



Contribution of the
Chair of the World Heritage Committee
to the
High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

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Introduction

A number of innovative actions, measures, policies to ensure “the reinforcement of the 2030 Agenda and eradication of poverty in times of multiple crises” have been effectively delivered by the World Heritage Committee and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (as the Secretariat for the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage) in response to the challenges posed by multiple crises including initiatives that promote heritage-based actions to meet sustainable development goals at the national and local levels and to address key challenges that countries or cultural and natural heritage faces in line with Goal 11.4. Furthermore, the actions have also been taken to enhance resilience and contribute transversally across a number of other Goals and Targets.

The World Heritage Committee has reaffirmed its commitment to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs through several actions, programs, and policy advice. The 2015 Sustainable Development Policy addresses challenges common to many sectors and policy domains and creating conditions for implementing transformative change, contributing to the implementation of the SDGs. The Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties to the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) has been a landmark document addressing the urgent issue of climate change and its impacts.

Safeguarding Cultural and Natural Heritage

The 1972 World Heritage Convention has been ratified by 195 States Parties (as per March 2024) making it one of the legal treaties with the most States Parties. This in itself is a huge accomplishment and an indicator of the almost universal commitment to safeguard and protect cultural and natural heritage. 1,199 World Heritage sites are included on the UNESCO World Heritage List providing for a global network in 168 States Parties, 48 of them being transboundary sites. The World Heritage Convention supports international cooperation and intergovernmental decision-making and the governance of cultural and natural heritage through its governing bodies, the World Heritage Committee and the General Assembly of States Parties who adopt strategic resolutions and decisions for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

Properties inscribed on the World Heritage List that face imminent and ongoing threats are placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory bodies provide focused technical assistance to such properties

UNESCO Member States adopted an Operational Strategy for Priority Africa 2022-2029. This includes a priority Flagship Programme is on Fostering Cultural Heritage and Capacity Development with a view to support capacity building on World Heritage for African Member States with the long-term goal of empowering local communities, especially women, to protect Africa’s rich cultural heritage. During the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee in 2023, five new properties from African countries were inscribed on the World Heritage, bringing the number of African World Heritage properties to 100.

During the 18th Heads of State and Government Summit in September 2023, the G20 adopted a Leaders' Declaration, emphasizing a strong commitment to culture as a pivotal element in their policies. UNESCO served as a Knowledge Partner for the Culture Working Group, and under the theme "Culture as a Transformative Driver of SDGs," the G20 recognized the significance of cultural property return and restitution through North-South cultural diplomacy. The leaders acknowledged the creative economy as a catalyst for inclusive growth and urged the integration of culture into the global development agenda post-2030. The "Kashi Culture Pathway" (https://www.g20.org/content/dam/gtwenty/gtwenty_new/document/2--new/G20_Culture_Ministers_Meeting_Outcome_Document_and_Chairs_summary.pdf) adopted by G20 Culture Ministers, outlined commitments focusing on cultural property ethics, local community contributions, investment in cultural industries, and leveraging digital transformation for cultural protection. The priorities were discussed in Global Thematic Webinars, culminating in the comprehensive report "G20 Culture: Shaping the Global Narrative for Inclusive Growth" (<https://indiaculture.gov.in/shaping-global-narrative-inclusive-growth>) offering actionable recommendations to harness culture's potential as a global public good.

UNESCO organized the Naples Conference on Cultural Heritage in the 21st Century in Naples, Italy, in November 2023, with the aim to strengthen synergies between the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Conference gathered a diverse group of global stakeholders including renowned thinkers and community leaders. Their insights inspire an innovative approach to heritage that considers the close relationships between nature and culture, tangible and intangible, as well as heritage and creativity. A Call for Action was adopted to guide and support further implementation of a holistic approach to heritage, harnessing heritage as a key driver of sustainable development (https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2023/11/UNESCO_CALL_FOR_ACTION_NAPLES.pdf).

