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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

World Heritage Committee
Fourteenth Ordinary Session

Banff, Alberta, Canada, 7-12 December 1990

Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda : Monitoring of the state of
conservation of World Heritage cultural properties

Timbuktu

The traditional urban fabric of Timbuktu, included in 1988 in the World Heritage List under criteria (ii), (iv) and (v), is constituted, in particular, by the three great mosques of Djingareiber, Sankore, and Sidi Yahia, and sixteen cemeteries and mausoleums which are essential elements of the religious monuments. When inscribing this site, the Committee suggested that the Malian authorities consider inscription of this property on the List of World Heritage in Danger because of the threat of sand encroachment at Timbuktu. In its evaluation ICOMOS furthermore pointed out the vulnerability of the mosques.

At the request of the Malian authorities and financed under the World Heritage Fund (US\$5,274), an expert mission was carried out from 13 to 21 July 1990. The purpose of the mission was to diagnose the state of deterioration of the above-mentioned elements and to elaborate a programme of safeguarding. The report of the expert emphasizes the urgency of implementing a programme of conservation of the mosques and of rehabilitation of the environment which will require promulgating appropriate laws and raising adequate financial resources. In addition to the emergency measures recommended in the report, which may be consulted by the Committee members, studies will have to be undertaken to analyse the state of deterioration of Malian earthen architecture and intervention techniques. This programme should be integrated into a general city management plan.

Mosques of Djingareiber, Sankore, and Sidi Yahia: These monuments present the same type of deterioration. The Sidi Yahia mosque is the best maintained because of the congregation's participation in its upkeep. The problems encountered are due to sand encroachment. The deterioration of the rainwater drainage system and the fragility of the bases of the walls endanger their static equilibrium, the upper parts of which have been changed by hydric and aeolian erosion.

Mausoleums and Cemeteries: These elements, isolated at the outskirts of the town, are very much exposed to aeolian erosion, due, in particular, to the deterioration of surrounding vegetation. Action on the environment should be urgently undertaken with a view to setting up protective barriers consisting mainly of plants. The expert report recommends to reafforest altered zones with fast-growing species and to make the population aware of the necessity of limiting the exploitation of the slow-growing plants which are still available.