



World Heritage

Testimonies to our Humanity

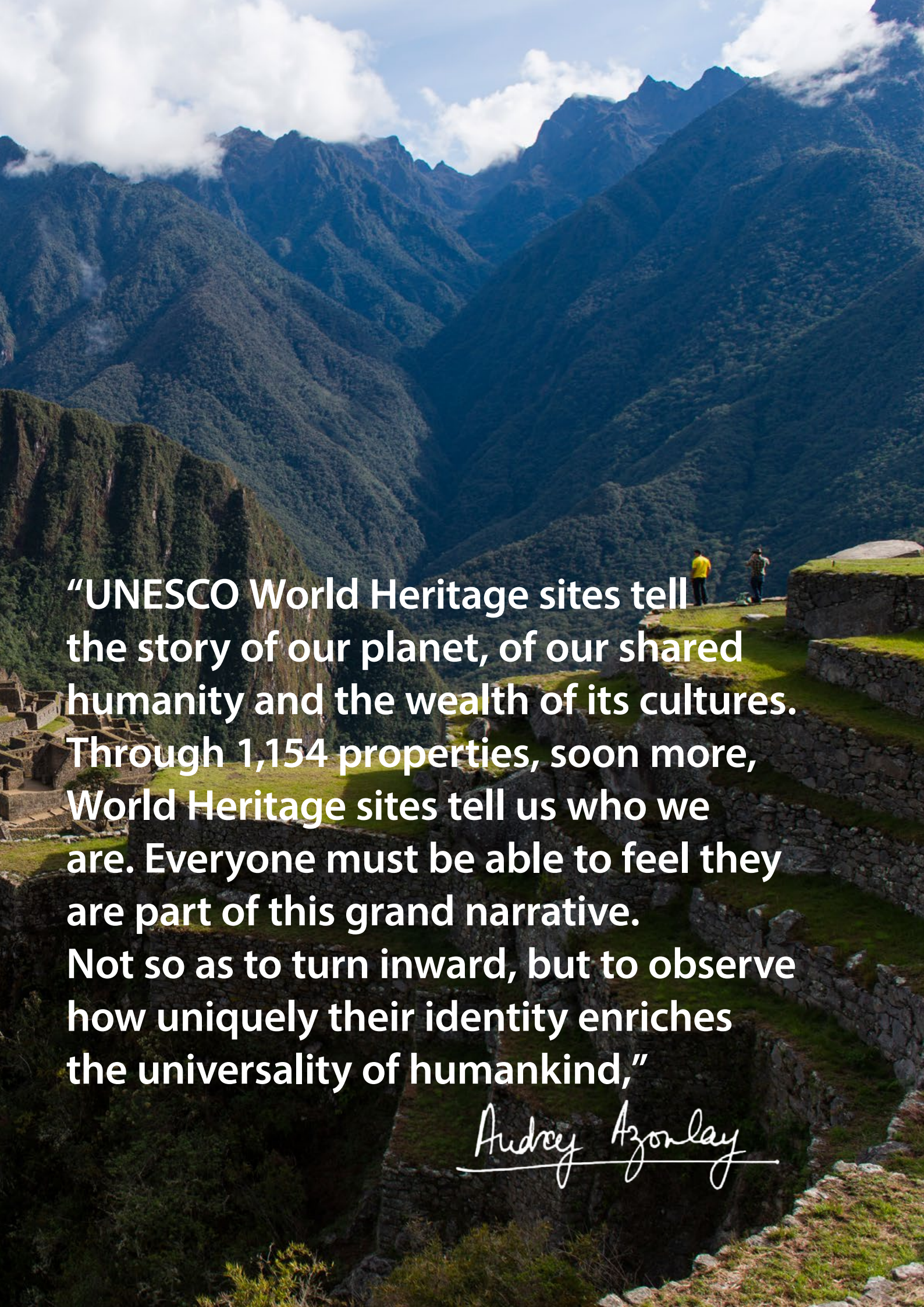




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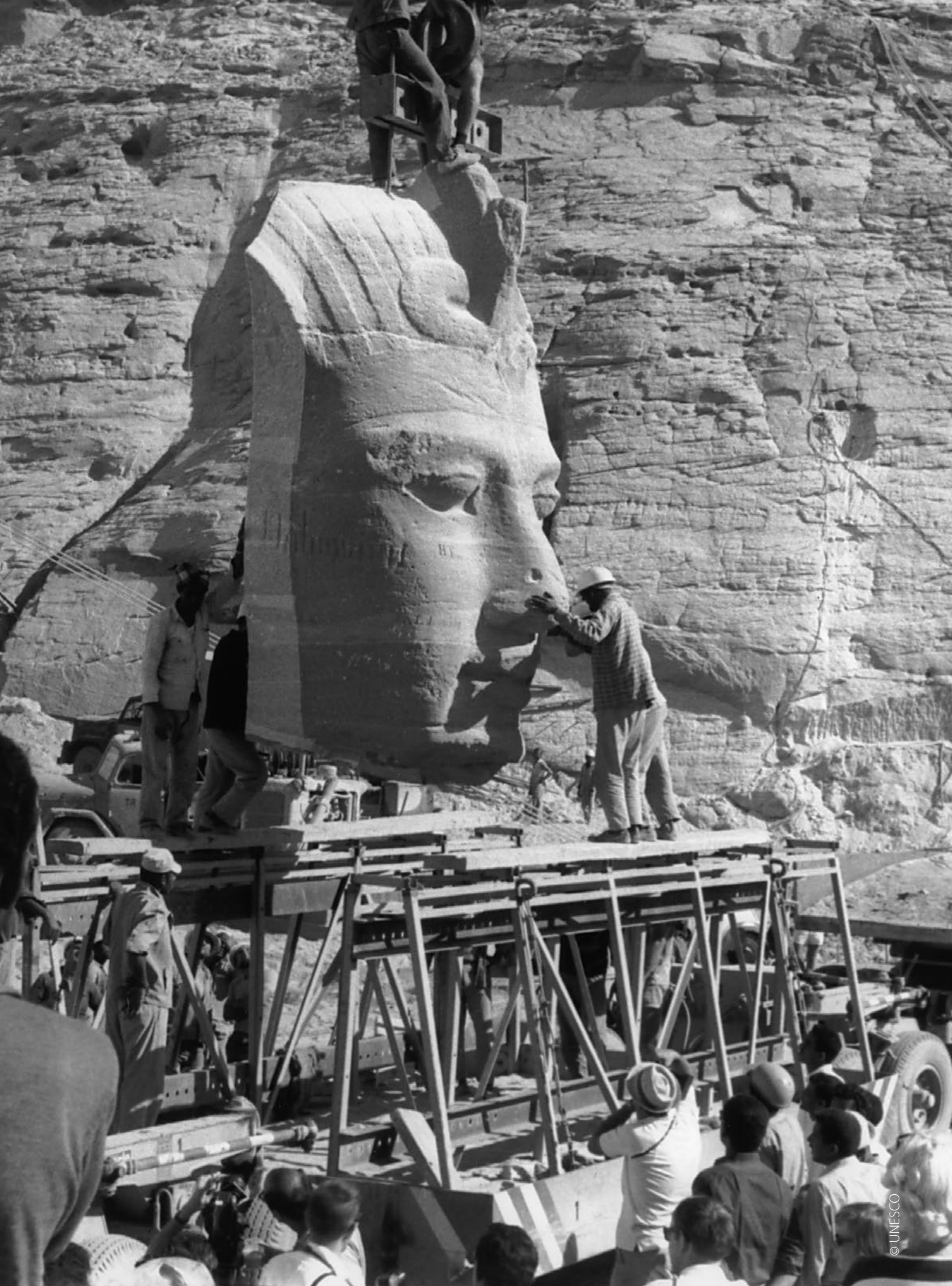
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“UNESCO World Heritage sites tell the story of our planet, of our shared humanity and the wealth of its cultures. Through 1,154 properties, soon more, World Heritage sites tell us who we are. Everyone must be able to feel they are part of this grand narrative. Not so as to turn inward, but to observe how uniquely their identity enriches the universality of humankind,”

Audrey Azoulay



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A brief history of the Convention

The Convention for the Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage is an international agreement based on the principle that some places on Earth embody outstanding universal value that should be part of the shared heritage of humankind.

