The 32nd General Conference of UNESCO made some important advancements for the conservation of heritage worldwide. Two resolutions attest to the growing reach of heritage conservation issues. In one, the international community broadened the conservation efforts to include Intangible Heritage. In the other, Member States moved closer to the goal of protecting heritage in times of peace and war.

The International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted at the General Conference, is a new tool that joins the group of UNESCO conventions for the preservation of cultural heritage. This new Convention is an important international instrument, since it addresses the preservation of particularly vulnerable heritage, such as oral traditions and expressions, including languages as vehicles of cultural heritage; the performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. What is of particular significance is the stress the Convention places on the vital role that communities and groups that bring life to this Intangible Heritage have to play in its preservation.

National inventories of cultural property to be safeguarded now need to be drawn up, and an Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is to be established. Two lists will also be created: a Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity and a List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. At UNESCO, we are looking forward to working to preserve Intangible Heritage once the Convention comes into force, with the signature of thirty States Parties.

The General Conference also adopted a Declaration Concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage. The document recalls the tragic destruction of the giant Buddha statues of Bamiyan and expresses serious concern about the growing number of acts of intentional destruction of cultural heritage. Although the document is not legally binding, it has gone a long way to bringing this issue to the world’s attention. It asks all States to take appropriate measures to prevent, avoid, stop and suppress acts of intentional destruction of heritage, wherever such heritage may be located.

We are certain that the new International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Declaration Concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage will greatly support the efforts of UNESCO in providing assistance to Member States in preserving their heritage.

Francesco Bandarin, Director, World Heritage Centre
The 14th General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, chaired by H.E. Mr Ahmad Jalihi (Islamic Republic of Iran), was held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris from 14-15 October during the 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference. Representatives of 163 States Parties attended, as well as representatives of the Advisory Bodies of the World Heritage Committee (ICOMOS, IUCN and IICROM).

The Assembly, in addressing these issues, adopted a resolution which welcomed the adoption by the 26th session of the World Heritage Committee of new Strategic Objectives that include the strengthening of the Credibility of the World Heritage List and the development of effective Capacity-building measures. A progress report on the implementation of the Global Strategy for a credible, representative and balanced World Heritage List was presented and discussed. The Assembly also recommended that additional financial resources be allocated to the World Heritage Centre for programmes to strengthen capacity in the States Parties and regions under-represented on the List.

At the meeting Zhang Xinsheng (China), Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee, presented a comprehensive report on the activities of the World Heritage Committee since October 2001. He said that 48 States Parties still do not have properties on the List. Mr Matsuura called the participants’ attention to three significant issues for conservation. It is essential, he said, that ICOMOS and IUCN determine existing gaps in the World Heritage List. The lack of representativeness of the List, according to Mr Matsuura, should be addressed by identifying States Parties’ needs, particularly for capacity-building. Thirdly Mr Matsuura pointed out that additional resources should be sought for protection through partnerships, once the recurrent cost of conservation of existing World Heritage properties is determined.

The Committee will review both issues at its 28th session in November-December 2003 / January 2004.

The main challenges facing the Committee this year consist primarily of the issue of the representativeness of the World Heritage List (or the lack thereof) and the recurrent Cairns Decisions. The List has grown quite rapidly over recent years and now includes 754 properties. However, we are concerned that some regions and types of outstanding heritage are still not included on the List. The Cairns Decision, as you know, limits the number of new nominations the Committee will examine each year. It was partly proposed as a way to manage the workload of our World Heritage system. However, some States Parties have expressed serious concerns about the limiting effect it may have on the List’s healthy development.

The Committee will review both issues at its 28th session in Suzhou, China in 2004. Our biggest challenge will be to find ways to encourage new and complete nominations from under-represented regions, countries and categories of heritage, to mobilize necessary additional technical and financial resources for this purpose and at the same time to manage the workload of our system.

Do you feel that the question of under-represented regions and categories is being adequately dealt with?

