

**CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION
OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

**Forty-sixth session
New Delhi, India
21-31 July 2024**

Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda: Report of the Open-ended Working Group established by the extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee

SUMMARY

This document is presented in conformity with Decision **45 COM 11**, by which the World Heritage Committee established an Open-ended Working Group of States Parties to the Convention, to discuss critical issues regarding the representativity of the World Heritage List and enhancing the balance of the List, improving capacity building, exploring the possibility of using additional service providers, and propose solutions for the sustainability of funding. The Committee furthermore requested the Open-ended Working Group of States Parties to submit a report and recommendations at its 46th session. This document presents the report and recommendations of the Open-ended Working Group.

Draft Decision: 46 COM 11, see Point IV.

I. BACKGROUND AND MANDATE

1. Since 2014, discussions on critical issues regarding the implementation of the World Heritage Convention have been held within an Ad-hoc Working Group established by the World Heritage Committee (Decision **38 COM 13**). This group, composed of Committee members and two non-Committee members per electoral group, reported to the World Heritage Committee at every session. While the composition and mandate of the Group varied through the years, the two main issues covered by the Ad-hoc Working Group, which met between 2014 and 2023, were the nomination process (operationality, credibility, and representativity of the List) and the sustainability of the World Heritage Fund. Both issues were often interlinked. The matter regarding the modalities for the possible use of advisory services from other entities was also recently part of the mandate of the Ad-hoc Working Group.
2. At its extended 45th session (Riyadh, 2023), the Committee decided to transfer the mandate of the Ad-hoc Working Group to an Open-ended Working Group to allow all States Parties to the Convention to contribute to the discussions. The mandate of the Open-ended Working Group is defined in Decision **45 COM 11**:
 - a) *Consider the necessary improvement aiming at reducing the gap of the representation of States Parties on the World Heritage List and enhancing the balance of the List,*
 - b) *Propose solutions to the technical evaluation requirements, including improving capacity building activities,*
 - c) *Explore the possibility of using additional service providers,*
 - d) *Propose sustainable solutions to the financial requirements of the nomination process to implement the above including the Preliminary Assessment,*
 - e) *Consider the mandate and working methods for an extension of this Open-ended Working Group, with a view to starting a fundamental reflection on the operation of the World Heritage Convention;*
3. The Committee requested the Open-ended Working Group to submit a report and recommendations to its 46th session.

II. SUMMARY OF THE WORK OF THE OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP

4. The Open-ended Working Group met in four meetings in 2024. At the inception meeting, held on 9 February 2024, the Group elected its Bureau:
 - Chairperson: Mr Mohammad Alaidaroos (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)
 - Rapporteur: Ms Chafica Haddad (Grenada)
 - Vice-Chairpersons: Germany (Group I), Poland (Group II), Philippines (Group IV), and Kenya (Group Va).Furthermore, the Working Group requested the Secretariat to prepare a background document to guide the Group's work and to avoid repeating and re-discussing decisions and recommendations that have already been examined and formulated in the past.
5. The Secretariat prepared a Background Document, which provides detailed information and follows the structure provided in the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group. It is divided into four parts corresponding to the first four paragraphs of Decision **45 COM 11**. The fifth paragraph of the Decision foresees a reflection on the extension of the mandate of the Working Group and is therefore under the purview and decision of the Group itself.

