

FORMAT FOR THE SUBMISSION OF STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORTS BY THE STATES PARTIES

(in compliance with Paragraph 169 of the *Operational Guidelines*)

Name of World Heritage property (State(s) Party

AKSUM (Ethiopia)

Property ID C 15

Date of Inscription: 1980

Criteria (i) and (iv)

1. Executive Summary of the report

This report is generated in response to the World Heritage Committee **Decision 45 COM 7B.123** adopted at its extended forty-fifth session in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 10-25 September 2023. The report has also considered the World Heritage Committee Decision adopted at its extended 44th session (**44 COM 7B.3**) meeting Online 16-31 July 2021 in Fuzhou (China) where the State Party of Ethiopia was requested to submit a state of conservation report of the property for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 46th session.

Thereofre the Ethiopian Heritage Authority (EHA), former Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), representing the State Party of Ethiopia, has generated the present State of Conservation report in accordance with the requirements of the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* and *Operational Guidelines* for its implementation.

This State of Conservation report is submitted by EHA to UNESCO in March 2024 to present the progress report, taking into account the armed conflict that broke out in Tigray region. The armed conflict that lasted from 03 November 2020 to 03 November 2022 hindered the opportunity to undertake the conservation and management activities of the property.

The present report provides a set of responses testifying to the progress made since 2020 based in particular on the current major ongoing project, namely the “The Consolidation Project of Stele III. Various documents have been developed as part of this project and submitted to the World Heritage Center enclosed to the last State of Conservation Report of the property.

The conflict in northern Ethiopia that broke out in November 2020 in the Tigray region has delayed the consolidation of the Stele III and the structural stabilisation of the Mausoleum. Similarly, the finalization of the boundary delineation and detailed mapping of the property has also been postponed due to the same reason. However, the management and maintenance works in and around the property remains to be the priority for the state party and the local community living and practising the value of the property.

2. Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee

Paragraph 6: (...) Requests again, in light of various accounts of reports on looting, destruction and damage in the Tigray region, that the State Party.

6.1 Assesses in detail... the impact of the conflict on the cultural heritage of the region, and in particular on the conservation and management of the property;

The armed conflict in Tigray region, Ethiopia was soon followed by the Covid-19 pandemic, which was identified in the country in March 2020. As a result the situation was challenging until agreement was reached between the Tigray regional and federal state in November 2022. The peace agreement helped to ensure the viability and sustainability of the world heritage property and to address the challenges brought with the conflict with proper interventions. It is therefore imperative that positive intervention is critical to protect, enhance and promote the world heritage property through community engagement. The interventions will have an impact on the safeguarding and protection of the world heritage property that makes it continue to be relevant to the local community and for its sustainable conservation.

6.2 Ensures the safeguarding of the property through protective measures;

At its 42th session (Baku, Azerbaijan 2019), the World Heritage Committee examined the State of Conservation of Aksum as a follow up of the previous report submitted by the State Party. The report was based on an updated on the implementation of the recommendations of the 2013 and 2016 missions. Consequently, this report provides basic information on the continued of the State Party, to ensure that the Authenticity and Integrity of the inscribed property is maintained and even enhanced.

To achieve this objective, the report presents the major actions undertaken in the property in terms of projects carried out within the property. This includes the long-awaited project of Stele III Consolidation and other ongoing conservation works and follow up on the major management challenges that the property is facing and the effective measures taken to deal with them. The report features the progress achieved in terms of boundary delineation and the legal framework for the implementation of major management objectives, which mainly includes the operationalization of heritage management advisory committee.

The project for the Conservation and Structural Consolidation of Aksum Stele III and stabilization of the underground Stone Slabs of the Mausoleum was the first priority to the State Party. After submission of the study documents to the World Heritage Center, the project was commissioned to the Italian company, LATTANZI S.r.l in 2020. Soon the project was launched and the required conservation materials had been imported using shipping containers, and transported to Aksum, where all the materials are still preserved within the property. However the commencement of the conservation the project was delayed due to the outbreak of the armed conflict in Tigray.

Upon the restoration of peace in Tigray, the State Party is working hard to start urgently the stabilization of Stele III project and strengthen the stone slabs in the Mausoleum, which will also consider the consolidation of the masonry works in the Tomb of the Brick Arches. The state party also allotted 5 million Ethiopian Birr for the preservation of the site, particularly

focusing on the protection wall on the Palace of Queen Sheba (Dungur Palace), fencing one of the key stele fields and its environs with wire mesh, and consolidating the rear get of the Mausoleum.

6.3. Engages ... in undertaking an emergency response through targeted actions, including by creating a full inventory of cultural artifacts and goods of the property and their state of conservation;

After the restoration peace in Tigray that followed the peace agreement reached between the regional government and the Federal State, the state party sent a monitoring mission to the region in general and Aksum in particular. The feedback obtained from the mission report confirmed that the majority of the monuments in the world heritage property remain intact. However some minor issues have been reported in the underground structures: the Mausoleum and the Tomb of the Brick Arches.

In this regard, the Mausoleum has been reported on having some cracks on the granite roofing slabs of the central and side chambers, which are growing wider due to the extra strain from the heavy load of soil at the top surface of the structure. Therefore, the report seeks that the weak points require immediate attention to strengthen the fragile elements of the structure.