The World Heritage list is a prestigious catalogue of the most outstanding cultural and natural places in the world. It is important that we, the World Heritage Committee, and all the States Parties ensure that experts working to prepare and evaluate World Heritage nominations do everything we can to maintain the value of World Heritage. It is vital that we do not lose the standard and threshold of value required for the inclusion of sites on the List.

At the same time, the World Heritage Convention is a tool for international co-operation. It is an instrument of encouragement and we should do everything we can to encourage (and, in some instance, assist) countries around the world to nominate their outstanding heritage to the List.

And it is not just about under-represented regions and categories. The Convention encourages all States Parties to identify, protect and present to future generations our World Heritage. There are 48 States Parties to the Convention that still do not have sites on the List - some of course are very recent signatories. We will obviously need to strengthen awareness about World Heritage and heritage conservation, build the capacity to nominate and effectively manage World Heritage sites and find the necessary resources to assist in the management of World Heritage in these countries.

You have talked in the past about China’s progress in conservation and preservation. What has China learnt that can be handed on to others?

China is proud to have 29 properties on the World Heritage List. For China, World Heritage is attractive because, just like our centuries-old civilization, it brings together the concepts of culture and nature. You can see this demonstrated at many of our World Heritage sites, at Mount Taishan and Mount Huangshan for example.

China has used its ratification of the World Heritage Convention as a catalyst for conservation and preservation at a broader level. Most particularly it has led to the preparation and enforcement of national, provincial and local legislation for heritage protection. It has also led to the well-known ‘China Principles’, which reflect Chinese traditions and approaches to conservation under existing laws for the protection of cultural heritage and may serve as a model for other countries.

In addition, we have learnt that World Heritage can be used as a tremendous mobilizing force to foster research, education and training. In future years, we would like to focus our efforts on capacity-building and institutional development and hope to see a greater sense of ownership with other countries in the region and around the world.

The first Expert Meeting to prepare the nomination process for inscription on the World Heritage List of the Qhapac Ñan ‘Camino Principal Andino’ (Main Andean Road) was held in Cuzco, Peru (24-25 October), with the support of extrabudgetary funds from Spain and the Netherlands. National representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, including the Ministers of Education of Peru, Carlos Malpica, participated, as well as a team from the World Heritage Centre.

Representatives at the meeting agreed on a number of issues, including the role of the World Heritage Centre in coordinating the nomination process. The delegations also set up a committee to monitor and implement future action. This committee, with a rotating presidency, will have one representative from each country involved in the Camino Inca nomination. Bolivia will hold the first presidency, and expressed the desire to host the second meeting, scheduled for April 2004.

In an important step, the delegates agreed to establish a protocol, to be ratified by all six countries, to adopt a common definition of the Qhapac Ñan, as a guide for the development of the process.

The majority of representatives agreed that the nomination of the Qhapac Ñan should come under the Cultural Road category, awaiting the re-definition of this category, given that the road goes across different Andean cultural landscapes.

The Secretariat is to co-ordinate actions with the European Space Agency, CONAE, and the Permanent Delegation of Argentina to organize a meeting in Cordoba, Argentina in March 2004. The objective of this meeting will be to train national experts in using radar and satellite information.

For further information, please contact: r.sanz@unesco.org
Promoting and Preserving Congolese Heritage: Linking Biological and Cultural Diversity

The UNESCO Science Sector and the World Heritage Centre are to hold the first international event in support of the cultural and natural heritage of the Democratic Republic of the Congo at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris from 6-26 September 2004.

This three-week event will aim to build awareness of the cultural and biological diversity of the region and catalyse financial and technical support in view of preserving the heritage of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thanks to the generous support of the Government of Belgium, an international exhibition, to be designed and produced by the Royal Museum for Central Africa (Belgium), the world’s leading museum and research institute on Congolese heritage, will open the event on 6 September 2004.

Archaeo-Astronomical Sites and Observatories

On 17 November, the elaboration of the new World Heritage Thematic Programme ‘Archaeo-Astronomical Sites and Observatories’, was officially announced by Anna Sidorenko, WHC Assistant Programme Specialist, who is responsible for this Programme, in the presence of Magda Stavinschi, Director of the Astronomical Institute of the Romanian Academy, and Regina Durighello of ICOMOS. Dr Christoforos Mallouris, astrophysicist, WHC consultant, presented an analysis of the archaeo-astronomical sites inscribed on the World Heritage List and tentative lists, carried out with support of the Government of the Netherlands.