6. The first two Parts of the Background Document are devoted to the representativeness and balance of the World Heritage List and to improving capacity building. They bring together statistical data and factual information collected since 1977, and in particular, the decisions, policies, measures envisaged, reflections, and processes discussed, as well as all the actions carried out within this framework. Parts 3 and 4 of the Document bring together factual information already provided to the Committee between 2022 and 2023. This information has been used by the Ad-hoc Working Group to consider issues such as the sustainability of funding for the World Heritage Fund, financial issues related to the nomination process, and the possibility of using other advisory services.
7. The second meeting of the Open-ended Working Group was held on 25 and 26 March 2024. During the meeting, seven invited keynote speakers with relevant experience in the fields covered by the Working Group, either in their regions or globally, shared their reflections and experience with the Working Group. In the debate that followed, States Parties expressed their points of view, mostly concerning Points 1 and 2 of the mandate of the Working Group, discussing better representation, credibility, ensuring structural capacity building, and the importance of dialogue.
8. The third meeting, held on 22 and 23 May 2024, continued the discussion. The second day of the meeting was devoted to the formulation of recommendations to be presented to the Committee at its 46th session. The Group adopted eight recommendations but did not have enough time to discuss all the recommendations tabled by States Parties.
9. Therefore, a fourth half-day meeting was held on 21 June 2024. At the recommendation of the Bureau, all the proposals were presented and discussed in terms of thematic clustering in the following categories: Africa, Twinning, Indigenous Peoples, Funding, Nature, Other, and the Chapeau. The Open-ended Working Group agreed on five recommendations out of the 28 tabled. The Group agreed that the Rapporteur would provide the 'Chapeau' for the recommendations to be presented to the World Heritage Committee at its 46th session. As the Group agreed to recommend to the Committee to extend its mandate until the 47th session, it decided that the unresolved matters were deferred to the next meeting of the Open-ended Working Group, which would take place after the 46th session of the Committee.
10. All the documentation relevant to the work of the Open-ended Working Group, including the Reference Document and its annexes as well as the reports of the four meetings, are available on a secured web page.

III. MAIN TOPICS THAT AROSE DURING THE DISCUSSIONS

11. The need for **better representation** and **enhanced balance** of the List, including the necessity to:
 - i. Address the existing imbalance of the World Heritage List by supporting under-represented and non-represented States Parties in preparing high quality and successful nomination dossiers;
 - ii. Have a common understanding of fair representation and existing gaps;
 - iii. Slow down nominations of well represented States Parties;
 - iv. Address the nomination processes, including:
 - a) improvement of procedural efficiency, streamlining nomination process, simplification of the Nomination Format and limit of the dossiers size,
 - b) use of new technologies and updating of communication tools,

- c) revision of the Tentative Lists including regional harmonization of Tentative Lists, with the support of the World Heritage Centre, and the Advisory Bodies, for possible cooperation and serial or transnational nominations,
 - d) up-date of the Gap Analysis by the Advisory Bodies,
 - e) better use of existing processes such as the Upstream Process and the Preliminary Assessment,
 - f) the need for possible financial support for a sustainable nomination process, notably through more voluntary contributions, including unrestricted ones,
 - g) setting of potential twinning (or linking) of sites during the nomination phase and after inscription,
 - h) exploring the inclusion of possible technical support from World Heritage-related Category 2 Centres.
12. The necessity to have a common understanding of **credibility** was highlighted, as well as to agree on the definition of **authenticity** and **integrity** and to clarify the concepts of Outstanding Universal Value and of gaps and to recognise regionality in the World Heritage context. In this regard, Kenya announced the intention to host a meeting in Kenya in May 2025 on this topic for Africa. In addition, the importance of **conservation** emerged as a top priority stressing the importance of protecting the heritage and not only increasing the inscriptions.
 13. The importance of implementing the **Operational Guidelines** was recalled as well as that of the *“Declaration of principles to promote international solidarity and cooperation to preserve World Heritage”* endorsed by the General Assembly at its 23rd session in November 2021.
 14. The need for **capacity building**, notably to determine what kind of capacity building is necessary and ensuring particular structural capacity building and **awareness raising** including of local communities, decision-making stakeholders and youth was considered of paramount importance. Systematised and targeted capacity building programmes, including mentorship and training of trainers, in the framework of nominations, conservation and management, including to address tourism development or climate change challenges, were considered of paramount importance as a response for under-represented and non-represented States Parties who should ensure that these capacities are sustained over time internally.
 15. The involvement of **stakeholders** was highlighted as essential, emphasizing the importance of engaging local communities and indigenous peoples in the nomination and conservation processes to ensure that local perspectives and expertise are integrated which is critical for the sustainable management of heritage sites.
 16. The attention was drawn on the priority to be given to **Africa** and **SIDS** and the positive role of the **Preliminary Assessment** to ensure high quality nomination dossiers as well as an opportunity to strengthen and improve the **dialogue** of States Parties with the Advisory Bodies and instore or restore confidence.
 17. The debate also addressed **financial challenges** within the World Heritage framework, and focused on enhancing existing processes as well as exploring innovative sustainable funding solutions.
 18. The possibility of involving additional **service providers** was considered as an option not to be pursued as it would introduce complex administrative issues and inefficiencies in management, knowledge transfer and institutional memory, which would have to be made up for by additional resources. Emphasis was placed on strengthening existing structures and processes rather than creating new ones, as well as on enhancing the involvement of regional experts.

