

# A Future for World Heritage

## Challenges and responses to assure the credibility of the World Heritage Convention International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), September 2012

In its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year the World Heritage Convention is rightly celebrating its successes. As is the case for any organization, there are challenges that need to be addressed, and an anniversary is a good time to do that. As we look to the future of the Convention, we note that, along with its many achievements, there are growing concerns regarding its performance, credibility, sustainability and long-term viability. The Convention, in the view of IUCN is at a crossroads, and warnings of serious departure from its original objectives from many sources, including the most senior levels of UNESCO, seem, so far, to have gone unheeded. The Convention conveys the highest expectations for the protection of our common cultural and natural heritage. UNESCO has been entrusted to provide the home for the Convention which has its own, independent governing body, supported by a professional Secretariat. The Convention now faces a central challenge to function in the increasingly politicised world of UNESCO.

If the Convention is to remain a relevant instrument, it needs to implement the reforms that its own External Evaluation of 2011 has identified. Its governing Committee needs to follow its own Operational Guidelines. The Advisory Bodies, including IUCN, need to be fully transparent in their work, and need to work in new ways to achieve dialogue with State Parties, and with all stakeholders in World Heritage that will lead to success across all listed World Heritage Sites. Additional resources are required to meet these needs.

IUCN was instrumental in the establishment of the Convention and has been its advisor on natural heritage since its founding. We are fully supportive of the World Heritage Convention, and ready to engage with our 1,000-plus State and NGO members, and 10,000-strong global expert network, in new ways to meet these major challenges. IUCN's World Conservation Congress has just taken place in Jeju, Republic of Korea, and included an extremely vibrant debate on World Heritage, with no less than 18 different events. The IUCN Congress adopted a number of motions related to World Heritage, including an overall resolution on Strengthening the World Heritage Convention which is attached as an annex to this non-paper. We commend these resolutions to UNESCO, and they underline our future contribution to the Future of the World Heritage Convention, and the commitment of IUCN members to the Convention.

The World Heritage Convention should be a beacon for conservation, for culture and for nature, as called for in the 2011 External Evaluation of the Convention's Global Strategy, which States Parties have welcomed and adopted. We are convinced that the Convention has a bright future if necessary reforms to ensure its effectiveness are put in place. Concerned to ensure that the Convention remains relevant in the years ahead, we note four principal challenges and propose recommendations to address them below.

### **1. The Credibility Challenge: Upholding the standards of the World Heritage Convention**

A central challenge to the Convention is a lack of consistency in observing the Operational Guidelines and Rules of Procedure of the Convention by the World Heritage Committee. The Convention is a standard-setting instrument which must not compromise its own standards. With a loss of standards, Parties will be disappointed and frustrated that the enhanced reputation of having a World Heritage site they expect is not achieved, and the support that World Heritage status can offer to them could become meaningless. UNESCO must, as an absolute priority, support and guide the Committee to follow consistently its own rules and guidelines. This is a prerequisite to other necessary reforms of the Convention.

- **Recommendation 1:** *Clear accountability for the World Heritage Committee is required. UNESCO should monitor and publish annually results of the compliance of Committee decisions with the Operational Guidelines and Rules of Procedure, and report these to the General Assembly of the Convention.*
- **Recommendation 2:** *The World Heritage Centre should be strengthened in order to focus on its core Secretariat role, and provide strong and consistent advice to the WH Committee on the observation of the Operational Guidelines and the Rules of Procedure, and should be held accountable for its performance in doing so.*

## **2. The Implementation Challenge: Prioritising strategic actions for a more effective World Heritage Convention.**

The World Heritage Convention has long required an effective, modern long-term strategy, led by conservation. There has been a long, rich and fruitful debate on the *Future of the Convention*, informed by many meetings and position statements. Despite this effort, the Convention has remained inconsistently managed, with limited memory of past decisions within its governing bodies, and a tendency to reinvent and review strategy and policy, but with little consistent implementation. The 2011 External Evaluation has considered the issues facing the Convention comprehensively and has recommended clear action. The Evaluation's findings have been adopted by the General Assembly to the Convention, together with an agreed Strategic Action Plan. They should be acted on as a priority.

- **Recommendation 3:** *UNESCO should prioritise its work to ensure a full and effective response to the External Evaluation of the World Heritage Convention's global strategy. The World Heritage Centre should be accountable for assuring that this response is delivered, including through strengthening its staffing of nature heritage specialists, recognising that the Advisory Bodies and other technical partners may be better placed than UNESCO to deliver many of the required actions.*

## **3. The Results Challenge: Better dialogue for better conservation results.**

The current nomination and the subsequent evaluation process for potential new sites are important, but cannot, on their own, provide adequate conservation solutions for World Heritage Sites. In addition, the monitoring of listed sites focuses primarily on reacting as problems occur rather than considering solutions from the outset. Under the present system, unnecessary confrontations occur when difficult issues facing listed and potential sites, are brought directly to the Committee. The Convention should, therefore, establish additional processes to support the efforts of the Advisory Bodies to provide early proactive advice to individual States Parties on the conservation needs of their listed sites and on the sites they are considering nominating. Better results also require the greater involvement of civil society, and communities associated with World Heritage sites, and mechanisms to assure and empower their input into the Convention, and to fully realise and respect their rights, are required.

