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World Heritage Convention

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

**22-23 May 2024
10.00 am-6.00 pm
(*in praesentia* and online meeting)**

REPORT

The meeting was attended by a total of 110 States Parties to the Convention, either *in praesentia* or online.

Opening of the meeting

The **Chairperson** of the Open-ended Working Group, **Mr Mohammad Alaidaroos** (Saudi Arabia), welcomed the participants to the third meeting of the Open-ended Working Group in relation to **Decision 45 COM 11**. He warmly welcomed the Vice-Chairpersons and the Rapporteur and extended a special welcome to the African countries on the African Week. The Chairperson emphasised that this was the last meeting of the Open-ended Working Group before the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee and suggested dedicating the second day of the meeting to drafting the recommendations to be presented to the Committee at its 46th session.

Report of the Rapporteur of the second meeting

The Rapporteur, Mrs. Chafica Haddad (Grenada) shared the main points of the report of the second meeting, which had been distributed previously to all States Parties. She highlighted that 33 States Parties shared their views during the debate, mainly focusing on better representation and credibility of the World Heritage List. Key discussions included addressing the imbalance by supporting under-represented States Parties in preparing nomination dossiers, establishing a common understanding of credibility and fair representation, and considering slowing down nominations of well represented States Parties. Simplifying the nomination format, updating and harmonizing Tentative Lists, and ensuring financial support through voluntary contributions were also discussed. Emphasis was placed on structural capacity building and enhancing dialogue between States Parties, Advisory Bodies, and the World Heritage Centre, as well as conservation after inscription.

Introduction by the Secretariat of the contributions received from States Parties

The Director of World Heritage (DIR/WH), Mr. Lazare Eloundou Assomo, thanked the African States Parties for attending the OEWG during the African Week. He informed that contributions from 44 States Parties were received, including a joint submission from 8 States Parties: 13 States Parties from Group I, four from Group II, six from Group III, six from Group IV, nine from Group Va, and six from Group Vb. The ratio of participation was 22,5% of the 195 States Parties to the Convention. There was a clear preponderance in terms of number of contributions concerning Point I of **Decision 45 COM 11** on the issue of representativeness of the List compared to the other points for which, at times, no proposals or comments were made. Key points discussed included the necessity of reducing the representation gap on the World Heritage List, emphasising capacity building through workshops and awareness raising, twinning nominations, harmonising Tentative Lists, updating the Advisory Bodies' Gaps Analyses,

simplifying and streamlining the nomination process, adhering to the “Code of Conduct”, and defining over and under-represented States Parties. A majority of States Parties indicated that the Preliminary Assessment has the potential to offer States Parties a way to submit more solid nominations, especially those that have less means. Solutions to technical evaluation requirements were proposed, including improving capacity-building activities and requesting more expert variety and transparency from Advisory Bodies. The possibility of using additional service providers was explored, with a preference to strengthening the existing Advisory Bodies. Sustainable solutions to financial requirements were suggested, including resource mobilisation, promoting partnerships, engaging the private sector, and reducing the length and cost of Committee sessions. The contributions also called for better inclusion of relevant stakeholders, including indigenous groups in the processes, and the extension of the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group, and the strengthening of the Secretariat.

Thematic Discussion

POINT 1 Decision 45 COM 11, para. 6a) – 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

The introductory debate for **Decision 45 COM 11**, para. 6 a) focused on several critical themes: updating the Advisory Bodies’ Gap Analyses, improving representation and inclusion, prioritising conservation, the implementation of the Preliminary Assessment, enhancing procedural efficiency, simplifying and streamlining nomination procedures, building capacity, and addressing financial issues within the World Heritage framework.

- Representation and inclusion were major points of discussion. There was a strong call for enhancing the representation of underrepresented regions, especially Africa and for better involvement of Indigenous peoples. Special attention was given to the unique challenges faced by SIDS, advocating for tailored support to facilitate their inclusion on the World Heritage List.
- Another issue was refining terminology and identifying gaps in the heritage framework. This involved updating the Gap Analyses and its methodology, with ICOMOS emphasising the need to update typologies by incorporating chronological and theme-based approaches and to undertake an analysis aimed at understanding how and if States Parties have used the Gap Analyses of 2004.
- Conservation emerged as a top priority, with several States Parties recalling that this is at the heart of the Convention and with an emphasis on developing clear intervention strategies to maintain the integrity and sustainability of heritage sites. This included practical measures for involving local communities in conservation efforts and ensuring effective communication with them.
- Procedural efficiency of nominations was a recurring theme, addressing the lengthy and complex nomination process. There was a call for pragmatic approaches to streamline nominations, and improving efficiency. Collaborative efforts for regional harmonisation of Tentative Lists and for the involvement of regional experts in decision-making were emphasised. An updated manual for the nomination process was also requested to provide clearer guidance.
- Without neglecting the necessary technical and scientific quality of the information contained, there was a strong consensus on the need to simplify nomination formats and limit dossier sizes, with specific proposals to impose word count restrictions. Simplification was also seen as crucial for maintaining the integrity and clarity of nomination process.
- Capacity building and the roles of the Advisory Bodies were discussed. Proposals included targeted capacity-building activities and enhancing collaboration with advisory networks.
- The twinning mechanism was acknowledged as a potential solution to assist underrepresented and non-represented States Parties.