UNESCO convened the World Conference on Culture and Arts Education from 13 to 15 February 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre (ADNEC), which brought together nearly 1,000 culture and education stakeholders – including 90 ministers, 125 representatives of UNESCO Member States, policy-makers, experts and NGOs, as well as UN agencies, academia and the private sector. Building on the Road Map for Arts Education and the Seoul Agenda: Goals for Arts Education, UNESCO Member States unanimously adopted a new global Framework for Culture and Arts Education. Among the commitments made: to give greater priority to culture and arts education in teacher training, to put more emphasis on local and indigenous cultures and heritage in the classroom, and to better recognize artistic and cultural skills within the professional world. The framework will be a critical tool for Member States to shape integrated strategies and policies that anchor the cultural dimension in educational systems, and support them to invest in nurturing skills and competencies, notably through culture and arts, that respond to contemporary needs and opportunities.

World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy (2015)

Sustainable development has been mainstreamed into the processes of the World Heritage Convention by integrating related concepts actions and monitoring as appropriate. In the framework of the Third Cycle of Periodic Reporting exercise (2018-2024), UNESCO has ensured the integration of indicators to measure the achievements of the sustainable development implementation of States Parties, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy (WH-SDP).

The MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration, unanimously adopted at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development - MONDIACULT 2022, held in Mexico in 2022, recognized culture as a global public good and called for the creation of a standalone goal on culture in the post-2030 development agenda. . In relation to SDG 13, 16 & 17, the Declaration emphasizes the importance of the protection of cultural heritage to confront the challenges of climate change and armed conflicts, supporting the efforts of the Centre outlined in the WH-SDP, as well as of enhancing synergies with the safeguarding of intangible heritage and other Culture Conventions.

Tools have been developed to support the operationalization of the WH-SDP and emphasised the need for a platform of good practices in integrating heritage conservation with sustainable development, the World Heritage Centre's online platform "World Heritage Canopy – Heritage Solutions for Sustainable Futures", for heritage conservation-based solutions for sustainable development, has been developed and expanded providing examples of innovative local implementation of heritage-based solutions.

The World Heritage Centre contributed to the UN General Assembly Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, regarding World Heritage and cultural rights in October 2022. Finally, the World Heritage Centre also provided substantive inputs to UN-Habitat for the Synthesis Report on Goal 11 to the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG)

With regard to some of specific points raised in your letter:

a) Impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of SDGs from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body.

Since its inception, UNESCO has always been at the forefront of international efforts in protecting culture in emergencies. Over decades, the Organization has built significant expertise and operational experience in this field and has established a **robust institutional architecture** through:

- Building an international legal framework to protect culture in emergencies
- Advocating for the integration of culture into humanitarian, security and climate actions
- Developing capacity and providing technical assistance
- Coordinating rapid response and emergency interventions for culture
- Leading large scale and long-term projects for reconstruction and recovery in post-crisis contexts.

UNESCO continues to monitor damages and needs in its areas of competence in regions that have been affected by disasters and conflicts. Since 2014, UNESCO has worked and established a trusted partnership together with UNOSAT, the United Nations Satellite Centre, to assess damages of inaccessible cultural sites.

UNESCO intervenes immediately after the breakout of the crisis to ensure urgent safeguarding of culture. Since 2015, through its **Heritage Emergency Fund**, UNESCO has conducted **over 100 urgent operations, including consolidation and stabilization of built heritage, evacuation and securing of collections, and assistance to artists and living heritage bearers.**

UNESCO also engages in recovery through long-term flagship projects, to foster resilience, empower communities, and enable long-term socio-economic transformations. The growing number of risks brought by climate-related disasters and other natural hazards reaffirm the importance of **preparedness**, which remains the most effective way to prevent and mitigate the threats **vulnerability and exposure of culture to disasters**. Evidence demonstrates that rapid economic growth, combined with fast population expansion in urban areas and more frequent extreme weather events, is increasing disaster vulnerability and exposure of culture and heritage to disasters in cities. On the other hand, **culture can also be a contributing factor in disaster risk reduction**, including through the mainstreaming of traditional knowledge and practices in risk management policies.

