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МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Our Ref. GB/AR/EG/1704_IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 19 December 2024

Ms. Emma Maria José Rodríguez Sifuentes
Minister, Deputy Permanent Delegate, Chargé
d'Affaires a.i.
Permanent Delegation of Mexico to UNESCO
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World Heritage List 2025

Huichol Route through Sacred Sites to Huiricuta (Tatehuari Huajuyé) (Mexico) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ms. Rodríguez Sifuentes,

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 “Huichol Route through Sacred Sites to Huiricuta (Tatehuari Huajuyé)” was carried out by M. Ulises Cardenas Hidalgo (Chile) in August 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 planned and approved development projects, governance and management, tourism, interpretation and visitor management, Indigenous peoples' rights, and cultural landscapes. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 4 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 25 November 2023 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 “Huichol Route through Sacred Sites to Huiricuta (Tatehuari Huajuyé)” 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:

Wixárika people, routes and sacred sites

ICOMOS understands that the nominated route to Wirikuta starts at Tuapurie, where Wixárika people live, but that there are also other Wixárika communities living in other locations in Jalisco and neighbouring Mexican states. ICOMOS also notes that the route to Wirikuta is described in the nomination dossier as a “*braid of trails*” that might have variations (p.41).

ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could provide a summary and map showing the main locations of Wixárika communities in order to assist ICOMOS in better understanding the social and cultural contexts of the nomination. Do all Wixaritari follow the same route as the one nominated (i.e. starting at Tuapurie and travelling east in a ritual sequence to Wirikuta)? Are there variations to the route that include areas and sacred sites that are not included in the nominated component parts? If this is the case, ICOMOS would appreciate additional information to understand this wider context and, in particular, why this route has been selected for World Heritage nomination.

Sequence of the route

The nomination dossier, and the sequence of numbering of the component parts, describe the pilgrimage route as beginning at component part 01 Tuapurie (Jalisco) and moving to the east through a ritual sequence that crosses several states and ecological landscapes to reach Wirikuta (component parts 015-018). However, the nomination dossier specifies a final component part 019, seeming to suggest that the route then turns back toward the west, ending at the Pacific coast at Tatei Jaramara (Nayarit).

Based on the descriptions and maps provided, it is unclear how the route is used following the visit to Wirikuta and the important rituals conducted there. Do the participants retrace their steps and return to Tuapurie? Do the same people then travel to the coast, or is this a different journey? How does the route to Wirikuta eventually reach the coast and the sites at Tatei Jaramara?

Potential addition of a new component part (Cerro Gordo, Durango)

ICOMOS notes the advice received in the additional information of November 2024 that the State Party wish to add a new component part to the 19 already nominated for inscription. This is the site of Hauxa Manaka (Cerro Gordo), located in the state of Durango.

While ICOMOS understands well that this area contains sites sacred to the Wixárika people, the rationale for adding it to the nominated route is unclear at this stage, since it does not seem to be aligned or linked in any way to what has been described as the pathway of movement and rituals for the selected component parts. At what point does the route travel to Durango? Or, is this a different journey undertaken for spiritual and cultural purposes by the Wixárika people? ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could provide more detailed information to clarify this question.

ICOMOS notes that the potential inclusion of this additional component part raises concerns as regards the rationale for the whole concept of the nomination whose narrative is focused on the Huichol route and will require revision to many of the descriptive elements of the original nomination (such as the overall area of the nominated property and buffer zones, the number of inhabitants, arrangements for legal protection in the state of Durango, the involvement of relevant states and municipalities in the management system, and so on).

Selection of component parts

Based on the above questions and dialogue with the State Party, ICOMOS understands that the nominated property could comprise the route to Wirikuta, plus two extremely important sacred sites: Tatei Jaramara and (potentially) Hauxa Manaka, that are also visited by Wixárika people during their lives and according to their spiritual traditions (but are not connected directly to the ritual route between Tuapurie and Wirikuta).

As it is currently not clear, ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could confirm whether this understanding is correct, and provide any necessary clarification. In addition, ICOMOS would like to know whether there are other Wixárika sacred sites that are not included in this nomination. How have these sites been selected or not for the nomination?