- **Recommendation 4:** *The Convention should do much more to increase the capacity of actors at both sites and at State levels, including communities and NGOs. We should measure our results in this vital area. States need support to establish better governance, legal systems and institutions in order to avoid potentially damaging projects affecting World Heritage sites as a priority, and deliver sustainable development that protects World Heritage sites. The Convention should also deliver much greater opportunities for communities and NGOs to participate in, and benefit from, the inscription of World*

*Heritage sites and ensure that the listing and conservation of World Heritage Sites is based on the respect for the rights of communities, including indigenous peoples, in line with international norms.<sup>1</sup>*

- **Recommendation 5:** *The World Heritage Committee should assure rich participation of observers, NGOs and communities in its meetings, addressing the extreme lack of such voices as present. It should provide them with many more opportunities to participate, give them space and visibility in the meeting room, and increase the time provided for observers to speak in the Committee’s debates.*
- **Recommendation 6:** *The new Strategic Action Plan for the Convention should include as a priority, proactive monitoring of listed sites by the Advisory Bodies, as recommended in the External Evaluation, and this should be a means of mobilising action for conserving listed World Heritage sites. Early and coordinated advice by IUCN and ICOMOS to ensure the quality of tentative lists and other so-called “upstream processes” should become a core process in the Convention. The regional networks of the Advisory Bodies (including IUCN’s regional offices and expert Commissions) should be fully involved in delivering this new proactive approach.*
- **Recommendation 7:** *A review of opportunities to increase transparency and dialogue within the work of the Convention should be undertaken. New forums for the more difficult issues should be created, prior to these being put before the World Heritage Committee for decision. Specific issues to be considered include:*
  - *Use of Environmental Assessment tools and provision of effective management plans as priorities for listed sites;*
  - *The potential benefits of extending the evaluation process for nominated sites that are recommended for deferral, referral or non-inscription to allow time for issues raised to be properly considered.*

#### **4. The Budget Challenge: Securing adequate resources for the World Heritage Convention.**

Lack of resources for the Convention is a long standing problem, and the recent major decrease in UNESCO resources is a major concern. The budget of the World Heritage Convention is woefully limited. The lack of adequate and consistent support to sites included on the List of World Heritage in Danger is the most obvious example of a key constraint in the workings of the Convention. The World Heritage system currently appears to face an impossible challenge given the growing requests for additional work, quality, dialogue, and at the same time seeing a double figure decline in the available resources.

- **Recommendation 8:** *A new approach to budgeting and prioritising the work of the World Heritage Convention as a whole is needed within UNESCO. There is the need to provide and manage, via the World Heritage Committee, a budget from all sources (the World Heritage Fund, regular programme, State Party and other external funding) that addresses agreed priorities and that does not seek to do more, for less. There should be focus not just on “doing things”, but doing things well.*
- **Recommendation 9:** *UNESCO should act in concert with the Advisory Bodies to raise additional funds for World Heritage, focused on the key needs of the Convention. Director level accountability within the World Heritage Centre and the World Heritage Programmes of all three Advisory Bodies should be expected to address this critical issue, and ensure that the joint leverage of UNESCO and its three key partners in the Convention is realised.*

<sup>1</sup> The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2012 adopted motion 55: [Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the context of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention](#) on this matter, and this will be circulated to the World Heritage Committee when the WCC decision motion has been issued as amended.

**IUCN, September 2012.** This “non-paper” has been prepared at the request of the Director General of UNESCO for the meeting on “The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead”, to be held in UNESCO, Paris, 3 October 2012. In addition to this paper IUCN has previously contributed papers to the Future of the Convention process, and reports annually to the World Heritage Committee, and those reports provide further analysis on the challenges and opportunities facing the Convention, including matters of substance for its future strategy for conservation and for achieving a balanced and representative World Heritage List.

## **ANNEX: Motion 53 approved at the IUCN World Conservation Congress, 2012<sup>2</sup>**

### **M053: Strengthening the World Heritage Convention**

RECALLING Resolution 1.67 *World Heritage Convention* adopted by the 1st IUCN World Conservation Congress (Montreal, 1996), and other relevant IUCN Resolutions and Recommendations;

WELCOMING the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention taking place in 2012, that near universal recognition of the Convention has been achieved, and that the recognition of natural heritage on the World Heritage List has grown to more than 211 natural and mixed World Heritage Sites;

RECOGNIZING the specific and unique formal mandate IUCN holds within the World Heritage Convention as the Advisory Body for natural heritage, and also IUCN's own mandates and objectives as an international conservation organization that relate to World Heritage;

COMMENDING the World Heritage Committee, the State Parties to the Convention, and UNESCO and its World Heritage Centre, for significant conservation successes over the 40 years of the operation of the Convention and recognizing the important role of IUCN and the other Advisory Bodies named in the Convention, ICOMOS and ICCROM, in these successes;