This international awareness originated with the decision to build the Aswan Dam in Egypt, which was to flood the valley, site of the Abu Simbel temples, treasures of ancient Egyptian civilization. In 1959, following an appeal from the governments of Egypt and Sudan, UNESCO decided to launch an international campaign. Archaeological research was accelerated in the areas that were to be flooded. The Abu Simbel and Philae temples were then dismantled, moved and reassembled. It was generally thought at that time that a choice had to be made between culture and development, between growing abundant crops and preserving the traces of a glorious past. UNESCO showed that you could have both.

The campaign demonstrated the importance of sharing responsibility among some 50 countries to preserve outstanding cultural sites. This success was followed by other safeguarding campaigns, notably to save Venice and its Lagoon (Italy) and the Archaeological Ruins at Moenjodaro (Pakistan), or to restore the Borobudur Temple Compounds (Indonesia).

These campaigns led UNESCO to initiate the preparation of a draft Convention on the Protection of Cultural Heritage with the assistance of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). UNESCO recognizes cultural and natural sites of outstanding universal value, and protects them for the benefit of all. As a basis for mutual understanding and dialogue, the responsibility for protecting our shared heritage requires cooperation among all States Parties as well as civil society, local communities and the private sector.

The idea of reconciling the conservation of cultural sites with that of natural sites originated in the United States of America. A White House conference in Washington, D.C., in 1965 called for the creation of a "World Heritage Foundation" that would stimulate international cooperation to protect "the most extraordinary places, landscapes, and historic sites for the present and future of all mankind." In 1968, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) made similar proposals to its members. These proposals were presented at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972.

Eventually, all parties concerned agreed on a single text. The Convention concerning the Protection of the World

Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972.

In recognizing both cultural and natural aspects of heritage, the Convention reminds us of the interaction between human beings and nature and the fundamental need to preserve the balance between the two.

World Heritage Governance (Secretariat, Committee, GA)

Inscription on the World Heritage List is only a first step in protecting sites for future generations. Management and protection efforts are an ongoing process involving local populations as well as site managers and national authorities.

The governance of the World Heritage Convention entrusted to the General Assembly of States Parties and to the World Heritage Committee which relies on Advisory Bodies and the Secretariat (the UNESCO World Heritage Centre). This bipartite form of governance ensures a separation of powers in the implementation of the Convention.

Established in 1992, the World Heritage Centre coordinates World Heritage activities within UNESCO. As the day-to-day manager of the Convention, it organizes the annual sessions of the World Heritage Committee and its Bureau, advises States Parties on the preparation of nominations, organizes international assistance from the World Heritage Fund upon request, coordinates the process of reporting on the state of conservation of sites and urgent actions required when a site is threatened. The Centre also organizes seminars and training, develops educational materials to raise awareness of heritage protection among young people, and informs the public about World Heritage issues.

The World Heritage Committee meets once a year. It is composed of representatives of 21 States Parties to the Convention elected by their General Assembly.

The Committee is responsible for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, determines the use of the World Heritage Fund and allocates financial assistance following requests from States Parties. It decides whether a site is accepted for inscription on the World Heritage List and examines reports on the state of conservation of inscribed sites requiring States Parties to take action when sites are not protected adequately. The Committee also decides on the inscription and deletion of sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The 'at risk' list

When the very characteristics that motivated the inscription of a site on the World Heritage List are threatened, inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger can be an effective conservation tool.

It draws the attention of the international community to sites endangered by natural conditions or human activity such as armed conflict and war, earthquakes and other natural disasters, pollution, poaching or uncontrolled urbanization, and mobilizes international resources to take urgent action. In addition, the inscription of a site on the List of World Heritage in Danger allows the Committee to grant immediate financial assistance to the threatened property under the World Heritage Fund.

How to join the famous List (criteria and process)

Only countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention and are thereby committed to protecting their natural and cultural heritage can submit nominations for inscription of properties located on their territory on the World Heritage List. To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one of ten selection criteria.

Countries (States Parties) submit their nominations to the World Heritage Committee. If the Committee decides, following the recommendations of the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS and IUCN), that the nomination meets at least one of the necessary criteria, the property nominated by the State Party is included in the World Heritage List. The Committee inscribes an average of 25 to 30 sites each year. As of 2022, the list numbers 1,154 sites in 167 countries around the world.