IV. DRAFT DECISION

Draft Decision: 46 COM 11

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/24/46.COM/11,
2. Recalling Decision **45 COM 11** adopted at its extended 45th session (Riyadh, 2023),
3. Having examined the Background document prepared by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (April 2024),
4. Reaffirming that the conservation of cultural and natural heritage is at the core of the Convention, and equal attention needs to be given to inscription, protection and conservation, and management,
5. Also reaffirming the need to reduce the gaps, enhance representativity of heritage with Outstanding Universal Value, achieve a balanced and credible World Heritage List and to support the aspirations of non-represented and under-represented States Parties on the World Heritage List,
6. Requests the Advisory Bodies to undertake a review and an update of the 2004 Gap Analyses, including a consultative process, pending necessary financial support, to report about the progress, including a roadmap, to the 47th session and to submit the updated Gap Analyses, including an action plan for implementation, to its 48th session;
7. Also requests the World Heritage Centre, in cooperation with the Advisory Bodies and Category 2 Centres, to review existing and proposed new capacity building programmes and propose a mechanism to strengthen their funding and coordination including sustainability of results, focusing on Africa and SIDS, as well as under-represented and non-represented States Parties for the preparation of the Tentative Lists, nominations and long-term conservation, and ensure more awareness raising of stakeholders and decision makers on the processes and requirements of the Convention, and invite the States Parties to contribute financially to this end;
8. Strongly encourages States Parties to regularly revise their Tentative Lists to include under-represented categories of sites, and also recalling Paragraph 73 of the Operational Guidelines, encourages State Party dialogue at regional, sub-regional and inter-regional level;
9. Further requests the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies, in consultation with Category 2 Centres, to present a proposal for the revision and simplification of the Nomination Format, and the corresponding revisions in the Operational Guidelines, also exploring options for developing an online platform for the submission of nomination dossiers, at its 47th session;
10. Requests furthermore the World Heritage Centre in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies to update the Manual for Preparing Nominations, pending necessary financial support, and to submit it to its 48th session;
11. Further recalling the “Declaration of principles to promote international solidarity and cooperation to preserve World Heritage”, endorsed by the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention in 2021, also strongly encourages Committee Members to refrain from having nominations examined during their mandate;

12. Also encourages an equal geographic representation of experts from all regions in the Advisory Bodies, including their inclusion in all stages of the evaluation and advisory processes, and an increased engagement of regional experts and Category 2 Centres for sustainable capacity building activities;
13. Recommends to carry-out an in-depth reflection on heritage in Africa, and the other regions, on understanding and application of authenticity as expressed by the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity and the 1964 Venice Charter on conservation and restoration, to reinforce the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and present a progress report to the Open-ended Working Group and to the 47th session of the World Heritage Committee;
14. Takes note of the intention by the State Party of Kenya to host a meeting in Kenya in May 2025 on the topic of heritage and authenticity in Africa;
15. Also recommends the establishment of an AFRICA 2035 Programme similar to the AFRICA 2009 Programme, with strategic objectives, inter alia, to reinforce the achievements of the AFRICA 2009 Programme, the Youth Heritage Africa Programme, to train young Africans on the dynamics of the inscription of sites on the World Heritage List, and to strengthen site management and conservation systems in the face of climate change in collaboration with ICCROM, the World Heritage Centre and other partners, including the Category 2 Centres;
16. In line with the Resolution **12 GA 30-48** adopted by the 12th General Assembly of States Parties and Paragraph 59 of the Operational Guidelines, further strongly encourages the States Parties with successful World Heritage nominations, to explore opportunities to link each of their nominations with one nomination presented by a State Party whose heritage is under or non-represented; this entails full support for the whole process of the preparation of the nomination file, until the submission of both nominations preferably at the same cycle of evaluation;
17. Urges States Parties to develop genuine cooperation to reduce the imbalance of the List, by assisting a State Party that so requests in the process of preparing a nomination dossier;
18. Further recommends to explore the funding possibilities, including through the World Heritage Fund, to support the implementation of the above-mentioned programme and activities;
19. Decides to extend the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group until the 47th session of the World Heritage Committee.