Justification for criterion (v)

At this stage, ICOMOS does not fully understand the basis for the use of criterion (v). While it is clear that the rituals performed are oriented in part at sustaining the agricultural systems, there is not sufficient evidence presented about the traditional settlements and agriculture of the Wixárika, such as the *milpa*. ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could elaborate on how and where these traditions are specifically represented within the component parts.

Given that the component parts have been selected to represent the route to Wirikuta, how can they also represent the traditional settlement and agricultural practices of the Wixárika in an exceptional way?

Tangible attributes of Outstanding Universal Value

The nomination dossier and additional information received by ICOMOS in November 2024 has explained that the nominated component parts are places of ritual, and that there are specific natural features (such as wetlands, springs, hills, and rock formations) that are sacred sites, imbued with spiritual meaning. While there are some images presented of the *tuquipa* in the nomination dossier, it is not very clear where these are located. Overall, it remains unclear to ICOMOS what tangible cultural attributes exist in each of the component parts, such as archaeological sites, *tuquipas* or other vernacular ritual structures, *milpa*, and so on. It would be greatly appreciated if the State Party could provide a concise inventory of tangible attributes with brief descriptions of each, as well as a map of each component part showing the location of these attributes, and a selection of photographic images.

Management

ICOMOS has concerns about the effectiveness of the coordination between the various Mexican states, the Federal level of government and the Wixárika governance structures with regard to the protection and management of the nominated property. Given that there are many pressures that apply to this nomination, ICOMOS considers that coordination will be crucial to the long-term continuity of the route and its traditions.

ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could provide information on whether the coordinated management mechanism is now operating in practice, and how the State Party plans to ensure that the management system will be effective over the long-term.

In addition, ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could provide additional information on how the management system will be modified in the event that the additional component part of Hauxa Manaka (Cerro Gordo) is incorporated into the nominated series.

Legal protection

ICOMOS appreciates the additional information received in November 2024 that outlined recent Federal decrees to strengthen the recognition of the cultural rights and self-determination of Indigenous peoples in Mexico, and to protect sacred sites. ICOMOS understands that these are powerful mechanisms, but because they are newly established and operate at a high level, it would be appreciated if the State Party could provide further advice on how these apply on the ground across the wide expanse of the nominated property, and how the legal frameworks of the various states reflect or complement these provisions.

Right of access

ICOMOS understands that the route to Wirikuta passes through many areas in private ownership, and that there can be conflicts over access for the Wixárika people as they move through the landscape. Could the State Party please provide additional information about how the legal frameworks at the Federal and State levels protect the right of access through these areas by the Wixárika? What responses are planned for access issues arising from the establishment of barbed wire fencing in some areas, and the expansion of urban areas in others?

The management plan calls for cooperation between local communities and governments to resolve private land conflicts and secure the right of way along the pilgrimage route, but it is not clear how this will be progressed. Are there additional measures that could be put in place in the future to ensure that there is a right of access for the Wixárika people, while also respecting the rights and interests of land owners? ICOMOS does not necessarily expect that such measures could be developed within the short timeframe of the evaluation procedure, but if this is planned, ICOMOS would appreciate advice on the likely timeframe for their development and implementation.

ICOMOS also notes that communities in parts of the route are potentially impacted by safety and security issues (including those affected by illegal activities). While this is obviously a matter that has wider challenges than for heritage protection alone, any comments regarding the ways in which the safe passage of the Wixárika people can be safeguarded would be appreciated.

Mining concessions

ICOMOS notes that there are very significant potential threats posed by mining concessions and possibly also legal and illegal existing mining operations within the vicinity of some of the nominated component parts. The additional information received in November 2024 usefully clarified that a number of mining concessions are currently paused and waiting for decision from the Mexican courts. ICOMOS understands that the newly established Federal Decrees have implications for whether mining will proceed in these areas.

In this regard, ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could provide further information on the following points:

- Given that the current situation is awaiting the outcomes of the courts, is it possible at this point to guarantee the protection of the sites that could be impacted by future mining concessions?
- Is it possible to confirm that mining within the component parts, buffer zones and wider settings will be prohibited?
- Within the governance structures in Mexico, where are the responsibilities for monitoring and enforcement of mining in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas situated?

Naming protocols

ICOMOS notes that there is a preference for the Huichol people to be known as Wixaritari or Wixárika (and the site of Huiricuta to be expressed as Wirikuta), and that the State Party also uses these

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