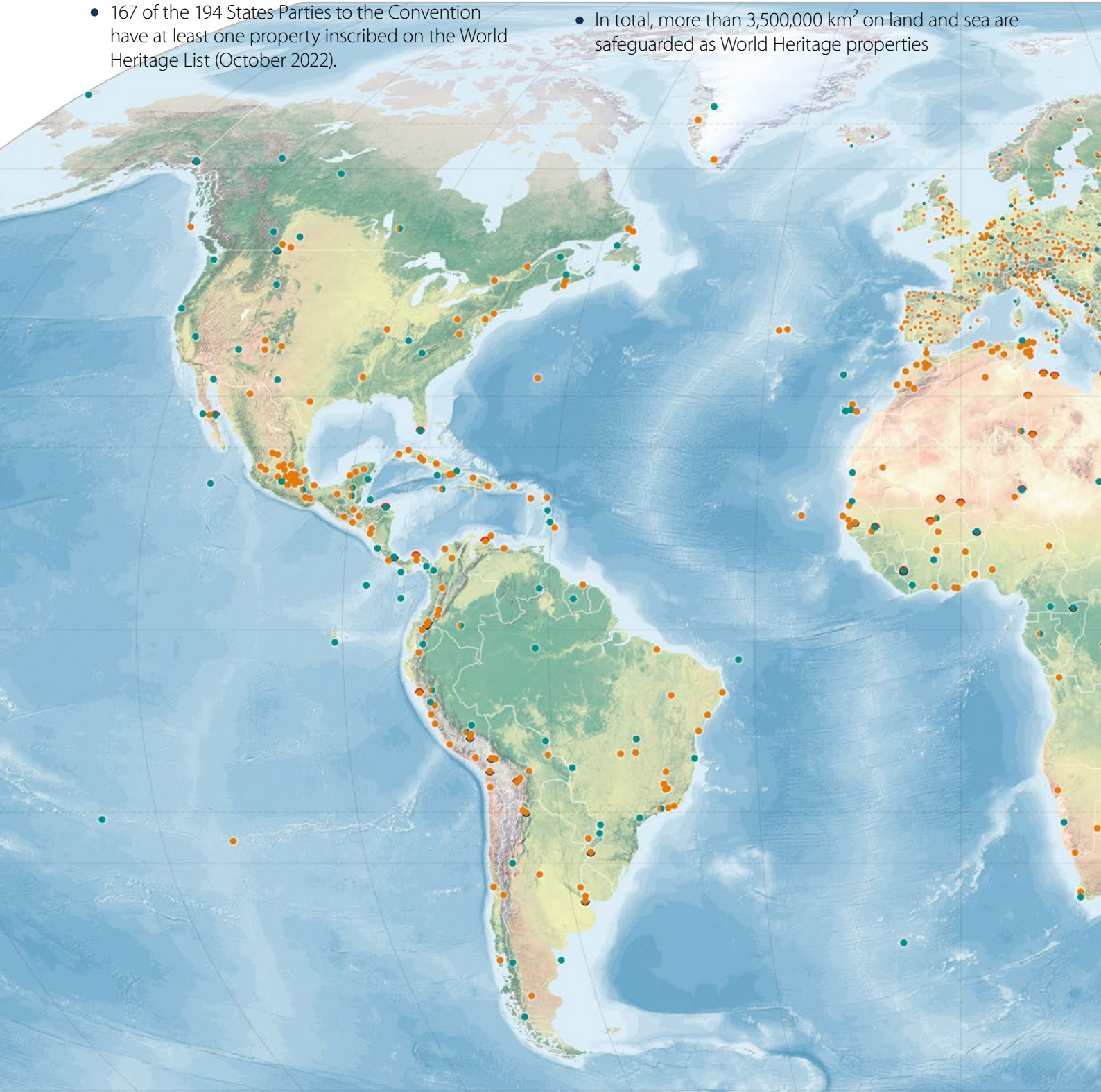




World Heritage Today: Figures and Map

The numbers

- In 2022, the Convention had 194 signatory States Parties, i.e. almost universal ratification. At the time of writing, the number of UNESCO Member States was 193.
- 167 of the 194 States Parties to the Convention have at least one property inscribed on the World Heritage List (October 2022).
- 1,154 properties are inscribed, of which 897 are cultural properties, 218 natural properties and 39 mixed properties. Among the 1,154 properties, 43 are transboundary or transnational serial properties, and 52 sites inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger subject to increased monitoring.
- In total, more than 3,500,000 km² on land and sea are safeguarded as World Heritage properties



Key

- ① Cultural property
- ② Natural property
- ③ Mixed property (cultural and natural)
- ④ Transnational property
- ⑤ Property currently inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger

See country index on the back side of map for site listings.

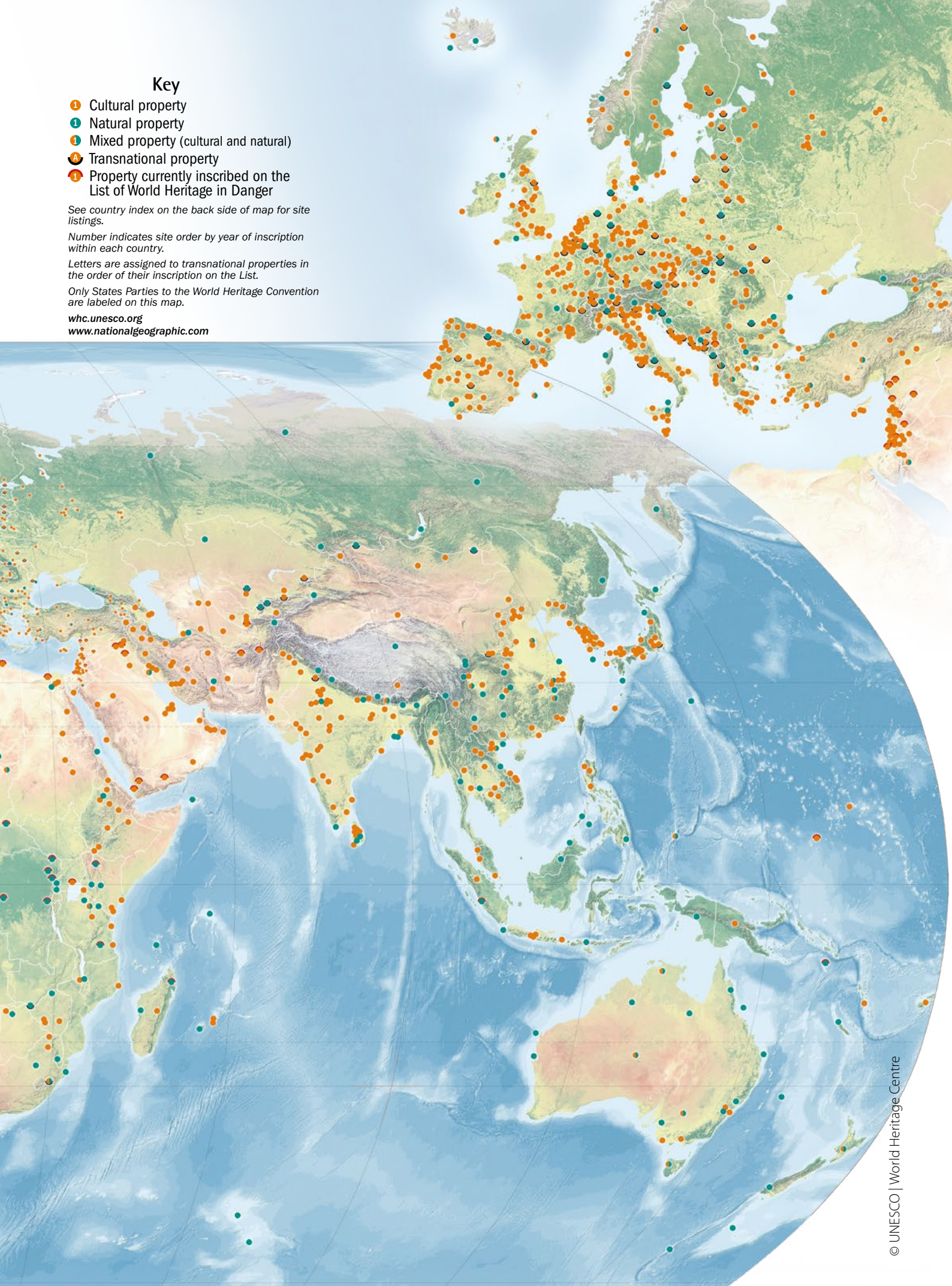
Number indicates site order by year of inscription within each country.

Letters are assigned to transnational properties in the order of their inscription on the List.

Only States Parties to the World Heritage Convention are labeled on this map.

whc.unesco.org

www.nationalgeographic.com





Great Apes, sentinels of biodiversity

UNESCO protects a large part of the Virunga Massif in the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda under the World Heritage Convention and the Biosphere Reserve programme. The area is home to some of the last remaining mountain gorillas, a population that was threatened by poaching, disease and deforestation.

Thanks to conservation measures coordinated by UNESCO and involving local communities, the situation is improving. The number of mountain gorillas has increased from 480 in 2010 to 604 in 2022. It is the only great ape population currently experiencing growth.



World Heritage Advantages

The highest standards of protection

The World Heritage Convention is more than a text, it is above all an instrument for concrete action to preserve endangered sites and species.

Through inscription on the World Heritage List, the World Heritage Convention, has allowed the successful identification and safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage sites of great value to humanity. By mobilizing its signatory States, it has helped build capacity for conservation and management at the local and national levels, to promote laws, policies and regulations, and to develop guidelines for the conservation and management of different types of heritage. (Bilan des 50 ans de la Convention du Patrimoine, This document was prepared by a consultant on the basis of consultations with World Heritage Centre staff as well as the documents referenced at the end of the document.)