Natural disasters have impacted World Heritage properties in recent years – flooding in Yemen, Sudan and Pakistan, hurricanes in Cuba, earthquakes in Chile, Morocco, Turkey and Syria, to name a few. Each time, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies have reacted quickly to provide support as needed. The UNESCO World Heritage Centre also provides technical and financial support for properties to minimize the risks of disasters as well as their impact, paying particular attention to sites inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger.

Environmental hazards are particularly acute for SIDS. In response to the UN Secretary-General's call to address the challenges of the Triple Planetary Crisis of climate Change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste, Samoa has launched a response plan (Vai o le Ola initiative) to ultimately achieve climate stability, live in harmony with nature, and move towards a pollution free planet including several actions for sites to be prepared for eventual nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The proposed actions within this response plan will be implemented also by UNESCO, UNESCAP, and UNEP, with the Government of Samoa with available funds from the Joint SDG Fund.

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre has, furthermore, supported numerous initiatives that aim at strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in World Heritage Sites.

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the three Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee – ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN – are developing their first joint toolkit on climate action for World Heritage sites. The toolkit will support States

Parties and site managers to integrate climate change in the management strategies of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

b) Three key areas where sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the SDGs are being effectively delivered, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2024, considering the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.

– **Enhancing Environmental Resilience**

Following a four-year consultation and negotiation process, which was significantly delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted during the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) organised in December 2022 in Montreal, Canada. Through its 4 goals and 23 targets, the UN-backed GBF sets out the priority actions to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, and to ensure that, by 2050, the shared vision of living in harmony with nature is fulfilled. By decision 15/22 on Nature and Culture (multiple languages, available at <https://www.cbd.int/decisions/cop/?m=cop-15>) COP-15 also renewed the mandate of the Joint Programme of Work on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity.

Through enhanced Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, the corporate sector can significantly advance sustainable development and protection of World Heritage properties, both by minimising their environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks and by maximizing positive impacts on people, heritage and the planet. It is against this background that UNESCO and IUCN have closely worked with the corporate sector for more than two decades. Companies have demonstrated their support to World Heritage notably by refraining from undertaking or funding activities within properties, their buffer zones or wider setting, which could damage sites and their OUV. These policies are generally referred to as the World Heritage ‘no-go’ commitment. In December 2022, the “UNESCO Guidance for the World Heritage ‘No-Go’ Commitment was launched: Global standards for corporate sustainability” to assist companies to develop or update their policies and strategies to safeguard World Heritage. The guidance complements the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context and is available on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website, which also includes a database of corporate sector policies on World Heritage (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/nogo-commitment>). UNESCO has embarked on a range of ambitious conservation activities in Africa benefitting to date 20 natural, 7 cultural and 3 mixed World Heritage sites in Africa, 14 of which are included on the List of World Heritage in Danger. UNESCO also supports participatory boundary mapping aimed at a conflict resolution over contested resource use and land occupation.

The protection of the world’s forests is crucial for achieving the SDGs and is considered as one of the most cost-effective forms of climate action by the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The continued loss of forest cover globally is a major concern in this regard. In 2021, UNESCO and IUCN published a study entitled “World Heritage forests: carbon sinks under pressure”, demonstrating that between 2001 and 2020 World Heritage sites lost 3.5 million hectares of forest (more than the area of Belgium), thereby impeding their capacity to store carbon (see: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379527.locale=en>)

In line with the World Heritage Convention’s recognition of the linkages between nature and culture, the World Heritage Centre also serves as the Secretariat of *the UNESCO-Greece Melina Mercouri International Prize for the Safeguarding and Management of Cultural Landscapes* to reward outstanding examples of action to safeguard and enhance the world’s major cultural landscapes.

– **Furthering Climate Action with World Heritage**

Climate change is one of the greatest threats facing cultural and natural World Heritage properties globally and we see its growing impact including extreme weather-related events and related disasters. Climate change impacts the Outstanding Universal Values (OUV), including integrity and authenticity, of many properties, as well as the economic and social development and quality of life of communities connected with World Heritage properties (SDG 1, 2, 8). More than a third of all properties and 70% of marine properties are experiencing negative impacts on conservation due to climate-related factors. World Heritage properties, given their global significance, can serve as exemplary models for integrated approaches that address both cultural and natural heritage in climate action, showcasing transformative change to enhance resilience and sustainable development. A dual focus is essential, acknowledging these properties as assets requiring protection from climate impacts and as resources that can empower communities towards transformative change.

The Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage was adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties of the World Heritage Convention at its 24th session (2023). Its purpose is to provide high-level guidance on enhancing the protection and conservation of heritage of Outstanding Universal Value through comprehensive adoption of climate action measures, including climate adaptation, mitigation, resilience building, innovation and research, and in so doing, to create coherence with, and take advantage of synergies between, the objectives and processes of the World Heritage Convention and those of the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement adopted under the UNFCCC and other multilateral agreements, frameworks, processes and instruments, including but not limited to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2015 Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2016 New Urban Agenda, the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (“Samoa Pathway”), the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

It is crucial to recognize that safeguarding World Heritage properties from climate change cannot happen in isolation due to the global nature of the problem. While many properties have illustrated how engaging with local communities strengthens resilience and fosters sustainable futures, management systems must

expand these approaches. The goal is to ensure all properties are interconnected with their broader settings, aligning efforts with national and international initiatives to combat climate change while safeguarding Outstanding Universal Value. Integrated, inclusive, informed, and adaptive governance is key to uniting approaches and communities, especially those in proximity to these properties, facilitating the transformative change needed to address climate change effectively.

In the framework of COP 27 in December 2022, UNESCO launched the results of a new study on World Heritage glaciers carried out by the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, which encompass 10% of the world's glaciers. (<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-finds-some-iconic-world-heritageglaciers-will-disappear-2050>) The study finds that some 60% of these glaciers could disappear by 2100 under current emissions scenarios. (see the full study: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383551>).

The 'Guidance for Wind Energy Projects in a World Heritage Context' (see: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/renewable-energy/>) as an online tool for States Parties in the Europe and North America region was also launched in March 2023. The Guidance aims to assist all relevant stakeholders in the planning of wind energy projects while providing insights to explore options for proactive conservation for World Heritage site managers and heritage protection authorities..

– **Sustainable Cities and Settlements**

Of the 1,199 World Heritage properties today, more than 70% of cultural properties are located in urban areas, making them vulnerable to the pressures of uncontrolled urbanization and poorly conceived development projects. In line with Decision 43 COM 7.3 and Decision 214 EX/13.V, tools have been developed to support the conservation of urban heritage in World Heritage cities, such as the "Urban Heritage Atlas", developed with pilot case studies in close cooperation with city stakeholders, local and national experts, as well as consultations with a wide group of UNESCO Chairs, Category 2 Centres, and the Advisory Bodies. Following these decisions, the framework, methodology and activities related to the 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011 Recommendation) have been aligned with the World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy (2015), the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the New Urban Agenda as well as climate action.

In January 2023, UNESCO took part in the Davos Conference of European Ministers of Culture followed by a launch event with of the partners of the Davos Alliance for high quality building culture that was jointly organized by UNESCO, the Swiss Federal Ministry of Culture, and the World Economic Forum and has since supported the Davos Alliance. The collaboration builds on the synergies of the 1972 Convention and the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL Recommendation) with the Davos Alliance.

Engaging and building capacities of World Heritage city site managers from Africa and the SIDS has been a priority and the World Heritage Cities Programme has been contributing to the several projects developed by the World Heritage Centre in Africa.

The *UNESCO Urban Heritage Atlas* was launched in February 2024 as a digital tool for cultural mapping and inventorying attributes of urban heritage on a GIS data base and as an atlas of historic cities and settlements. The platform builds capacities at the local level of the site managers and other local authorities and supports them in the implementation of the HUL Recommendation.

c) Three examples of specific actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving the SDGs.

– **Alleviate poverty and ensure food security for local communities**

World Heritage properties offer great potential to **alleviate poverty and enhance sustainable livelihoods of local communities**, as acknowledged in the World Heritage Sustainable Development Policy (2015), as well as in the UN GA Resolution (A/RES/68/223) on Culture and Sustainable Development (2013). Engaging local communities in the conservation and management of World Heritage properties, and heritage sites in general, is one of the five Strategic Objectives of the World Heritage Committee, along with Conservation, Credibility, Capacity and Credibility (5 Cs).

