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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Forty-seventh session UNESCO, Paris 6-16 July 2025

<u>Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda</u>: Global Strategy for a representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List

9A. Upstream Process

SUMMARY

Further to Decision **46 COM 9A**, this document presents a report on the implementation of the Upstream Process requests since the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee (New Delhi, 2024). It also includes the Upstream Process requests received by the 31 March 2025 deadline.

<u>Draft Decision</u>: 47 COM 9A, see point IV

I. BACKGROUND

- 1. At its 32nd session (Quebec City, 2008), the World Heritage Committee launched a process of reflection on the future of the World Heritage Convention. In this framework, the Committee, aware of the challenges that exist in the process for nominating a site to the World Heritage List, proposed an initiative entitled Upstream Processes. The aim was to find options for improving and strengthening the nomination process.
- 2. In 2010, by Decision **34 COM 12**, the World Heritage Committee requested the World Heritage Centre "in cooperation with the Advisory Bodies and other relevant organizations, to invite one or two States Parties from each of the UNESCO regional groups to undertake, on an experimental basis, voluntary pilot projects related to identifying options and preparing dossiers for nomination". The following year, by Decision **35 COM 12C**, the Committee took note of the 10 pilot projects that had been chosen to implement this experimental approach. The pilot projects evolved in different ways. Some resulted in the inscription of the site on the World Heritage List and others led to the discontinuation of the nomination project, following the advice from the Advisory Bodies. The last pilot project was phased out by the Committee at its extended 45th session in 2023 (Decision **45 COM 9A**).
- 3. In 2015, at its 39th session, the World Heritage Committee included the Upstream Process in the Operational Guidelines, thereby recognizing that the Upstream Process has extended well beyond the pilot projects and has become a mainstream mechanism widely regarded as beneficial by many States Parties.
- 4. At its 41st session (Krakow, 2017), the Committee adopted Decision 41 COM 9A, marking a significant milestone in formalizing the Upstream Process within the Operational Guidelines. Through this decision, the Committee addressed several key procedural issues, including the adoption of the Upstream Process request format and a timeline for submission of requests for upstream advice, with two deadlines per year. In the same decision, the Committee decided to give priority to requests for the preparation or revision of Tentative Lists to Least Developed Countries, Low-Income and Lower-Middle Income Countries and Small Island Developing States, followed by the mechanism of Paragraph 61.c) of the Operational Guidelines.
- 5. In 2018, by Decision **42 COM 9A**, the Committee approved a revised definition of the Upstream Process proposed by the Ad-Hoc Working Group and, at its 43rd session (Baku, 2019), the Upstream Process request format was included in the Operational Guidelines, becoming the new Annex 15 (Decision **43 COM 11A**).
- 6. In 2020, the "Guidance on Developing and Revising World Heritage Tentative Lists" (https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/184566/) was prepared by ICOMOS, with UNESCO, IUCN and ICCROM, as a first step to address the Upstream Process requests regarding the creation or revision of Tentative Lists. Subsequently, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies have operationalized this guidance through a toolkit for States Parties and resource persons. The toolkit is used for workshops conducted by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS and IUCN on the development and revision of Tentative Lists and contributes to a streamlined and consistent implementation of all Upstream Process requests concerning Tentative Lists.
- 7. At its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021), the Committee, by Decision 44 COM 9A, limited to one the number of requests per State Party that can be addressed in each cycle. In the same decision, the Committee decided to remove the 31 October deadline for submission of Upstream Process requests, retaining only the annual deadline of 31 March. By Decision 44 COM 12, this annual deadline was included in Paragraph 121 of the Operational Guidelines.

- 8. On a related note, the Preliminary Assessment has been introduced as the first phase of the now two-phase nomination process. Drawing on the experience of the Upstream Process, the Preliminary Assessment builds the capacities of States Parties in establishing the feasibility of a potential nomination and developing high-quality nominations. Whilst the Upstream Process is voluntary and may include a visit to the site, the Preliminary Assessment is mandatory for all nominations that the World Heritage Committee will examine from 2028 onwards. The Upstream Process may provide general advice, in relation to revision of a Tentative List, while the Preliminary Assessment is undertaken on a specific site already included on the Tentative List. While in general the costs of Upstream Process requests are borne by the requesting State(s) Party(ies), the costs of Preliminary Assessments are included in the related evaluation process (see Paragraph 122.i of the Operational Guidelines).
- 9. Both processes provide guidance at an early stage, prior to the preparation of a nomination. Therefore, in 2024, in order to avoid an unnecessary redundancy in the nomination process, the Committee, by Decision **46 COM 8**, amended Paragraph 121 of the Operational Guidelines. This amendment exempts from the Preliminary Assessment procedure nominations of sites having been subject to an Upstream Process concerning a specific site. The report of Upstream Process advice concerning a specific site is relevant for up to five years, in line with Paragraph 122.f of the Operational Guidelines regarding the Preliminary Assessment.
- 10. It is important to emphasize that the application of the Upstream Process approach does not imply that a site would ultimately be inscribed on the World Heritage List. The primary objective of the Upstream Process is to reduce the number of sites facing significant challenges during the nomination process, and to avoid substantial investment in financial and human resources where the proposed sites do not demonstrate potential for justifying Outstanding Universal Value.