By recognizing the outstanding universal value of sites, States Parties commit themselves to preserving them and to working on solutions to protect them. If a site is inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, the World Heritage Committee can take immediate action to redress the situation, which has led to many successful restorations. The Convention is also a powerful tool to attract international attention and incite action through international safeguarding campaigns.

A solution exchange network

As part of the effective and active implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the creation of an international network of World Heritage site managers has strengthened communication between World Heritage actors at the international level, developing synergies between UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, the academic community and professionals in the heritage field.

With more than 1,000 sites inscribed, the World Heritage List represents not only an international network of cultural, natural and mixed sites, but also a network of professionals working in the heritage field. Each site manager brings an essential contribution to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

By providing a knowledge and information sharing platform for site managers and other key World Heritage stakeholders, the World Heritage Centre is developing a community that can disseminate the World Heritage Convention in a comprehensive, interactive and accessible way, helping site managers benefit from a network of expertise, support and exchange with like-minded professionals.

A powerful lever for economic and social development (Grand Bassam, Côte d'Ivoire)

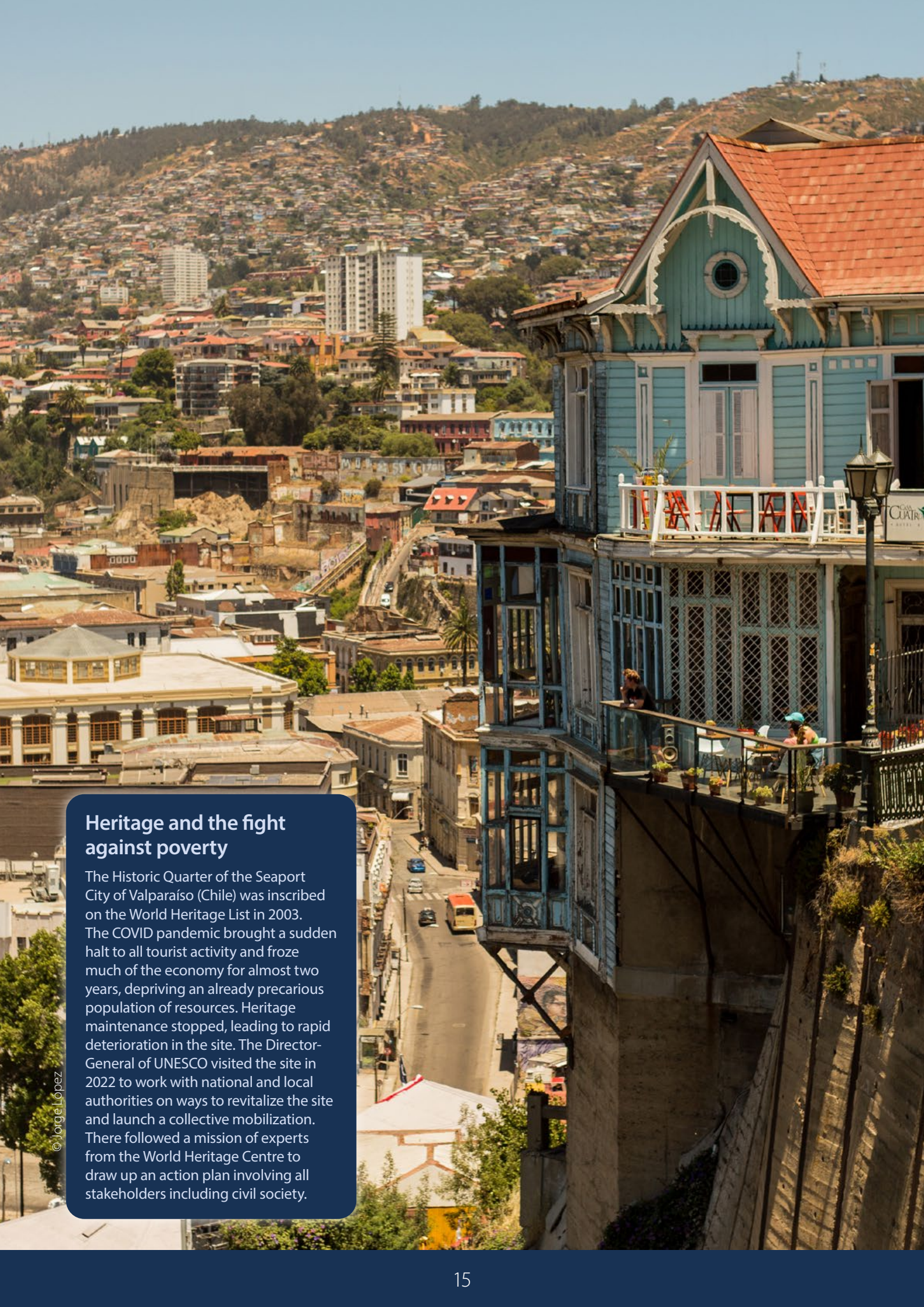
The inscription of a site on the World Heritage List offers new opportunities to promote sustainable development in many regions. At the site of Grand Bassam in Côte d'Ivoire, inscribed on the World Heritage List since 2012, UNESCO is working with the authorities to support the economic development of the historic town, promote measures to protect the site and implement awareness-raising and education activities, in conjunction with the local population. From the creation of a local World Heritage management office to the development of cultural tourism and public/private partnerships, a wide range of initiatives aims to balance modernization and city planning projects that improve the quality of life of residents, including urban and tourist development, with the protection and conservation of heritage. The Tutorat project has set up a programme offering economic operators long-term leases on private buildings in exchange for their restoration or rehabilitation.

Technology at the service of heritage

The need to develop a platform for the observation and monitoring of World Heritage sites drawing on innovative technologies such as 3D and interactive maps has long been recognized. Some World Heritage properties are already digitized but their data remains fragmentary. Few sites make such information available online. Moreover, data that is often useful for communication and cultural awareness purposes, is not always adapted to the needs of archaeologists or curators.

With the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Dive into Heritage project aims to develop an innovative digital platform for the exploration, promotion, monitoring and safeguarding of World Heritage and address persistent shortcomings. World Heritage sites and their associated living heritage will be made accessible to the public and researchers. The Arab region has been selected as a pilot region for this project, which will also contribute to the training of professionals in the field of digital technologies, and establish common standards to ensure data quality.

Space technologies also provide enhanced monitoring capabilities to rapidly assess risks related to climate



Heritage and the fight against poverty

The Historic Quarter of the Seaport City of Valparaíso (Chile) was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003. The COVID pandemic brought a sudden halt to all tourist activity and froze much of the economy for almost two years, depriving an already precarious population of resources. Heritage maintenance stopped, leading to rapid deterioration in the site. The Director-General of UNESCO visited the site in 2022 to work with national and local authorities on ways to revitalize the site and launch a collective mobilization. There followed a mission of experts from the World Heritage Centre to draw up an action plan involving all stakeholders including civil society.

Saving coral reefs

UNESCO has launched the Resilient Reefs initiative for World Heritage sites harbouring such reefs. The initiative aims to adapt these sites to climate change through local mitigation measures and scientific experiments. At the site of Ningaloo Coast (Australia), the working is carried out to improve coral reproduction by installing small star-shaped structures made of steel bars on the reef which allow fertilized eggs to settle and grow. The initial results are very conclusive and raise hope that the system can be extended to other reefs around the world.



change, natural disasters and armed conflicts, among others, in order to design an appropriate response to mitigate them. To facilitate the deployment of space technologies in World Heritage monitoring, the International Centre on Space Technologies for Cultural and Natural Heritage (HIST), a category II centre under the auspices of UNESCO, was officially established by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) in July 2011.

