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Declaration of the 6th World Heritage Site Managers' Forum
in conjunction with the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee
**Heritage and communities: inclusive and effective approaches for
the sustainable management of World Heritage properties**
18 – 25 July 2024 | New Delhi, India

Preamble

The 6th edition of the World Heritage Site Managers' Forum was organised by the Ministry of Culture represented by the Archaeological Survey of India, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICCROM, and IUCN in partnership with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and ICOMOS. The Forum brought together 82 professionals responsible for the management of 82 World Heritage properties, located in 34 countries.

The participants extend their gratitude to the Government of India for graciously hosting and facilitating this Forum in collaboration with UNESCO and the Advisory Bodies, as well as for the financial support provided to support the participation of 24 World Heritage site managers. Participants also thank the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for hosting the first three days of the Forum at the World Heritage property of the Humayun's Tomb, Delhi.

Site managers recall the World Heritage Committee of the previous statements and declarations of the World Heritage Site Managers' Forum that were presented at 41 COM (Kraków, Poland), 42 COM (Manama, Bahrain), 43 COM (Baku, Azerbaijan), 44 COM (Fuzhou, China/Online), and last year, at the 45 COM (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). These statements highlight key challenges and issues that need to be tackled to ensure that site managers can effectively manage and conserve World Heritage.

Communities and heritage

The inclusive governance and effective management of World Heritage requires holistic, people-centred and rights-based approaches. Site managers advocate for the recognition of the role played by Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the protection and conservation of World Heritage properties and their buffer zones. World Heritage properties are recognised for their Outstanding Universal Value and hold a wide range of other heritage values, including spiritual values, important to Indigenous and local communities. Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge are essential to find transformative solutions to existing challenges and to overcome the nature-culture divide that often hinders the effectiveness of management efforts. An effective approach to responsible site development would also entail facilitating equity, behavioural change, sustainable livelihoods, local and indigenous knowledge-based innovative solutions, and fostering entrepreneurship and economic opportunities in and around World Heritage properties to benefit local communities. Therefore, it is imperative that States Parties adopt and promote participatory approaches founded on constructive interaction between a wide range of actors.

Commitment of States Parties to recognise the role of site managers

The Forum requests the commitment of States Parties to recognise the roles of 'site managers' and 'site coordinators' in their national World Heritage system, with definition of clear mandates that are fully recognized in institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks, and equipped with the provision of adequate financial support and resources to ensure the long-term protection of World Heritage properties.

Strengthening communication across levels

States Parties should support the work of site managers by establishing and strengthening communication between site managers and officials at the international and national levels. National authorities should ensure duly informing site managers about the changes in processes, procedures and resources connected to the World Heritage system. Site managers' concerns should be central in discussions at the international World Heritage arena.

Accessible communication channels between site managers and different actors, including World Heritage Committee, Secretariat, Advisory Bodies and States Parties should be established to facilitate decision-making and effective problem solving.

Addressing major challenges impacting World Heritage properties

Armed conflicts pose significant threats to World Heritage properties, leading to loss of lives, damage and the destruction of natural and cultural heritage. There is the need to enhance the capacities of site managers and local communities to plan and implement emergency preparedness and response measures appropriate to deal with such challenges. The effects of climate change, urban pressures and lack of disaster preparedness are compounding these challenges and hindering site managers' efforts to protect World Heritage properties for present and future generations. International assistance, multilateral cooperation and promoting peace and reconciliation are more important than ever.

Capacity building

The role and responsibilities of site managers have increased in complexity over time, requiring continuous capacity building to strengthen existing skills and acquire new competences. More capacity building actions, guidance and tools are needed to actively support sites managers in their efforts to respond to the wide range of challenges faced by World Heritage properties. World Heritage Committee members and States Parties are asked to provide the necessary means to invest in capacity building with urgent priority.

Networks

Over the years, the Forum has become the established space for site managers to meet and exchange, strengthening international and regional networks as can be seen through the We Are Site Managers International Symposium that led to the adoption of the George Town Declaration. Site managers request that the Forum continues to be organised in conjunction with the World Heritage Committee. Furthermore, site managers advocate for the establishment of international, regional and thematic site managers networks where a site manager-led process of improvement by sharing experiences, continuous knowledge exchange can be developed, with diverse mechanisms of collaboration through online and in-person modalities supported by the Convention through adequate means.

Way forward

The concerns raised by the World Heritage Site Managers' Fora should be included and reflected in the relevant agenda items and decisions adopted at the annual World Heritage Committee meetings.

States Parties should fully adopt and integrate the protection and management requirements for World Heritage stipulated in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention into national legal and planning frameworks to enable and empower site managers to be able to effectively manage World Heritage properties.