In the same way, the Tomb of the Brick Arches was observed facing a significant increase in the water level, which alleviates the rainwater ingress into the underground structure, to make the problem worse as certain sections of the structure are becoming even weaker. Therefore, consolidation work on the masonry of the Tomb of the Brick Arches is observed as priority to avoid further impact on the fragile underground structure.

Furthermore, the mission report brings additional data on the missing Aksumite coins that have been looted from Aksum Archaeological museum. Most of these coins were found through archaeological excavation in 20th century at different parts of the property. Archaeological research in Aksum is an ongoing activity and touches different parts of the property to have a deeper insight on the history of the Aksumite civilization. The archaeological research is also

contributing to enhance the various attributes of the property, hence to maintain its OUV. The monitoring mission report has also revealed that a few bullet marks were observed, on the surface of some structures, within the world heritage property

As a result, the findings of the mission revealed that immediate efforts and collaborations are required to protect the fragile structural environment of the property and its surroundings, as well as the archaeological areas of the property. Therefore, the state party holds discussions with relevant government authorities to seek that all stakeholders are involved in the joint effort to improve the management and protection of the world heritage property.

Paragraph 7: Requests the State Party, to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ ICOMOS/ ICCROM Reactive Monitoring mission to the property to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the state of conservation of the property;

Upon the request of World Heritage Committee for high level reactive Monitoring mission to the world heritage property to assist on the implementation of the World Heritage Committee Decision 45 COM 7B.123, the State Party would like to invite the World Heritage Center/ ICOMOS and ICCROM to carry out a comprehensive assessment on state of conservation of the Aksum world heritage property.

Paragraph 8: Request for Mobilization of the international community to provide financial and technical support ... including through International Assistance, to implement the short- and medium-term measures to improve the state of conservation of the property;

As stated in the previous reports, Aksum world property has in place an effective management plan and adequate legal framework in order to ensure that the OUV is protected in line with the World Heritage Convention 1972 and to achieve a sound and sustainable development of the buffer zone. In view of preserving the Authenticity and Integrity of the Aksum Stele, the State party of Ethiopia is also increasingly putting tremendous effort in the management and conservation of the Property.

Since the submission of the 2019 State of Conservation Report, the State Party remains guided by its Management Plan, Thematic and Structural Plan, using these plans as the main reference

documents and road map in order to maintain the Outstanding Universal Value of the world heritage property management. Given that the management plans guide our day to day operations, implementations of the plan of action is an ongoing process.

Moreover, despite the challenges highlighted in this report, the State Party is aware that realizing the full potential of the property requires strong focus on the potential threats that needs to be continually explored and addressed for the benefit of the property. Therefore, a risk management plan is anticipated to ensure the effective management of the property with regards to potential pressure and to provide the services required while maintaining the integrity and values of the property.

As a statutory requirement of the management authority of the property, a Visitor Management Plan is also proposed for the improved management of the property. However, the development of the visitor management plan and risk management plan will not be without challenges. The challenges include lack of capacity in terms of professional skills and appropriate knowledge at the staff levels to produce the proposed plans. Hence, various strategies are being developed to achieve the best solution to reverse the challenges.

On the other hand, the existing management plan anticipated on the implementation of the proposed actions to pursuit public sensitization, education and awareness creation programs that extend to relevant stakeholders and the local community, which in turn strengthen their capacity as a functional body to implement the proposed recommendations. As a result, the State Party would like to request the international community including UNESCO to extend financial and technical support to implement the proposed activities and safeguard the world heritage property.

3. Response to Requests under Decision 44 COM 7B.3, on an updated timeline for the completion of the Church Museum, including ... minor façade modification design, a report on the archaeological features uncovered during the excavation and construction of the Church Museum, and details on the conservation of the Church Museum collection;

- With regards to the request of the world heritage committee on the state of conservation and damage assessment of the archaeological and built attributes of the property in regards to Decision 44 COM 7B.3, the state party has submitted a report that shows that no significant archaeological remains have been found on the construction site of the new church museum.
- Since most of the cultural object collections are preserved within the premises of the Aksum Zion Church, under the ownership of the Church, a joint inspection task force is still working to monitor the status of the object collections. Although no damage is during the conflict, a joint inspection task force has been working on the examination of the cultural objects. As soon as the task force finishes its assessment, official report on the results will be released.
- The construction of the Orthodox Church Museum has remained unfinished as there is no further progress towards its completion to make it functional. However, due to the location and size of the museum under construction, building façade modification was proposed to seek an appropriate solution to maintain the OUV of the property and avoid any negative impact on the OUV of the property. However, the recommendation on the façade treatment was well received by the church authorities.
- Timeline for all pending actions has been developed and several consultations were organized to engage all the responsible bodies and will be communicated to the world heritage centre in due course.

4. Other current conservation issues which may have an impact of the Property's OUV;

It has been observed that there is a gradual change in the landscape of the property, associate with new additions and minor developments, in the buffer zone. Therefore the State Party

would like to some guidance on the implement the ICOMOS Historic Urban Landscape Recommendations to safeguard the ancient historic urban landscape of the property, and benefit from the protected status and improvement of the management of existing the ancient urban landscape.

5. Public access to the state of conservation report

[Note: this report will be uploaded for public access on the World Heritage Centre's State of conservation Information System (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc>).Should your State Party request that the full report should not be uploaded, only the 1-page executive summary provided in point (1.) above will be uploaded for public access].

The State Party of Ethiopia is most willing if this State of Conservation Report.is open for public access.

6. Signature of the Authority

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Elias Shikur
Deputy Director
General

19 MAR. 2024

