

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Our Ref. GB/AR/EG/1744_IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 19 December 2024

H.E. Mr. Ahmad Pakatchi
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
Permanent Delegation of the Islamic Republic of
Iran to UNESCO
Maison de l'UNESCO
1, rue Miollis
Paris Cedex 15 75732

World Heritage List 2025

Prehistoric Caves and Falak-ol-Aflak Ensemble of Khorramabad Valley (PCFEKV) (Iran (Islamic Republic of)) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ambassador,

As prescribed by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2025. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation procedure.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to the “Prehistoric Caves and Falak-ol-Aflak Ensemble of Khorramabad Valley (PCFEKV)” was carried out by Ms. Hatice Pamir (Türkiye) in September 2024. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

On 20 September 2024, an additional information letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the description, the nomination strategy, boundaries, legal protection, conservation principles and standards, the management plan, the tourism plan, and clarification on three other issues. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 3 November 2024 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2024, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2025. The additional information provided by the State Party, together with the mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2025.

We thank you and your Delegation for your availability and your participation in the meeting held on 26 November 2024 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that the “Prehistoric Caves and Falak-ol-Aflak Ensemble of Khorramabad Valley (PCFEKV)” might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value, this has not yet been demonstrated.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

Justification for inscription - proposed narratives

ICOMOS notes that the proposed justification for inscription comprises three different narratives. The first one encompasses the overall nominated series which seems to focus on the continuity of human occupation in the Khorramabad Valley. Concomitantly, the prehistoric caves and the rock shelter constitute a free-standing narrative, and so does the Falak-ol-Aflak Ensemble.

ICOMOS does not consider that the continuous and long-term human occupation of a place necessarily provides grounds for a property to be recognised as outstanding, since this is a common phenomenon throughout the world. However, ICOMOS considers that the nominated prehistoric caves and the rock shelter component parts of the nominated property offer important insights into the human dispersal, evolution, social behaviour, adaptation strategy, subsistence, tool-making, and other aspects of the development of the prehistoric communities in the region. For this reason, ICOMOS recognises that these component parts alone might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value.

In addition, ICOMOS is aware of the importance of the nominated prehistoric caves and the rock shelter, as evidenced by the numerous publications and other scholarship on this topic. However, ICOMOS considers that, at this stage, the nomination dossier and the additional information submitted by the State Party in November 2024 have not demonstrated clear potential Outstanding Universal Value for these component parts only.

Chronology

The nominated prehistoric caves and the rock shelter span a period from approximately 63,000 to 3,000 BCE. While the general timeline of human occupation has been established, many gaps remain. ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could provide a detailed chronology table of all the artefacts discovered at these sites, in order to better understand the levels of development that have been reached at any particular time period.

Comparative analysis

ICOMOS considers that the prehistoric caves and rock shelters in the Zagros Mountains are important to the understanding of the possible early human dispersal routes, evolution, and technological advancement in the region. However, it is difficult to assess at this stage the position of the nominated prehistoric caves and of the rock shelter in the context of similar sites in the Zagros Mountains region and in the wider region. ICOMOS would therefore appreciate if the State Party could provide a summary of the similarities and specificities identified between the nominated caves and rock shelter in comparison to similar sites in the Zagros Mountains in order to understand how the nominated component parts stand out.

It would be helpful as well if the State Party could expand the comparative analysis to include similar sites in the Arabian Peninsula, that played a significant role in the understanding of early human dispersal routes and human evolution, so as to position the nominated prehistoric caves and rock shelter in a wider prehistoric geo-cultural context.

Academic potential and future research

ICOMOS understands that the archaeological deposits in the nominated prehistoric caves and rock shelter have not yet been fully excavated. However, the archaeological and scientific potential of these deposits is unclear at this stage. ICOMOS would be pleased to know whether a scientific appraisal for

the academic potential of these deposits has been made, and if so, what the outcome of this appraisal is.

ICOMOS notes that one of the actions provided for in the short-term plan included in the management plan concerns the “[c]ontinued multidisciplinary research, archaeological excavations of prehistoric caves [...]” (p. 81). ICOMOS would be interested to receive an update on the progress made in this regard since the management plan was approved in 2023. In addition, ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could provide the timeframe for the completion of this action. Could the State Party inform whether more focused research on analysing the flint tools found in the nominated caves and rock shelter, with particular focus on the technological advancements of the time, has been envisaged?

Tourism management

ICOMOS notes that significant improvements have been made as regards the protection and tourism management of the prehistoric caves and rock shelter. ICOMOS would like to know whether the carrying capacity of these component parts has been established and if so, what the outcome of this survey is.

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation procedure.

We would be grateful if you could provide **ICOMOS** and the **World Heritage Centre** with the above requested information by **28 February 2025 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* concerning additional information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this statutory deadline will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while ICOMOS will carefully consider any additional information submitted within the statutory deadline, it will not be possible to properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or a large amount of new information submitted at the last minute. ICOMOS would therefore be grateful if the State Party could keep its response concise and respond only to the above requests.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation procedure.

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to The Office of Vice Minister and Deputy Minister for Cultural Heritage of the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts (IMCHTH)
UNESCO World Heritage Centre