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## Maloti-Drakensberg Park (Lesotho, South Africa) No 985ter

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### 1 Basic information

#### States Parties

Lesotho  
South Africa

#### Name of property

Maloti-Drakensberg Park

#### Locations

District of Qacha's Nek  
Lesotho

KwaZulu-Natal  
South Africa

#### Inscription

2000 as Ukhahlamba/Drakensberg Park  
Significant modifications to the boundaries in 2013 as  
Maloti-Drakensberg Park

#### Brief description

The Maloti-Drakensberg Park is a transnational property composed of the uKhahlamba Drakensberg National Park in South Africa and the Sehlabathebe National Park in Lesotho. The site has exceptional natural beauty in its soaring basaltic buttresses, incisive dramatic cutbacks, and golden sandstone ramparts as well as visually spectacular sculptured arches, caves, cliffs, pillars and rock pools. The site's diversity of habitats protects a high level of endemic and globally important plants. The site harbors endangered species such as the Cape vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) and the bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*). Lesotho's Sehlabathebe National Park also harbors the Maloti minnow (*Pseudobarbus quathlambae*), a critically endangered fish species only found in this park. This spectacular natural site contains many caves and rock-shelters with the largest and most concentrated group of paintings in Africa south of the Sahara. They represent the spiritual life of the San people, who lived in this area over a period of 4,000 years.

#### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

13 March 2024

## 2 Issues raised

### Background

In 2000, the uKhahlamba/ Drakensberg Park (South Africa) was inscribed on the World Heritage List as a mixed property under cultural criteria (i) and (iii), and under natural criteria (vii) and (x). No buffer zone was defined at the time. In 2013, the World Heritage Committee approved the significant modification to the boundaries of the property to include the Sehlabathebe National Park (Lesotho). At that point, a buffer zone was defined surrounding the western and northern parts of the Sehlabathebe National Park but not the southern part because of the border with South Africa.

Based on ICOMOS' recommendation, the World Heritage Committee requested the States Parties to continue their cooperative attempts towards providing a buffer zone to the south of Sehlabathebe located in the territory of South Africa (Decision 37 COM 8B.18). In addition, the Committee also requested that the buffer zones surrounding the property be formalised. The World Heritage Committee reiterated its request for the States Parties to submit a minor boundary modification, in Decisions 39 COM 7B.33, 41 COM 7B.38 and 43 COM 7B.38.

### Modification

The proposed minor boundary modification extends the buffer zone to a total area of 283,279 ha, within the territory of South Africa. The proposed buffer zone includes an area surrounding the south of Sehlabathebe located in the territory of South Africa.

The State Party of South Africa informs that the proposed buffer zone is divided into two sub-zones, called layers, that represent a sensitivity gradient. The first layer, covers an area of 69,754 ha, is considered highly sensitive, and aims to preserve in a close pristine state as possible those parts of the proposed buffer zone which directly affect the property. The second layer is much larger (213,525 ha) and is said to be further away from the property; its primary purpose is the conservation of natural resources and their beneficial management. However, ICOMOS notes that the maps provided do not indicate which areas of the proposed buffer zone are covered by these two layers.

Overall, the proposed buffer zone was designed based on the following objectives: to better protect the purpose and values of the World Heritage property, especially its Outstanding Universal Value; to protect the biodiversity and ecosystems which transcend the property's boundaries; to protect important areas adjacent to the property that have valuable natural or cultural attributes linked to property; and to assist neighbouring affected communities to secure appropriate and sustainable benefits from the property and the buffer zone area itself.

ICOMOS notes that most of the information provided by the State Party pertains to the purpose of the buffer zone from a nature conservation perspective. Almost no

information was provided as to how the buffer zone was delineated to address management needs, and act as an additional layer of protection to the property, in relation to its cultural values – especially the southern part of the proposed buffer zone. The sole justifications offered are of a general nature where the State Party inform that the proposed buffer zone has been determined on the basis of the distribution of archaeological sites. However, the maps provided include no information about the location of such sites.

Regarding the complementary legal and/or customary restrictions applicable within the proposed buffer zone to regulate its use and development, the State Party informed that within the first layer, the Competent Authority must be party to the final decision-making regarding any proposed activity. In the second layer, the Authority has the power and right to be consulted and advise the designated authority as to whether an activity should be approved, rejected or conditionally approved.

The information provided does not explicitly state whether the management authority of the area of the property within the State Party of South Africa – Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife – is to be understood to be considered the Competent Authority. Nor whether the Competent Authority has capacity to manage or be involved in decision-making related to activities originating within the proposed buffer zone that may impact the cultural significance of the property. ICOMOS recalls that in its 2000 evaluation, it had made recommendations regarding the need to establish a cultural heritage unit within the management authority (called at the time the KwaZulu Nature Conservation Service), whose staff was then exclusively related to the natural heritage.

