Inputs to the 2016 session of the HLPF – Convention concerning the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)

(a)   An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global level:

The conservation and wise management of cultural and natural heritage has tremendous potential to address many of the key sustainable development challenges facing the poorest and more vulnerable, including by providing shelter, access to food, water and other means of livelihood as well as stable and decent employment. In addition, a well preserved heritage is an essential component to the dignity and resilience of disadvantaged communities, notably in the face of disasters and other complex emergencies. The harnessing of this potential, however, requires the implementation of appropriate policies, at national and local levels, that would integrate a sustainable perspective and go beyond conservation per se.

(b)   The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges:

Unfortunately, the majority of countries have not yet developed policies and programmes to integrate a sustainable development perspective into their heritage management strategies, with a specific focus on the most vulnerable groups within society. This is particularly the case in many of the least developed countries, where sustainable development is still associated. At the same time, cultural and natural heritage are increasingly exposed to a variety of threats, including insensitive development, natural hazards and conflicts, which are progressively eroding this irreplaceable asset and compromising its potential to contribute to sustainable development.

(c)   Valuable lessons learned on ensuring that no one is left behind:

Experience gained by UNESCO over many years has shown how cultural and natural heritage have played a critical role in supporting the poorest and more vulnerable in developing countries. Examples include rise in income and employment at many World Heritage properties associated with sustainable tourism initiatives and political stability, such as at Angkor (Cambodia), but also the strengthening of the resilience of communities to disasters through the maintenance of ecosystems, such as at the Sundarbans mangrove forests in Bangladesh and India. Key lessons learnt include the inherent ability of heritage to ensure ownership and participation in development processes, as well as to facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding among diverse groups within society.

(d)   Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of this principle:

Development pressure, globalization, conflicts and natural disasters represent the main threats to the cultural and natural heritage, which affect its ability to contribute to sustainable development and to ensuring that "no one is left behind". Despite the recognition of culture within the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, awareness of the importance of heritage for sustainable development, including at the level of policy and decision-makers, is still relatively low.

(e)   Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required:

The key area where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is required is the integration of a concern for heritage within sustainable

development policies and plans at national and local levels taking into account the explicit reference in Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development to the need to enhance the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage.

(f)   Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind:

To accelerate progress for those at risk of being left behind, a comprehensive set of policy recommendations have been formulated in the framework of the World Heritage Convention, the most important international standard setting instrument in this field. A Policy for the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the Convention was indeed adopted by the General Assembly of the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention at its 20th Session in November 2015. This new policy revolves around the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely environmental sustainability, inclusive social development and inclusive economic development, complemented by the fostering of peace and security. It provides clear recommendations for the integration in heritage conservation and management of fundamental considerations such as the respect of human rights, gender equality, poverty alleviation, resilience, the rights of indigenous peoples and the reduction of the environmental footprint, among others. The policy is accessible from: http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1387.