For 20 years, UNOSAT has been developing its expertise in the use of geospatial information technologies. Established as an operational programme of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), UNOSAT has already helped map the extent of damage to monuments in Kathmandu following the 2015 earthquake, and at several conflict-affected World Heritage sites in the Middle East. UNESCO is using the technology to assess the damage of the war in Ukraine. Based on reports from the field, UNESCO sends UNOSAT a list of potentially damaged sites and retrieves satellite images that experts can analyse.

With the emergence of advanced remote sensing applications, the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UN-SPIDER) is also improving its ability to monitor in near real time the effects of human activities such as resource extraction, mass tourism and urban encroachment on natural ecosystems.

Digitizing to enhance understanding and protection

The cultural landscape and archaeological remains of the Bamiyan Valley (Afghanistan) are among the most emblematic World Heritage sites in Danger. In order to carry out a hydrogeological study of the Buddhas cliffs and identify the risks they face, UNESCO has commissioned the Iconem company to collect a complete set of topographic and photogrammetric data from July to December 2021, with a view to analyzing the evolution of the cliffs' erosion over a period of five years. As part of the preparatory work for the conservation plan for the Minaret of Jam (Afghanistan), Iconem carried out a detailed survey and 3D digitization of the Minaret and archaeological remains in its vicinity, using a drone and almost 5,000 high-resolution photographs. Similar operations were carried out in Beirut (Lebanon) in historic areas affected by the 2020 explosions, in 2018 and 2021 in Iraq's old city of Mosul, 80% of which was destroyed by conflict, and also in Yemen, with training workshops in photogrammetry and 3D scanning for local professionals in charge of preserving the site of Sana'a. In Syria, as part of the EU-funded safeguarding project, UNESCO worked with Iconem to carry out a complete survey of the Crac des Chevaliers site, including a zenithal orthophotograph of the site to be used to assess its stability.



A model for international cooperation

Major safeguarding campaigns (Abu Simbel, Angkor, Borobudur...)

The Convention is a very powerful tool to attract the attention of the international community and to incite it to act through international safeguarding campaigns. Often the World Heritage Committee and States Parties, with the help of UNESCO experts and other partners, find solutions before the situation deteriorates to the point of damaging the site.

Sangha Tri-National (Cameroon, Congo and Central African Republic)

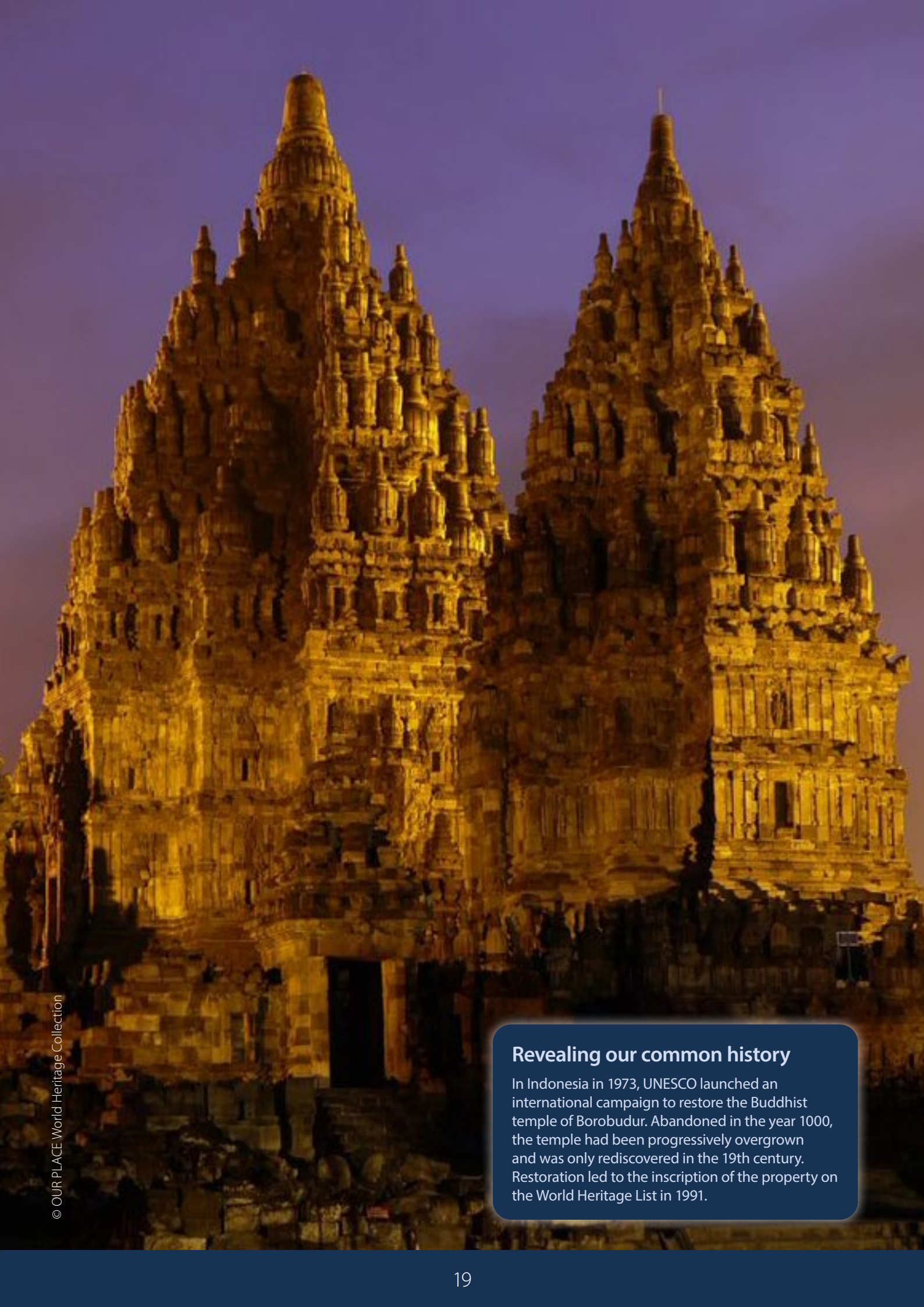
The Sangha Tri-National is a transboundary nature conservation complex located in the north-western Congo Basin, where the Republic of Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic meet. The TNS comprises three contiguous national parks covering a total area of 754,286 hectares. These are the Lobéké National Park in Cameroon, the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in Congo and the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park in the Central African Republic. The latter is composed of two separate parts. The parks are embedded in a much larger forest landscape that is sometimes referred to as the Sangha Tri-National Landscape.

The Abu Simbel campaign in the early 1960s was a major breakthrough on a global scale: UNESCO demonstrated that it was possible to reconcile a country's economic development with the preservation of its cultural heritage, and create major international coalitions to do so. Other major campaigns have strengthened the foundations of the Convention and raised global awareness of the importance and need to preserve peoples' cultural heritage.

In Indonesia, an international safeguarding campaign was launched in 1972 by UNESCO to restore the celebrated 8th and 9th century Buddhist temple of Borobudur. Abandoned in the year 1000, it had been progressively invaded by vegetation and was only rediscovered in the 19th century. With the active participation of the Japan Trust Fund for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage and other partners, the restoration of Borobudur was completed in 1983.

