

Conference Report:

The 27-28 November 22nd Extraordinary Session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee; and the 30 November - 5 December 22nd Session of the World Heritage Committee, Kyoto, Japan.

By Mark J. Spalding

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee held its annual meeting from November 30 to December 5 in Kyoto (Japan) at the close of which it inscribed new cultural and natural sites on the World Heritage List. This year it also removed two sites from its List of World Heritage in Danger. In doing so, it followed the recommendations of its smaller advisory body, the World Heritage Bureau, as well as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) which provides the Committee with scientific advice.

One by one the World Heritage Bureau's recommended actions were described, focusing first on existing "In Danger" sites -- including Yellowstone and Everglades National Parks -- and, second, on the far greater number of World Heritage sites about which there are concerns. The Member State Delegations reacted, with decisions taken by consensus.

The two sites taken off the in danger list on December 1 were the Old City of Dubrovnik (Croatia) and the Wieliczka Salt Mines (Poland) due to the success of measures undertaken for their restoration and preservation. The List of World Heritage in Danger will now number 23 sites around the world. They include natural reserves and historic monuments such as Angkor (Cambodia), the Everglades and Yellowstone national parks (United States), and Timbuktu (Mali). The List of endangered sites is designed to attract the attention of world leaders and focus public opinion on the need to preserve cultural or natural sites of universal value that are particularly threatened by human intervention or natural causes. It is revised annually at the meeting of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee.

Two sites were up for inclusion on the list of Natural World Heritage sites in danger. One was Kakadu National Park in Australia, which had been recommended by the IUCN for inclusion in the list due to the development of a uranium mine within the site. Instead, after a heated debate, Australia was given six months to submit additional information regarding the potential impacts of the mine, which will be subjected to independent scientific review before the Bureau makes a decision. The second was the Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaíno in Baja California Sur, Mexico where a joint venture between Mitsubishi Corporation and the Mexican Government proposes to build a 116 square mile solar salt production facility. In the case of El Vizcaíno, the Bureau recommended, Mexico accepted and the Committee approved an IUCN Mission for 1999 to "prepare an up-to-date state of conservation report on the Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaíno, and submit it to the twenty-third session of the Committee in 1999." (WHC-98/CONF.203/8.Rev)

There were XXX new cultural sites and XX new natural sites in XX countries added to the World Heritage list.

In addition, the Bureau and Committee reviewed the status of all the properties on its list. As such, it was refreshing to see the World Heritage Committee was actively pushing, encouraging, and assisting governments to take measures to improve the protection of important natural and cultural sites.

Unfortunately, NGOs were prevented from registering for the meeting until the Committee granted them permission to attend. In contrast, there were hundreds of NGOs freely admitted to the Kyoto climate negotiations last year. It is clear that the World Heritage Committee is something of a relic of an earlier era when UN bodies were not terribly open to participation by NGOs.

The intergovernmental World Heritage Committee includes 21 States Parties elected by the General Assembly of the 155 States Parties to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris, November 16, 1972) for a term of six years. The Committee is responsible for the implementation of the Convention and determines the inclusion of sites on the World Heritage List on the recommendation of two advisory bodies the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), for cultural sites; and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), for natural sites. Moreover, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) is mandated to provide expert advice on monument restoration and organizes training for specialists.

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage presently protects 552 sites of "outstanding universal value," in 112 countries. With 155 Member States, the Convention is one of the international instruments which brings together the largest number of states. It is the only international instrument for the protection of both cultural and natural sites and it encourages co-operation among nations for the protection of their common heritage.

By adhering to the Convention, States are committed to ensure the preservation of those sites that they themselves have nominated and which have been included on the World Heritage List. The World Heritage Committee examines reports on the state of conservation of listed sites and requires the States Parties to take corrective measures when they are not managed properly. States concerned must also adopt legislative and regulatory measures to protect these sites.

The World Heritage Committee allocates subsidies provided by the World Heritage Fund. It can also provide emergency financing to make possible repairs to man-made or naturally incurred damages. The Committee also facilitates technical co-operation - expert intervention and material assistance - and personnel training. The World Heritage Fund receives US\$4 million annually in obligatory and voluntary contributions from States Parties and funding from the private sector.

For the latest information on World Heritage, consult the UNESCO World Heritage Centre WWW pages at:

<http://www.unesco.org/whc/welcome.htm>

<http://www.unesco.org/whc/welcome.htm>

-----

Mark J. Spalding was an invited advisor/observer for the World Heritage Bureau and Committee meetings. Mark J. Spalding is the Executive Editor of the *Journal of Environment and Development*. He is also a Guest Lecturer at the Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies (IR/PS) at UCSD where he teaches international environmental policy and law courses. He may be contacted at [mspalding@ucsd.edu](mailto:mspalding@ucsd.edu).