The World Heritage Centre welcomes support from partners in advancing regional pilot projects in under-represented areas.

Lake Baikal World Heritage Site

In accordance with the request of the World Heritage Committee at its 27th session and at the invitation of the authorities of the Russian Federation, a high-level meeting was held at the Ministry of Natural Resources in Moscow on 11 November, with participants from UNESCO/WHC, IUCN, and the Ministry – including K.V. Jankov, Vice-Minister of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation, A. Steiner, IUCN Director General, F. Bandarin, WHC Director, and M. Rüssies, Chief WHC Europe and North America Unit.

The goal of this meeting was to jointly discuss issues related to the conservation of the Lake Baikal World Heritage Site and the debate over its possible inclusion on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources stressed the relevance of co-operation with the World Heritage Centre and the IUCN and the importance of its further development.

The Ministry presented comprehensive information on issues related to the current state of conservation of the site, as well as the measures undertaken by the Russian authorities to address these issues. The Russian delegation confirmed its preparedness to present a detailed report on the state of conservation of the site by February 2004, in line with the requests of the 26th and 27th session of the World Heritage Committee.

The Russian Ministry of Natural Resources also proposed the consideration of a joint pilot project with the participation of UNESCO and IUCN, aimed at addressing issues of concern to the conservation of the site. The representatives of UNESCO and IUCN supported the proposal.

Butrint (Albania)

Butrint occupies a small peninsula between the Straits of Corfu and Lake Butrint. Inhabited since pre-historic times, Butrint has been the site of a Greek colony, a Roman city and a bishopric. Following a period of prosperity under Byzantine administration, then a brief occupation by the Venetians, the city was abandoned in the late Middle Ages after marshes formed in the area. The present archaeological site is a repository of the ruins representing each period in the city’s development.

Butrint was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 1997, with the full support of the Minister of Culture of Albania who voiced his government’s concern and commitment to the preservation of the site. Civil disturbances in Albania that year did not cause any irreversible damage to the archaeological site itself, but the showcases of the museum were opened and looted. Since then, the World Heritage Committee has closely followed the developments affecting the site and has expressed its concern about its situation in terms of legal protection, management arrangements, planning and state of conservation. During its last session in June/July 2003, the Committee requested the State Party to submit a report to the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2004 that would take all these issues into account.

As was also requested by the Committee, a joint UNESCO/ICOMOS mission went to Butrint in October to assess the implementation of actions earlier proposed by UNESCO and ICOMOS and to formulate a recommendation as to whether the site can be withdrawn from the List of World Heritage in Danger. The mission met with national and local stakeholders, as well as international private foundations involved in the site and site management. Together with the report to be submitted by the State Party, the World Heritage Committee will examine in 2004 the outcomes and recommendations of this mission, and decide whether to remove Butrint from the List in Danger.
in November the UNESCO Armenian Office produced the second edition of the "World Heritage in Young Hands" Guidebook. This regionally adapted version, made possible with the support of the government of the Netherlands, will be distributed to teachers of secondary schools in and around World Heritage sites in eight countries of the Arab region. The Arabic Kit will now allow teacher training to commence in the region.

The Educational Kit, first published in 1998, has already been translated into twenty languages.

A World Heritage Boreal Zone Workshop was held from 9-13 October in St Petersburg, Russian Federation to identify priority areas in the boreal zone, with emphasis on boreal forests that could be nominated as World Heritage. The participants were from the Russian Federation, Finland, Norway and Canada as well as from several NGOs. The workshop was hosted and organized by IUCN Russia, in co-operation with IUCN Canada, and with support from the World Heritage Fund and the Government of Finland.

On 15 October UNESCO and the United Kingdom signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which will enable developing countries to benefit from UK heritage and conservation expertise. The UK will provide aid in the identification of potential World Heritage sites and in the preparation of management plans and conservation strategies. In its first year the plan will concentrate mainly on under-represented regions.