In Cambodia, Angkor Archaeological Park, one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia, contains the magnificent remains of the various capitals





Revealing our common history

In Indonesia in 1973, UNESCO launched an international campaign to restore the Buddhist temple of Borobudur. Abandoned in the year 1000, the temple had been progressively overgrown and was only rediscovered in the 19th century. Restoration led to the inscription of the property on the World Heritage List in 1991.







Qhapaq Ñan, Andean Road Network (Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru)

Built by the Incas over several centuries and partly based on pre-Inca infrastructure, this great network of communication, trade and defence routes stretches over 30,000 km. The property includes 273 individual sites stretching over 6,000 km. They have been chosen to illustrate the architectural, technical, political, and social achievements of the network, as well as its associated infrastructure for trade, accommodation and storage of goods, and sites of religious significance. (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1459/>)

As a transnational property, the Qhapaq Ñan covers the jurisdictions of six countries at local and national level, including, in one case, regulations of seven regional authorities. A strong legal commitment by the States Parties between 2010 and 2012 now provides protection at the highest national level to all components of the property.

of the Khmer Empire (9th to 15th centuries). In 1993, UNESCO launched an ambitious programme to safeguard and develop the historic site. Illegal excavation, looting and anti-personnel mines were the main threats to the archaeological site. In 2004, having found that these problems had been overcome and that numerous conservation and restoration activities coordinated by UNESCO were successfully undertaken, the World Heritage Committee removed the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Transboundary/transnational sites

The inscription of new transboundary properties, such as the Qapaq Ñan, a network of Andean roads in Latin America, or the Sangha Trinational, a forest complex shared by Congo, Cameroon and the Central African Republic, underline the importance of solidarity and cooperation for the protection, conservation and presentation of World Heritage. These increasingly frequent transnational inscriptions are a good example of the international cultural cooperation promoted by UNESCO.)

A global network of experts

Fifty years of implementation of the Convention and more than 1,150 World Heritage properties have given birth to a unique international network of cultural and natural heritage experts from a wide range of States Parties who work in concert with the Secretariat and the three international Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee (ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN). In addition, numerous research institutions, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

are present in the field, representing a wide diversity of disciplines, nationalities, genders and ages. (Bilan des 50 ans de la Convention du Patrimoine, This document was prepared by a consultant on the basis of consultations with World Heritage Centre staff as well as the documents referenced at the end of the document.)

Reflecting this network of experts, the World Heritage Site Managers' Forum has been bringing together several dozen World Heritage site managers

every year since 2017, enabling them to share their respective expertise and strengthen bridges between World Heritage procedures and implementers involved in the day-to-day protection of the outstanding universal value of sites. (Bilan des 50 ans de la Convention du Patrimoine, This document was prepared by a consultant on the basis of consultations with World Heritage Centre staff as well as the documents referenced at the end of the document.)







A living heritage

Urban heritage (large historic centres)

The World Heritage Cities Programme is a thematic programme that has aimed since 2005 to assist States Parties in meeting the challenges of protecting and managing their urban heritage. In addition, in 2011 the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape. It is a tool for the integration of conservation, management and planning strategies for historic urban territories into local development and urban planning processes, giving their rightful places to conservation policies and practices.

The inclusion of indigenous peoples

Numerous World Heritage sites are located on areas managed by indigenous peoples whose land use, knowledge,

cultural and spiritual values and practices are related to heritage. Inspired by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), UNESCO's policy embraces the right of indigenous peoples to their traditional lands and territories and recognizes traditional systems as part of new management approaches.

The International Indigenous Forum for World Heritage functions as a platform for reflection on the participation of indigenous peoples in the identification, conservation and management of World Heritage properties.

World Heritage and other UNESCO conventions and programmes

The Convention has inspired the development of mechanisms and programmes for the protection of our common heritage, and forms the basis of a broader framework of other international conventions and complementary programmes. Thus, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention adopted in 2003 considerably broadens the scope of protection to all categories of living heritage: practices, traditions, knowledge and know-how. The Man and the Biosphere (MAB) scientific programme, launched in 1971, aims to enable the proper cohabitation of individuals and their environment, to reconcile economic development and the rational use of resources, and to preserve valuable ecosystems. The sites, practices and areas protected by UNESCO complement each other and together form spaces where elements of cultural, natural and living heritage can co-exist.

Indigenous peoples involved in site management

At Los Katíos National Park (Colombia), inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2009, the authorities have adopted a specific policy to involve indigenous communities in the management of the site. This has promoted the sustainable use of natural resources and improved the ecological connectivity of the territory. By 2015, the new policy had made it possible to remove the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.



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A leading scientific and experimental observatory

Natural World Heritage sites are an invaluable source of information for scientific research, as they bear witness to the impact of climate change.

Forests

Forests are among the most biodiverse habitats on Earth. They play a crucial role in regulating the climate by absorbing carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere and are considered one of the most cost-effective forms of climate action. They are also of vital importance to human well-being and survival. An estimated 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihoods, medicine, fuel, food and shelter.

Unique forest ecosystems are to be found in more than 200 World Heritage sites to date. Ranging in size from 18 hectares to over 5 million hectares, World Heritage forest sites now total over 69 million hectares.

Glaciers

New data from UNESCO and IUCN released in 2022 highlights the accelerated melting of glaciers in World Heritage sites. Glaciers in one third of the sites concerned are expected to disappear by 2050. The other two-thirds

can still be saved, provided global temperatures do not rise by more than 1.5°C compared to the pre-industrial period.

Fifty UNESCO World Heritage sites feature glaciers (A total of 18,600 glaciers have been identified in these 50 sites, covering an area of about 66,000 km²), which represents almost 10% of the total area of glaciers on Earth. These include, among others, the highest (next to Mount Everest), the longest (in Alaska) and the last glaciers in Africa. They provide a representative overview of the overall situation of glaciers worldwide.

These glaciers have been retreating at an accelerated rate since 2000 due to CO₂ emissions that increase temperatures. They are currently losing 58 billion tonnes of ice each year, equivalent to the combined annual water consumption of France and Spain, and are responsible for almost 5% of global rise in sea levels.

Only a rapid reduction in CO₂ emission levels can save glaciers and the exceptional biodiversity they sustain. UNESCO is committed to supporting States in achieving this goal. In addition to a drastic reduction in carbon emissions, UNESCO advocates the creation of an international fund for glacier monitoring and preservation. Such a fund



would support in-depth research, promote exchange networks and establish an early warning system as well as disaster risk reduction measures. Half of humanity depends directly or indirectly on water from glaciers for domestic use, agriculture and energy.

Reefs

Climate change is the greatest threat to coral reefs today. Under a business-as-usual scenario, nearly 90% of the 29 World Heritage coral reefs are expected to experience severe bleaching events twice a decade by 2040.

Coastal erosion alert

In Ghana, the ocean is gaining an average of two metres per year on the coast, threatening the World Heritage site of Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra and Western Regions, inscribed in 1979, and the work of remembrance carried out by UNESCO and the authorities in the framework of the Slave Route programme. Entire sections of Fort Prinsensten in Keta have unfortunately already been washed away.

Building climate resilience and adaptation is a key component of the long-term response to climate change. Resilience is the ability of reef ecosystems and the people, businesses and communities that depend on them to survive, adapt and recover from the stresses and shocks they face. By building resilience, we strengthen the ability of reef communities to prepare for and recover quickly from disturbances, adapt to changing circumstances and plan for an uncertain future.