RECOGNIZING the significant contribution of World Heritage Sites to the conservation of protected areas, noting that natural and mixed World Heritage Sites, and World Heritage cultural landscapes together provide coverage of over 10% of the land and aquatic areas included within the protected areas estate globally;

CONSIDERING that the potential benefits of World Heritage extend far beyond the sites which have been listed, and that these areas and those responsible for them should play a leadership role in developing, establishing and demonstrating global standards for management of protected areas and act as "flagships" in terms of raising public awareness, capacity building and finding solutions to conservation issues;

CONSIDERING that there is a need to strengthen recognition of the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples with respect to Convention processes, in line with agreed international norms, and secure environmentally sustainable and equitable benefits from World Heritage Site designation, as part of sustaining the leadership role of the World Heritage Convention;

CONCERNED that the World Heritage Convention, notwithstanding its record of success, faces significant challenges in its credibility and effectiveness, as notably set out in the conclusions of the evaluation of the Convention's global strategy undertaken by UNESCO's external auditors in 2011, and endorsed by the General Assembly of State Parties to the World Heritage Convention, especially with respect to the protection and management of listed sites as the key priority for the Convention, the achievement of a balanced and credible World Heritage List, adherence to the highest standards for the assessment of the Outstanding Universal Value of sites proposed for inclusion in the World Heritage List, and recognition by signatories to the Convention of their joint responsibility to assure the conservation of all World Heritage sites;

CONCERNED that there continue to be significant pressures on World Heritage Sites, including from major infrastructure and extractive industries, the impacts of conflict, the loss of management capacity and a range of other threats and pressures, that have resulted in a growing number of sites being included in the List of World Heritage in Danger, including some that have seen significant long-term deterioration of their values;

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<sup>2</sup> A full report on the motions approved by IUCN WCC that relate to World Heritage will be made available shortly, but was not complete at the time of completion of the present paper.

***The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea, 6–15 September 2012:***

1. REAFFIRMS its view that the principles of the World Heritage Convention are critical to conservation and therefore calls on the Convention's signatory Parties to ensure that the Convention remains effective;
2. ENDORSES the establishment of effective and equitable governance, conservation and management of all listed World Heritage Sites as the highest priority and benchmark of success of the World Heritage Convention for the ten years to its 50th anniversary in 2022, and commits to support the Convention to develop new mechanisms, strategies and programmes of work to achieve this goal;
3. REQUESTS the World Heritage Committee and all signatory Parties to uphold the highest standards by ensuring the rigorous observation of the Convention's *Operational Guidelines*, by meeting their collective responsibility to protect and manage effectively all World Heritage Sites, by ensuring that the Convention plays a full role in the implementation of the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020* and the Aichi Targets, and by developing as soon as possible new processes and standards that will ensure that the Convention appropriately recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities in line with accepted international norms and standards;
4. ALSO REMINDS State Parties to the Convention that there still remain gaps on the World Heritage List for new natural and mixed sites, and cultural landscapes which have the potential to be considered of Outstanding Universal Value, and that the protection of sites that would fill these gaps, their inclusion in national tentative lists, and their nomination to the World Heritage List remains a valid priority, that requires increased support and advice. This includes the specific opportunities to strengthen cooperation between States in ecosystems that require comprehensive and integrated approaches to conservation and management;
5. REQUESTS UNESCO, within available resources, to strengthen further the professional capabilities in natural heritage within the World Heritage Centre, and to cooperate with IUCN to increase IUCN's capacity to support the Convention;
6. CALLS UPON IUCN Members and Commissions to actively engage in supporting the World Heritage Convention, including by continuing to provide proactive support and advice to support IUCN's advice to the Convention on threats, conservation issues and solutions, and on the evaluation of potential candidate sites; and
7. REQUESTS the Director General, within available resources, to:
  - a. Maintain the effectiveness of, and develop further, IUCN's Advisory Body role on World Heritage to ensure that IUCN is able to advise, influence and guide the World Heritage Committee, to monitor and report on its implementation, and to contribute to the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020*;
  - b. To regularly report on progress and concerns regarding the implementation of the World Heritage Convention to IUCN, and to strengthen awareness across IUCN and within civil society of the performance and results of the World Heritage Convention, including through global and regional communication strategies;

c. In the 10 years leading up to the Convention's 50th Anniversary, to develop and support the application of international IUCN protected area standards and norms to all World Heritage Sites, to support identified measures needed to achieve their conservation, to communicate the status of World Heritage Sites and recognize World Heritage sites that meet global management standards, and to catalyze support to World Heritage Sites in Danger;

d. Establish new regional capacity and support via IUCN Regional Offices, Commissions and Members, and regional and national partners, with the purpose of strengthening IUCN's direct support to States, managers and stakeholders in World Heritage Sites to deliver both biodiversity conservation results, and ensure that World Heritage Sites contribute to the realization of benefits for communities, while respecting and supporting their rights; and

e. Maintain and develop strong and effective working relationships with UNESCO, and its World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS, ICCROM, and other partners to pursue a continuing, strengthened and effective role for the World Heritage Convention as a flagship for best practice in global conservation.