

**Open-ended Working Group
in relation to Decision 45 COM 11**

25-26 April 2024

Keynote speech by Mr Ray Bondin

The many meetings and action that has been taken over the past years has still not resolved the under representation of certain regions on the World Heritage List as well as the typology of heritage that the List represents.

First of all we need to go back to the basic principles as to why the List was created. It was never meant to highlight the most important heritage of every country but a representative list of heritage that has contributed to the story of mankind. Some countries still think that they have a right to nominate all their important heritage.

This attitude is very much reflected in a number of the sights proposed under the Tentative List which reflect many times local political pressure to put sites on this List with no real study as to which of those sites has outstanding universal values that will add value to the World Heritage List.

I am critical of the UpStream process because it gives countries the chance to adapt their Tentative List to what is acceptable by the consultative bodies rather than proposing what is really outstanding. Without being generic there are too many countries that have a long Tentative List, many times never revised, that does not reflect the typologies of heritage but keeps adding typology of sites already well represented.

I understand that each country wishes to add more sites to the List mainly because of the strong tourism that such recognition allows but at the same time failing to give enough attention to the management of sustainable tourism and the sometimes strong changes and damage to heritage that mass tourism produces.

It is infact the case that many times the choice for nominating a site is linked to its tourism potential rather than to its place in history and many sites that may not be attractive to tourists are not nominated because they are difficult to understand even though they are really important to the history of mankind.

I believe that the nomination dossier questionnaire needs to be substantially revised to reflect more the values of the site rather than that it fits in perfectly in the categories we have come up with over the years. Many dossiers are written in a way to ensure they fit into these categories which do not really reflect the typologies of heritage that could be nominated.

The categories still reflect very much a European bias towards monumental heritage which is not what we find in many regions of the world. We therefore have to look at

heritage from a non European perspective. The fact that in some regions the heritage may be singular or small or heavily affected by climate damage does not mean that it is less important. I am referring mainly to heritage in the Arab and African regions. Countries should also be encouraged to present heritage from the origins of those countries rather than the colonialist archaeological or monumental heritage.

We should continue to narrow the divide between cultural and natural sites. Yes there has been substantial improvement in this regard but more needs to be done. In many cases the two elements should not be separated.

I also see the divide between tangible and intangible heritage very unacceptable as intangible heritage of traditions and local elements are very much linked to the territory in which they take place. I am not arguing to combine the two lists but to give more importance to sites that may not have a strong or important physical elements but that have strong intangible heritage linked to a territory. This is very much the case in regions that are under represented on the List.

I am very critical also to the importance given to management plans in dossiers when we all know that most of these plans have great ideas but which eventually be left on a shelf and hardly referred to. Sometimes never. We need to come up with management plans that are simple but effective. They need to be done but are not the most important element of the dossier as some think.

The questionnaire should speak more about the possible damage of climate change and how the heritage will in future be protected against this serious threat. We do ask for some information but certainly not enough.

I also wish to see more sites from conflict areas be nominated as a way to protect the heritage even if the state of conservation is not perfect. The danger list needs however to be restudied as to what it contributes to the protection of the heritage.

There has been great efforts done recently to train regional experts but more still needs to be done. There has to be more attention by the consultative bodies as to the experts chosen. They must be regional and with no historical bias. I am not in favour of changing the present system of referring to our consultative bodies but they must also be open to experts that are not part of their structure.

However I prefer to see a secondary opinion by an expert chosen by the World Heritage Centre who would do a site visit paid for by the nominating State Party. Such a visit should allow for the expert to start his mission with two days on his own, that is not accompanied by the State Party officials. This would allow the expert to make an opinion of the OUV of the site beyond the officially accompanied visit.

Finally I agree entirely that the system of Preliminary Assessment is made mandatory. I would have preferred that this is done immediately and the deadline moved to 1st September to allow more time for discussion.