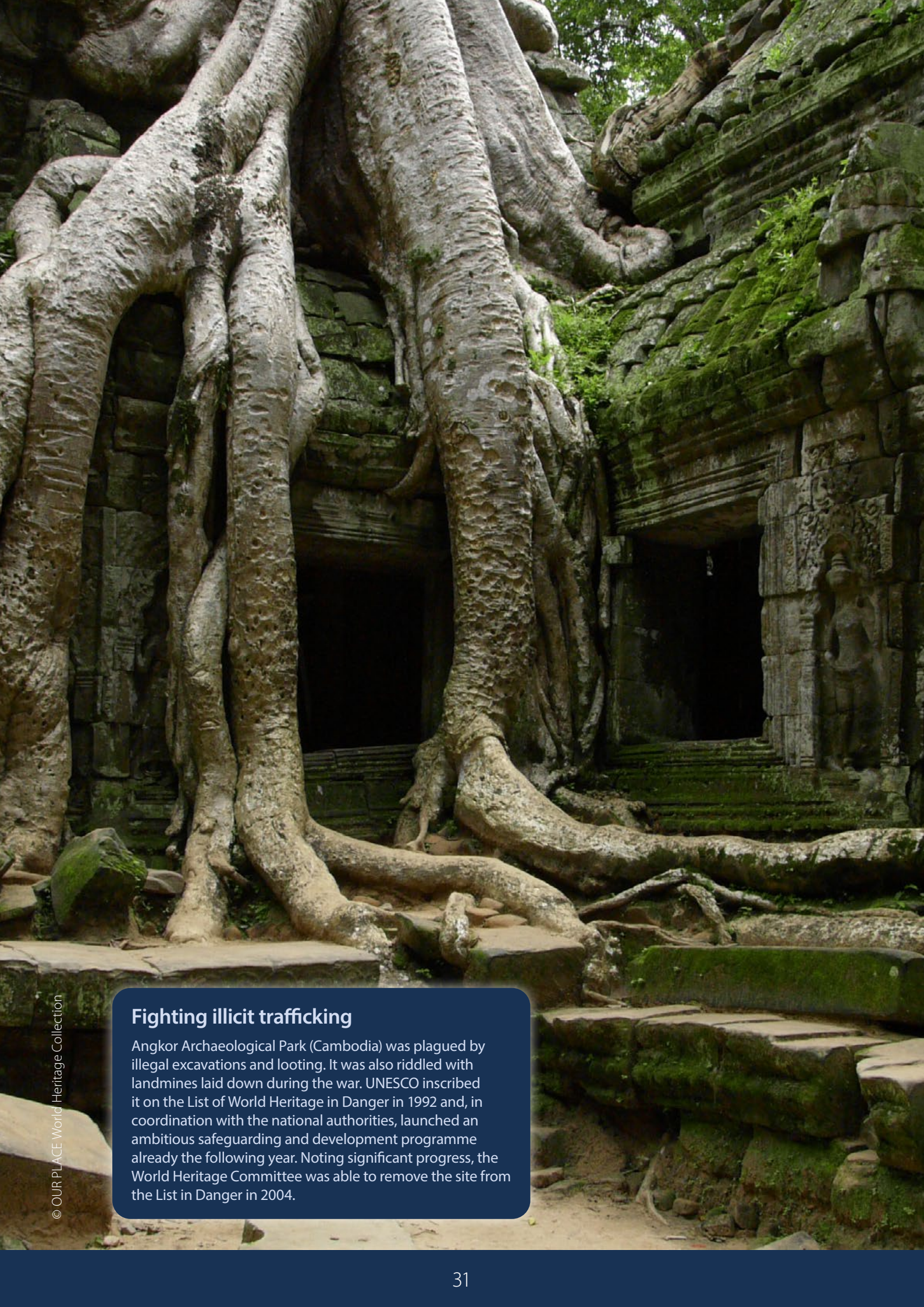
eDNA

UNESCO is launching an ambitious project that uses cutting-edge environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques to understand better the rich biodiversity of UNESCO's 50 World Heritage marine sites.

Scientists and local people will be involved in collecting genetic material from fish waste, mucus or cells from selected marine World Heritage sites to monitor fish, particularly those on the Red List of Threatened Species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The ADNe project will measure the vulnerability of marine biodiversity to climate change and the effects of this change on the distribution and migratory movements of marine life within marine World Heritage sites.



© 1 Ocean, Alexis Rosenfeld



Fighting illicit trafficking

Angkor Archaeological Park (Cambodia) was plagued by illegal excavations and looting. It was also riddled with landmines laid down during the war. UNESCO inscribed it on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 1992 and, in coordination with the national authorities, launched an ambitious safeguarding and development programme already the following year. Noting significant progress, the World Heritage Committee was able to remove the site from the List in Danger in 2004.

Using digital technology

To anticipate the erosion of the Bamiyan Buddhas cliffs (Afghanistan), UNESCO used drones in 2020-2021 to collect a complete set of topographic and photogrammetric data and then make computer projections. This allows experts to forecast the risk of collapse over the next five years.

Over the same period, these drones were also used to prepare work for a conservation plan for the Minaret of Jam. They produced 5,000 high-resolution photographs that allowed for the full 3D modelling of the monument.

Challenges

Several conditions threaten and may endanger properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and their value. In 2019, the World Heritage Committee recalled that the purpose of inscribing a property on the List of World Heritage in Danger is to mobilize international support to help countries address the challenges that sites may face effectively.

UNESCO is working with countries and is already providing support to address these threats.

Climate change

Climate change is among the greatest threats facing cultural and natural heritage sites around the world. These natural threats affect at least one in five World Heritage sites.

Worldwide, UNESCO is working to build the capacity of countries and communities to prepare for and respond to climate-related impacts and disasters. Mitigation measures are encouraged to address the threat of climate change to World Heritage sites.

World Heritage sites can provide immense benefits and play a crucial role in climate regulation by absorbing considerable amounts of CO₂ from the atmosphere. There is therefore a need to assess and anticipate better the impact of climate change on World Heritage sites. Soil erosion, desertification and the multiplication of natural disasters may lead to the disappearance of properties of universal value.

Responding to emergencies, anticipating the future.

The severe floods that hit Pakistan in the autumn of 2022 damaged two World Heritage sites: the Archaeological Ruins of Moenjodaro and the Historic Monuments at Makli, Thatta. UNESCO raised an initial budget of \$350,000 to deal with the emergency and sent a mission of experts to the site to prepare rehabilitation work.



Traditional tours and sustainable tourism

A positive model of sustainable tourism has been developed at the Trang An Landscape Complex (Vietnam): The authorities have set a limit to visitor numbers and rely on a traditional method of touring - rowing boats - to avoid impacting the environment.

Favouring local employment, the boats are mostly operated by local women providing them with additional income to supplement their agricultural activities. They have received training from UNESCO to promote and perpetuate their know-how.

In Ghana, coastal erosion is a source of great concern for the preservation of World Heritage, as well as for the work of remembrance carried out by UNESCO and the authorities in the framework of the Slave Route programme. The ocean is advancing by an average two metres per year on the coast. The Forts and Castles of Volta, Accra and its surroundings, inscribed in 1979, are very exposed. For example, whole sections of Fort Prinsensten in Keta have already been washed away.

In Uganda, the Rwenzori Mountains National Park suffered severe destruction in May 2020 due to torrential rains (including the destruction of local residents' homes). Funds have been made available by UNESCO to assist in the reconstruction of infrastructure and the development of a disaster management plan.

Wars and conflicts

Conflict can also be a source of real threats to World Heritage. This is not a new phenomenon, but unfortunately it has been increasing over the last decade.