II. PROGRESS MADE ON THE UPSTREAM PROCESS REQUESTS

11. Since the launch of the Upstream Process, a substantial number of Upstream Process requests has been received by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. However, its implementation has proven to be challenging especially in terms of calendar and financial resources, as it is carried out according to the availability of financial and human resources. The implementation rate of the Upstream Process requests is therefore determined by the resources available each year, leading to a backlog of requests and prolonged waiting times for States Parties.

A. Requests received by the annual deadlines from 2018 to 2021

12. Of the 60 Upstream Process requests received by the annual deadlines between 2018 and 2021, four concerning the potential future nomination of specific sites are still not finalised. Moreover, there are 14 pending requests (from which five are currently under implementation) concerning the revision of Tentative Lists of States Parties, which will benefit from the above-mentioned "Toolkit for Preparing /Revising Tentative Lists". The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies are making every possible effort to complete all requests in the shortest possible time determined by the resources available.

B. Requests received by the annual deadlines from 2022 to 2024

13. Regarding the Upstream Process requests received by the annual deadlines between 2022 and 2024, all requests concerned potential future nomination of specific sites. Of

the 13 requests received, two are currently under implementation and three are pending. Two were successfully implemented and six were discontinued for various reasons.

III. NEW UPSTREAM PROCESS REQUESTS RECEIVED

- 14. By the 31 March 2025 deadline, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre received three Upstream Process requests. In terms of their regional distribution, one request is from the Asia and the Pacific region, one from the Africa region, and the other from Latin America and the Caribbean region. As to the criteria of eligibility for receiving financial support, two requests are from Lower Middle-Income Countries and one from an Upper Middle-Income Country. Furthermore, regarding the subject of the advice demanded, all requests concern the potential future nomination of specific sites. Based on the combination of all criteria outlined in Decision 41 COM 9A, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre established a list of requests received by the 2025 deadline, in order of priority (see Annex I of this Document).
- 15. The request from the Africa region was submitted by Zimbabwe and concerns the 'Naletale Cluster of Dzimbabwes' site. An Upstream Process request for the same site was received in 2020, and the International Assistance n° 3284 was approved in 2021. At the time, ICOMOS considered that the documentation and information produced through the International Assistance activity were essential for the proper implementation of the Upstream Process. Since the International Assistance activity had not been carried out by the State Party, ICOMOS was unable to proceed with the Upstream Process, and the request was phased out in 2024. As the situation remains unchanged, it is still not possible to carry out this Upstream Process, and the request received in 2025 will therefore not be considered. The State Party is invited to resubmit the request once the International Assistance n° 3284 has been finalized.
- 16. Annex II of this document presents the list of pending Upstream Process requests received from 2018 to 2025. Based on the experience with the formalised Upstream Process, it should be noted that the timeline to address the Upstream Process requests depends on various factors, such as the number of requests received, their scope, the expectations of the State Party, the availability of funding and the prioritisation system. Therefore, while some requests may be dealt with swiftly, others require more time. Accordingly, it is advisable not to expect receiving the outcome of an Upstream Process request within less than, on average, 18 months after the deadline at which it is submitted. The advice to be provided in the framework of each Upstream Process request is reviewed and endorsed by the respective Advisory Bodies' World Heritage Panels. Additionally, it is worth noting that there is a stark imbalance between requests for natural heritage and cultural heritage, with the vast majority of requests being submitted for cultural sites.

IV. DRAFT DECISION

Draft Decision: 47 COM 9A

The World Heritage Committee.