Loescho joins the World Heritage Convention. On 25 November 2003, the Kingdom of Lesotho deposited its instrument of Accession to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, thus becoming the 177th State Party to the Convention. The Convention will come into force for Lesotho three months from that date, 25 February 2004.

What Are They Doing?

WHC Director, Francesco Bandarin was in Peru (18-26 October) with Nuria Sanz, Programme Specialist, Latin America and Caribbean Unit, to meet the authorities in charge of Peruvian World Heritage properties. He also chaired the first Expert Meeting in the process of the nomination of the Qchapap' Naf (Tikal) archaeological site in Guatemala, Chief Natural Heritage Section and Art Pedersen, Consultant on Tourism and Visitor Management, attended the 2003 Ecosystem Australia 11th National Conference (10-14 November). A World Heritage workshop was held and a Memorandum of Co-operation was signed with Ecosystem Australia in which members will donate tourism services, with the proceeds going to World Heritage conservation projects. Sarah Titchen, Chief Policy and Statutory Implementation Unit, attended the 9th Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal, Canada (10-14 November). Machteld Rössler, Chief Europe and North America, participated at the University of Luminy, France (29-30 October), 'Historical Monuments: What is at Stake?', on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Foundation for the Protection of Historical Monuments. Herman van Hooff, Adviser for World Heritage in Latin America and the Caribbean, participated in a course-workshop in Sao Miguel, Brazil, on the conservation, management and sustainable development of the Jesuit Missions of the Guaraní (28-9 November). Joanna Sullivan and Karina Lennon, of the Partnerships for Conservation Unit, were in Washington, D.C. and New York, USA (28 October-4 November) to discuss partnership development opportunities with a number of institutions including the National Geographic Society, Scholastic Inc. and A&E Television Network. Peter Stott, Consultant for Nominations and Documentation, toured Belarus (25-31 October) with Polish expert Tadeusz Bernardowicz and members of the Department for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage of Belarus to assess the development of a national Tentative List. Fernando Brugman and Fumiko Ohinata, Associate Experts, Europe and North America Unit, went in Moscow, Russian Federation (22-28 September) to participate in a training workshop on a Periodic Reporting exercise for cultural World Heritage sites from the Russian Federation and the eastern European CIS countries. Mr Brugman also carried out a mission, together with ICOMOS expert Carla Maurano, to the World Heritage site in Danger of Butrint, Albania (26-31 October). He participated in a round table in Kotor, Serbia and Montenegro (1-7 November) to develop a management plan for this site. Ms Ohinata further attended a workshop on Rock Art and Tourism, in Windhoek, Namibia (18-20 October). Ms Ohinata and Bernd von Droste, Adviser to ADGU/CL, went to a round table in Vilnius, Lithuania and the Russian Federation (24-26 October) to discuss partnership development opportunities with a number of institutions including the Russian Academy of Sciences. On 9-15 November, Marie-Pierre Richon, WHC Focal Point for UNESCO, attended the international symposium: ‘Stepping Toward the Future, Protection of World Heritage and University Education’ in Tokyo, Japan (27-29 October), organized by the University of Tokuya. Guy Debonnet, Programme Specialist Natural Heritage, attended a SYGAP (Système de Gestion d’Information pour les Aires Protégées) workshop in Kinshasa, Congo (28 September-6 October) organized by the Congo Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN), the Universities of Gent and Louvain-la-Neuve, and the WHC. Kerstin Mans, Consultant Europe and North America Unit, spoke at a meeting on World Heritage and Young People in Lorsch, Germany (30-31 October) organized by the Association of German World Heritage Sites. Lodovico Folini Calabi has joined the WHC as Associate Expert from Italy. He will be working on legal and policy issues. The World Heritage Centre has recently established a working group on the Information Management System. The participants include: Alonzo C. Addison, Adviser to the Director, Mario Santanna Quintero, Co-ordinator; Scott Refsand, Consultant; Maria Lepigne-Cobo, web design and content; Eric Esquivel, web design and dynamics; Ben Goebel, web dynamics.

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