- Financial considerations mechanisms were also discussed. The need for understanding of the financial barriers underrepresented regions face was emphasised as well as the need to consider more assistance to these regions.
- Adherence to the various principles of the “Code of Conduct” was also underlined such as considering a pause on Committee Members’ nominations during their mandate in the Committee.

POINT 2 Decision 45 COM 11, para. 6b) Propose solutions to the technical evaluation requirements, including improving capacity-building activities

The debate on **Decision 45 COM 11**, para. 6b) centred on solutions for technical evaluation requirements and enhancing capacity-building activities. Key themes included enhancing stakeholder involvement, addressing expert shortages, and strengthening capacity-building activities to ensure effective conservation and representativity of the World Heritage List.

- Clarification and flexibility in the Preliminary Assessment were widely discussed. The proposal to make this process voluntary was suggested to provide greater flexibility, while the mandatory nature of the Preliminary Assessment was defended due to its structured approach and the valuable information it provides.
- Stakeholders’ involvement was highlighted as essential, emphasising the importance of engaging local communities in the nomination and conservation processes. This involvement could ensure that local perspectives and expertise are integrated in the nomination process, which is critical for the sustainable management of heritage sites.
- Addressing the shortage of experts was another primary focus. Continuous engagement of experts from the different regions was seen as fundamental for building and maintaining capacity within the World Heritage framework.
- Enhancing dialogue and procedural efficiency was also discussed, with calls for increased and more substantial interactions between States Parties and Advisory Bodies. This included proposals to extend interaction slots and ensure more meaningful exchanges during the evaluation process. In this context, it was noted that the newly introduced Preliminary Assessment provides the opportunity for more dialogue and exchanges between States Parties and Advisory Bodies.
- Capacity-building efforts were emphasised, particularly in retaining expertise within the World Heritage system. This was seen as necessary to counter the migration of experts to the other sectors and to ensure that skilled professionals remain within the heritage conservation field.
- Financial considerations were addressed, noting the need for approval of relevant funding to support initiatives such as updating the Gap Analyses. This was tied to the broader aim of ensuring sufficient resources for evaluation and capacity-building activities.
- The primary objectives of the Convention were reaffirmed, emphasising the importance of preserving the authenticity, integrity, and Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage sites. Proposals included maintaining the limit on the number of nominations to one per year, not only to address representation on the List, but also to favour conservation over inscription.

POINT 3 – Decision 45 COM 11, para. 6c) Explore the possibility of using additional service providers

The debate on **Decision 45 COM 11**, para. 6c) focused on exploring the use of additional service providers for technical evaluations within the World Heritage framework. Key themes included improving existing procedures, addressing the complexity and financial challenges of expert selection, cautiously exploring the use of additional service providers, and emphasising the need for streamlined processes and strengthened Advisory Bodies within the World Heritage framework.

- A primary concern was the potential for misunderstandings between States Parties and Advisory Bodies. There was a call for improved dialogue and confidence restoration to ensure transparent evaluation process. The suggestion to involve additional service providers was met with caution, as it could potentially slow down procedures. Emphasis was placed on strengthening and enhancing existing structures and processes rather than creating new ones.
- The complexity and financial challenges of panel composition and expert selection were highlighted. Efforts to diversify the pool of experts were noted, with significant steps already taken by the Advisory Bodies to ensure broad representation. However, financial constraints were identified as a major challenge, with the cost of expert involvement being a significant factor affecting the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the expert pool.
- Progress in diversifying and involving a wider range of experts was reported, indicating positive steps toward inclusivity. The importance of prioritising existing Advisory Bodies was stressed, with the suggestion to consider additional service providers only exceptionally.
- Strengthening Advisory Bodies and involving Category 2 Centres more prominently were advocated as way to improve the support for the nomination and evaluation process. This included providing additional budgets to ensure the Advisory Bodies can operate effectively.

POINT 4 – Decision 45 COM 11, para. 6d) Propose sustainable solutions to the financial requirements of the nomination process to implement the above, including the Preliminary Assessment

The debate on **Decision 45 COM 11**, para. 6d) addressed sustainable financial solutions for the World Heritage nomination process. The debate focused on enhancing existing processes, addressing financial challenges, exploring innovative funding solutions, ensuring sustainable funding for the Preliminary Assessment, and improving transparency.