Different initiatives in various regions have been promoted **to end hunger and promote food security and sustainable agriculture (SDG 2)**.

– **Sustainable Tourism and livelihoods for local communities**

Numerous activities have been promoted by the World Heritage Centre and UNESCO Field Offices, in line with **UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme** and WH-SDP recommendation to support locally driven sustainable tourism initiatives in and around World Heritage properties, as a way to complement economic diversification and strengthen social and economic resilience of local communities.

– **Promoting Peace and Security and Facilitating International Cooperation.**

Conflict (including armed conflict and civil unrest) continues to represent a major threat to World Heritage properties. It remains one of the major reasons why properties have been inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Half of the 55 properties currently inscribed on List of World Heritage in Danger were included due, among other causes, to the potential or ascertained impacts of conflicts, and conflict situations have arisen subsequently for some of the other properties on that List.

UNESCO's initiatives in post-conflict recovery, , address Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 by fostering stability and inclusivity , contribute to SDG 11 including the upgrading of public infrastructure, contribute to the return of the displaced, and to the revival of cultural heritage, while supporting cultural industries contributes to reconciliation and social cohesion in these cities, hence contributing to

SDG 1 to end poverty in all its forms and SDG 10 to reduce inequality within and among countries.

A key element for promoting peaceful sustainable development is to raise awareness raising around the importance of transboundary cooperation in the framework of the World Heritage Convention, especially for natural heritage that often transcends geographical and political boundaries. This can be a powerful vector of communication and peace-building between countries and communities.

The World Heritage Convention has continuously proved to be a powerful tool for promoting international cooperation for the establishment of common priorities and strategies to face heritage conservation and preservation challenges. World Heritage-related cooperation associating north-south and/or south-south, public-private partnerships contribute to transfer of knowledge, co-learning and building of partnerships for sustainable development.

– **Measurement and Monitoring of Culture through Data collection.
(Related to all SDGs)**

For SDG 11.4.1, according to UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) data (custodian for Indicators 11.4.1), while the coverage rate increased by 100% from the first iteration in 2020 to the third in 2022, the number of countries reporting data for 11.4.1 Indicator is not sufficient to report global or regional figures. This indicator looks at investment at all levels of government. An increasing number of countries are able to report data by level of government. According to UIS, public expenditure on heritage for developing countries is significantly less compared to developed countries. The results for the 57 countries for which data are available from 2018 to 2021, show that the range of values for public expenditure on heritage for developing countries is significantly less compared to developed countries. While national expenditure plays a major role in heritage preservation for most countries, local governments take the lead in the safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage in some countries. Further details of the data collected are available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-institute-statistics-releases-key-findingsnew-cultural-and-natural-heritage-report> and the data can be found at <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

UNESCO successfully completed the pilot implementation of the *UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators: Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda*, The framework of 22 indicators, developed following extensive consultation in consultation with all UNESCO Member States and implemented in 12 countries and 14 cities globally. The initiative has highlighted the institutional, regulatory and policy issues that need to be structured to harness the full potential of culture for sustainable development. The publication series *Culture Counts: Culture|2030 Indicators National/Urban Culture Profiles* will showcase the results of implementation as well as culture's transversal and direct contribution in achieving progress towards the targets of the 2030 Agenda.

d) Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF

- We commit to ensuring cultural rights for all, supporting inclusive access to and participation in cultural life and strengthening the economic and social status of artists and culture professionals, including in the digital environment.
- We advocate for the protection of cultural heritage and diversity, as the foundation of peoples' identities, particularly in times of crisis, including by countering the illicit trafficking of cultural property.
- We reaffirm our commitment to supporting the creative economy, by strengthening the cultural and creative industries and promoting sustainable cultural tourism.
- We call on the UN Secretary-General to firmly integrate culture as a specific goal in its own right in the Pact for the Future and the development agenda beyond 2030.