

30 years of the Global Strategy in Latin America and the Caribbean: building the future.

Open ended working group of States Parties to the Convention

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1. Good morning everyone, first, thank you for the kind invitation to present some of the lessons learned in Latin America and the Caribbean and thoughts on potential ways forward regarding the Global Strategy.
2. In reflecting on the questions of credibility, balance and representativity of the World Heritage List, I am always reminded about the initial discussions where we thought of the List as a puzzle that had pieces missing that needed to be filled. As more and more properties have been inscribed, some of the gaps have been filled but the panorama appears to be that of similar pieces that keep piling on each other. But why is it that despite having a Global Strategy, and clear roadmaps for action as established by the World Heritage Committee, 30 years on we are still grappling with these crucial issues? The background document drafted by the World Heritage Centre provides an extensive and comprehensive overview of the global situation and how imbalances in representativity have been further exacerbated in past years. I will now present some of my thoughts after working in World Heritage for more than 30 years.
3. Latin America and the Caribbean are characterized by the exceptional diversity both in terms of natural and cultural heritage. The notion of what constitutes heritage has broadened to include new and diverse expressions

of that reflect the interaction between culture, ways of life, and the natural environment as opposed to the previously more static view that centred on the built environment. Although the Convention might appear to deal with the latter, it is essential to consider that it is people who create and sustain heritage values, and that what is socially constructed as heritage shifts and reflects cultural, political, and economic dynamics.

4. In most countries in the region, inventories have not kept pace with these changes nor have the regulatory frameworks to provide protection and conservation mechanisms. Although assistance has been provided to nominate potential World Heritage properties and to prepare and harmonize tentative lists, outdated inventories, and limited technical capacities and resources, have hindered progress in enhancing representativity. Additionally, existing studies are insufficient, making it difficult to identify gaps and priorities for nominations based on sound and well substantiated foundations. Except for a few cases, nominated places have continued to be largely selected on an individual basis without global, national and/or regional considerations, therefore not contributing to a balanced, credible, and representative system of World Heritage properties, where the region could effectively contribute to the understanding of outstanding cultural and natural processes.
5. So, what needs to change? Firstly, outdated inventories need to be revised to better reflect emerging notions of heritage. Heritage places need to be understood as systems that in many cases transcend political boundaries, overcoming the existent artificial divides between culture, nature, between tangible and intangible, and to harness their unique potential to achieve the

overarching goal of the World Heritage Convention: the conservation of places of Outstanding Universal Value. Revising and updating inventories, through open-ended and dynamic processes where various social actors are effectively included, can be an opportunity to address pressing social issues and redress past injustices by including heritage constructs and narratives of disenfranchised groups. World Heritage processes should be the flagship for these endeavors and set the standard for practices that overcome, and not perpetuate, cycles of inequity and exclusion. To undertake this exercise, the region could benefit from commonly agreed systems for the inventory of the natural and cultural heritage, where new types and categories of properties, reflective of current social dynamics, are identified. These could in turn support the regional harmonization of Tentative Lists and the prioritization of nominations of properties that contribute to the balanced representation of the cultural and natural diversity of the region.

6. The second point that requires attention is strengthening capacities, addressing not only technical considerations but also examining ways to promote and integrate ancestral knowledge, know-how in innovative mechanisms to understand how different social groups are constructing heritage and to enhance conservation and management practices. In promoting a more diverse and representative World Heritage List, consideration should be given into how to make the concepts and operational procedures set forth in the Convention and its implementation instruments more accessible and responsive to the needs of a wider range of social actors, to effectively respond to the demands often made to “decolonize” methodologies and approaches. Education and capacity

building are crucial cross-cutting foundations for the empowerment of professional, institutional, and social actors to create effective inclusion and collaboration in heritage endeavors, not only for nomination purposes, but also for sustained conservation and management. Actions in this arena need to respond changing circumstances, necessities and demands, but also be proactive in anticipating change and tailoring actions to be able to include a range of social actors who can also provide complementary knowledge and capacities.

7. Finally, as has been mentioned before, credibility is more than representativity. Efforts regarding the Global Strategy need to emphasize that listing is not an end onto itself. The credibility of the Convention will be achieved not only with a more balanced and representative World Heritage List, but also, and most importantly, when the properties listed achieve the highest levels of conservation, management, and social inclusion. Listing sites has never been the main goal of the Convention and compliance with management and protection requirements should be sine-qua-non requisites for nominations and inscribed sites.
8. The World Heritage Convention is the only instrument at the international level that has the potential to generate conditions for cooperation, integration, and the promotion of commonly accepted standards for conservation and management. The List should be a credible, vibrant tool that conserves and promotes outstanding places that convey universal messages, that showcase exemplary practices to meet the challenges of today and that harness their power to contribute to sustainability and, ultimately, to building a better, more resilient, and more just world.