- Financial challenges were a significant concern, including the costs associated with the evaluation process.
- Innovative funding solutions were proposed, including seeking additional support from the private sector, generating revenue through the World Heritage brand, and incorporating donation links on listed properties' websites. These measures aim to diversify funding sources and enhance financial sustainability. The discussion also covered the current reliance on voluntary contributions for Preliminary Assessments, with a call for sustainable funding from 2025 onwards.
- The categorisation of diverse contributions to improve clarity and transparency in funding mechanisms was addressed. This would help in understanding and managing different sources of financial support effectively. Revisiting unrestricted voluntary contributions, as adopted during the 19th General Assembly, and adjusting contribution calculations based on tourist numbers were also proposed to ensure equitable financial support.

POINT 5 – Decision 45 COM 11, para. 6e) 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

The discussion on Point 5 revolved around extending the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group, and adopting a pragmatic approach to streamline discussions.

- Participants proposed extending the OEWG's mandate, citing general consensus among members. There was a consensus on the need for an extension to revisit ongoing concerns, with suggestions to use the 2011 Audit and the "Declaration of principles to promote international solidarity and cooperation to preserve World Heritage" as starting points for addressing these issues.

DISCUSSION OF DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

On the second day, the OEWG focused its work on drafting recommendations for the 46th session of the Committee, based on the previous discussions.

DIR/WH summarised the proposed recommendations, seen as having a general consensus among the members of the group, highlighting their logical basis stemming from previous discussions. These proposals encompass various actions, including requesting the Advisory Bodies to update the Gap Analyses pending necessary financial support for submission to the 48th session, consolidating a Building Capacity Programme, encouraging States Parties to revise their Tentative Lists, revising and simplifying the Nomination Format, updating the Manual for Preparing Nominations, encouraging States Parties to refrain from nominating while on the Committee in accordance with the “Declaration of principles to promote international solidarity and cooperation to preserve World Heritage”, postponing examination of a nomination when a State Party has three complete nominations entering the evaluation processes in three consecutive cycles, and extending the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group.

Delegates offered various perspectives and suggestions on each recommendation presented and also proposed new ones.

Closure of the meeting

The OEWG did not have time to finalise its recommendations (see Annex 1 showing the status of recommendations at the closing of the meeting), therefore the Chairperson scheduled an additional meeting on 21 June 2024 in the morning. States Parties were invited to submit any additional new recommendation proposals to the Secretariat by 24 May 2024, midnight. DIR/WH informed that all recommendations adopted during the meeting on 23 May, together with the proposals left pending and the additional new proposals received by the above-mentioned deadline, would be circulated to all States Parties the following week. States Parties would then have the possibility to submit written amendments to the proposals **by 14 June 2024, midnight**.

The Chairperson expressed gratitude for the valuable contributions made by participants, both online and in-person, and reiterated his thanks to all members of the OEWG for participating in the third meeting.

Status of recommendations at the closing of the meeting (23 May 2024, 6pm)

The Open-ended Working Group recommends to the Committee at its 46th session to:

1. **[Adopted in the room]** Request 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.
2. **[Adopted in the room]** Request the World Heritage Centre, in cooperation with the Advisory Bodies and C2Cs, 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.
3. **[Adopted in the room]** Strongly encourage States Parties to regularly revise their Tentative Lists to include under-represented categories of sites and recalling paragraph 73 of the Operational Guidelines, also encourage State Party dialogue at regional, sub-regional and inter-regional level.
4. **[Adopted in the room]** Request the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies, in consultation with C2Cs, 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 the 47th session of the World Heritage Committee.
5. **[Adopted in the room]** Request 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.
6. **[Adopted in the room]** 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, strongly encourage Committee Members to refrain from having nominations examined during their mandate.
7. **[Adopted in the room]** To explore the funding possibilities, including through the World Heritage Fund, to support the implementation of the above-mentioned programme and activities.
8. **[Adopted in the room]** Extend the mandate of the Open-ended Working Group until the 47th session of the World Heritage Committee.

To be discussed:

[US] Request the World Heritage Centre in cooperation with the Advisory Bodies, and C2Cs to explore options for updating statements of OUV, to reflect the narratives of Indigenous Peoples, and present a proposal to its 47th session.)

[Kuwait, France, Czechia: delete] [South Africa, Brazil] (Request the World Heritage Centre in collaboration with the ABs to explore ways, taking into account [Czechia] discussions held at the OEWG, [Czechia: delete] for example the possibility of creation of a fast track for the evaluation of natural sites and other non-represented categories from under-represented States Parties.)

([Ukraine] Invites the World Heritage Centre, in cooperation with ABs to analyse the situations related to the needs for the sites to be inscribed in the WH List in Danger

[France, China, Italy, India: delete] [Kuwait, Lebanon, St. Vincent, Switzerland: keep] (Postpone to the following session the examination of a nomination whenever a State Party has three complete nominations entering the evaluation process in three consecutive cycles.)

[St. Vincent] (Request the States Parties with successful WH Nominations, for example with 20 or more sites, to link each of their Nomination, 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 sites at the same session.)