- 1. Having examined Document WHC/25/47.COM/9A,
- 2. <u>Recalling</u> Decision **46 COM 9A**, adopted at its 46th session (New Delhi, 2024), and its previous decisions concerning the Upstream Process,

- 3. <u>Also recalling</u> that upstream support should take place at an early stage, preferably at the moment of preparation or revision of States Parties' Tentative Lists,
- 4. <u>Takes note</u> of the progress made regarding the Upstream Process requests received from 2018 to 2024:
- 5. <u>Welcomes</u> the submission of the Upstream Process requests received by the 31 March 2025 deadline, and the efforts by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to process all requests received in the timeliest manner possible within the resources available;
- 6. <u>Thanks</u> the State Party of France for its financial support to the implementation of the Upstream Process, and <u>invites</u> States Parties to contribute extrabudgetary resources for the overall coordination and capacity building support of the Upstream Process;
- 7. <u>Requests</u> the World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies, to present a progress report on the support offered to Upstream Process requests received, for consideration at its 48th session.

<u>List of Upstream Process requests received by 31 March 2025</u>

Three Upstream Process requests were received following the requested format and are presented here in the order of priority. The prioritization was made on the basis of Decision **41 COM 9A**, paragraphs 11 and 12.

Region	State Party	Type of econo my	C/N	TL / NOM	Request complete as of 31/03/2025	Type of activity / site
AFR	Zimbabwe	LMIC	С	NOM	YES	Naletale Cluster of Dzimbabwes (On TL since 2018)
APA	Philippines	LMIC	С	NOM	YES	Fortifications of the Walled City of Manila (On TL since 2024)
LAC	Brazil	UMIC	C/N	NOM	YES	Sociobiodiverse cultural basin of Chapada do Araripe (On TL since 2024)

C = cultural heritage	AFR = Africa	LDC = Least Developed Country
N = natural heritage	APA = Asia-Pacific	LIE = Low Income Economy
TL = Tentative List	ARB = Arab States	LMIC = Lower Middle-Income Country
NOM = nomination file	ENA = Europe & North America	UMIC = Upper Middle-Income Country
	LAC = Latin America & the	HIC = High Income Country
	Caribbean	SIDS = Small Island Developing State

List of pending Upstream Process requests received from 2018 to 2025

This list shows all Upstream Process requests received from 2018 to 2025 and that are not yet finalised (i.e., pending or under implementation). They are divided by year of submission and object of the advice requested (TL or NOM) and presented in alphabetical order by State Party.

Region	State Party	C/N	TL / NOM	Year of Submission	Type of activity / site
AFR	Eswatini	C/N	TL	2018	Revision
AFR	Eritrea	С	NOM	2018	Qoahito Cultural Landscape
AFR	Malawi	С	NOM	2018	Malawi Slave Routes & Dr. David Livingstone Trail
ENA	Ukraine	С	NOM	2018	Archaeological Site "Stone Tomb"
ENA	Armenia	C/N	TL	2019	Revision
LAC	Colombia	C/N	TL	2019	Revision
LAC	Jamaica	C/N	TL	2019	Revision
ARB	Jordan	C/N	TL	2019	Revision
APA	Nepal	C/N	TL	2019	Revision
AFR	Nigeria	C/N	TL	2019	Revision
LAC	Ecuador	C/N	TL	2020	Revision
ARB	Egypt	C/N	TL	2020	Revision
AFR	Ethiopia	C/N	TL	2020	Revision
APA	Kiribati	C/N	TL	2020	Development
LAC	Nicaragua	C/N	TL	2020	Revision
ARB	Saudi Arabia	C/N	TL	2020	Revision
ENA	Belarus	С	NOM	2020	Kalozha Church of Sts. Boris and Gleb in Grodno

Region	State Party	C/N	TL / NOM	Year of Submission	Type of activity / site
LAC	El Salvador	C/N	TL	2021	Revision
ARB	Kuwait	С	NOM	2022	Ahmadi Company Township
ENA	Türkiye	С	NOM	2022	The Historical Port City of Izmir
ENA	Moldova	С	NOM	2024	Underground Wineries of Moldova
ARB	Qatar	C/N	NOM	2024	People of the Rawda: Desert Life in Qatar from the Dawn of Islam to the 20th c. CE
APA	Viet Nam	С	NOM	2024	Con Moong Cave
LAC	Brazil	C/N	NOM	2025	Sociobiodiverse cultural basin of Chapada do Araripe
APA	Philippines	С	NOM	2025	Fortifications of the Walled City of Manila

C = cultural heritage	AFR = Africa
N = natural heritage	APA = Asia-Pacific
TL = Tentative List	ARB = Arab States
NOM = nomination file	ENA = Europe & North America
	LAC = Latin America & the Caribbean