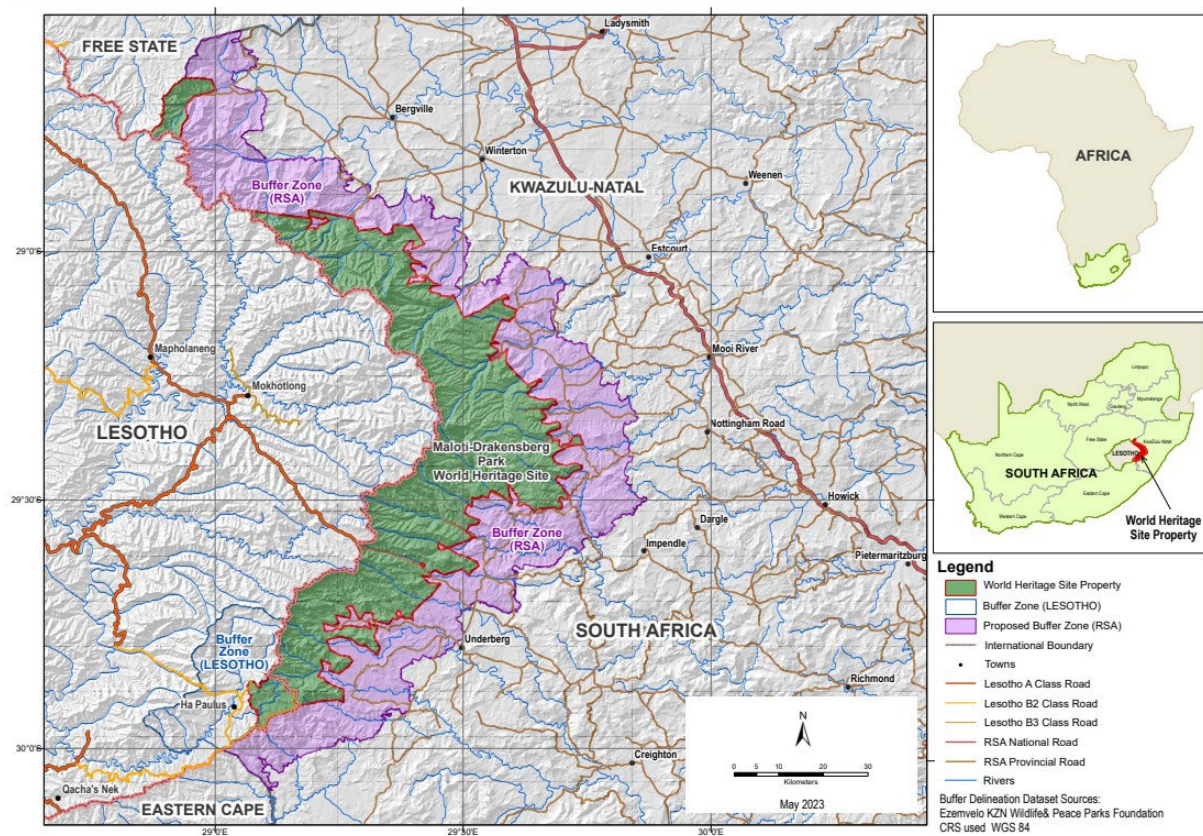
ICOMOS acknowledges that the proposed buffer zone responds in principle to its recommendation to provide a buffer zone to the south of Sehlabathebe located in the territory of South Africa. However, ICOMOS is not in a position to assess the adequateness of the buffer zone proposed due to the lack of information on how the area was conceived and delineated to add an additional layer of protection for the cultural heritage of the property. Therefore, ICOMOS does not consider that it would be appropriate to approve the proposed buffer zone without an understanding of the location of the two layers that form the buffer zone, of whether there are archaeological sites located within the buffer zone, of the legal and complementary measures applicable within the buffer zone from a cultural heritage perspective and of who is responsible for managing the proposed buffer zone.

### 3 Recommendations

#### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the examination of the proposed buffer zone of the Maloti-Drakensberg Park, Lesotho, South Africa, be **referred back** to the State Party of South Africa in order to allow it to:

- Provide additional maps with the location of the two layers of the buffer zone as well as the location of any archaeological sites located within it,
- Provide further explanations as to how the buffer zone was conceived and delineated to act as an additional layer of protection to the property from a cultural perspective,
- Provide detailed information on the legal and complementary measures applicable within the buffer zone and in particular for the control of access to any existing archaeological sites and sites of cultural significance,
- Provide further information about the governance and management arrangements for cultural heritage within the area of the buffer zone.



Map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone (February 2024)