Since the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, the Afghan authorities and the international community, including UNESCO, have worked tirelessly to safeguard Afghanistan's rich cultural and natural heritage, which bears witness to thousands of years of exchange between different peoples and cultures. Under the aegis of UNESCO, international cooperation has initiated major works for the conservation and stabilization of the Bamiyan site, but has also worked for the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage, and the construction of a cultural centre for Bamiyan that is dedicated to creativity.

In 2003, the cultural landscape and archaeological remains of the Bamiyan Valley were simultaneously inscribed on the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger, given the extreme fragility of the niches, the lack of a management framework and security concerns.

"We at UNESCO reiterate our support for the Afghan people and strengthen our commitment to stand together

with people around the world to safeguard cultural heritage, the embodiment of our common humanity." Ernesto Ottone R., UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture.

Tragically, since Bamiyan, we have witnessed the continued intentional destruction of cultural heritage in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Mali and elsewhere. But the international community has not remained silent in the face of these acts of violence.

In Mali, for example, Bandiagara, where the architectural heritage of 289 villages spread over 400,000 hectares in the Mopti region, has been damaged by the political conflict in the north and centre of the country. The intervention in Bandiagara builds on UNESCO's rehabilitation initiatives in Mali, active since 2012. A rehabilitation project has also been launched by UNESCO in 2021, which includes historic dwellings, granaries and sites dedicated to traditional culture (intangible heritage).

Excessive human activity and the role of exclusion zones

The International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA) recognizes that many World Heritage sites are affected by industrial operations and activities, including oil and gas exploration and extraction. The Oil and Gas Industry Mapping and Sustainable Development Goals, an atlas, was co-authored with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Finance Cooperation (IFC).

The report states that where there is a risk of impact on World Heritage sites, companies should conduct strategic environmental assessments and incorporate cultural heritage into environmental, social and health impact assessments (ESHIA).

Tullow, Shell and Total, as well as the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), which comprises 22 of the world's leading mining companies, have committed to refrain from conducting extractive activities in World Heritage sites. The principle of non-intervention has also been endorsed by a number of financial corporations,

The central role of the authorities

Venice (Italy) welcomes more than 25 million tourists every year, of which 1.5 million arrive by boat. According to several studies, the passage of the largest cruise liners displaced sand and created waves that weakened the pilings on which palaces and houses rest, leading to fears of irreparable damage. UNESCO requested that cruise liners be banned in the immediate vicinity of the city. After intensive discussions with the authorities, the ban came into force on 1 August 2021.





including Paribas, HSBC and JP Morgan, which have pledged not to support activities affecting World Heritage sites.

UNESCO and the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee are engaged in a dialogue with other companies to encourage them to refrain from exploring for or extracting oil, gas and mineral resources within the perimeters of World Heritage sites, while ensuring that operations in peripheral areas do not threaten their integrity. This is part of a broader effort by UNESCO to raise funds and mobilize resources for biodiversity and heritage conservation through stronger partnerships with the private sector, scientific cooperation and civil society engagement.

Representativeness to be improved

In ten years, the number of countries that ratified the World Heritage Convention grew from 139 to 178. The number of States Parties that submitted Tentative Lists in accordance with the model developed by the Committee has rose from 33 to 132. New categories of World Heritage sites were encouraged, such as cultural landscapes, cultural routes, industrial heritage, deserts, coastal marine sites and small island sites.

To encourage under-represented categories of sites and to improve geographical distribution, the World Heritage Committee recently decided to limit the number of nominations that each State Party can submit and the total

number of nominations it examines during each session. The Committee is also focusing on several other issues:

- Providing technical support to Member States in the preparation of their nomination dossiers, and in the establishment of legal frameworks necessary for the long-term preservation of these sites;
- Developing training within these States to support the emergence of a new generation of heritage professionals;
- Reliance on local populations in the inscription projects as well as in conservation actions, because both cultural and natural heritage very often also constitute living heritage of ancestral traditions that have an essential part to play in management and safeguarding plans.

On the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, a review of the many advances made possible by the Convention is necessary, notably so as to project ourselves into the future.

As Africa is one of UNESCO's two global priorities, the Operational Strategy for Priority Africa is introduced. The representation of the African continent on the World Heritage List must be improved as a matter of priority, since 98 sites have been inscribed on the continent to date, including 53 cultural sites, 38 natural sites and 5 mixed sites. This represents only 10% of all the sites inscribed on the World Heritage List.

The World Heritage Emergency Fund

In many cases, when disaster strikes, the capacity to respond rapidly is often lacking, making it more difficult to reduce and contain damage. In the event of a disaster or conflict, heritage is indeed exposed to greater and unforeseen risks with potentially disastrous consequences, such as the collapse of weakened buildings, the looting of documents and collections and the loss of valuable archives, unless immediate safeguarding measures are taken.

Over the years, in cooperation with several partners such as ICOMOS, IUCN, ICCROM and ICOM, UNESCO has developed a range of tools to manage the risks to heritage posed by conflict and disaster situations. These organizations are involved in all stages of the disaster risk management cycle: before, during and after emergencies.

The programme supports short-term, small-scale activities in three areas:

- **Preparedness:** The effects of a disaster or conflict can be mitigated by taking appropriate action before the risks materialize.
- **Response:** When a disaster strikes, it is important to determine without delay exactly how to respond. By dispatching a small team of experts within hours of a disaster, UNESCO is able to assess quickly what is most needed and to advise government agencies and international donors on imperative steps to be taken to avoid further destruction of heritage.

Moreover, it is during the very first days, or first couple of weeks following a disaster that the worst can be avoided, if material assistance is provided quickly. This may include the erection of temporary structures to stabilize weakened buildings, the replacement of damaged equipment or the rapid

reconstruction of field offices so that site management authorities can continue working in difficult areas.

- **Resource mobilization:** In addition to the above, the programme also includes communication and information initiatives, which aim to mobilize resources for this strategic area of work.
- **Implementation, monitoring and evaluation:** The implementation of the programme is coordinated by the Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit (EPR), based at UNESCO Headquarters and working within the Culture and Emergency Unit of the Organization's Culture Sector. The unit plays a coordinating role and focuses on the planning phases of interventions and immediate responses, in liaison with responsible officials at Headquarters and in the field.



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Support the World Heritage Fund

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The World Heritage Fund

The World Heritage Fund was established in 1972 by the World Heritage Convention, and derives most of its resources from States Parties' compulsory contributions as well as voluntary donations. It helps to preserve our most precious sites around the world. (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/faq/59/>)

The World Heritage Committee allocates funds giving priority to the most threatened sites.

Five categories of international assistance:

- Preparatory Assistance: to develop Tentative Lists, prepare nomination dossiers, formulate conservation projects or management plans;
- Training: to fund group training courses, primarily for World Heritage site staff (individual scholarships are not funded);
- Technical cooperation: to provide expert assistance and material support for the development of management plans and other conservation activities;
- Emergency assistance: to repair damage caused by human activity or natural disasters;
- Promotional and educational assistance: for awareness-raising activities and the development of educational materials.

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Since its creation 75 years ago, UNESCO has mobilized the international community around flagship heritage protection projects worldwide. Notable examples include the safeguarding of the temples of Abu Simbel (Egypt) and Angkor (Cambodia), the reconstruction of Dubrovnik (Croatia) and of the Old Bridge of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and the rebuilding of the mausoleums of Timbuktu (Mali) and of the Old City of Mosul (Iraq).

The UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage is the cornerstone of this mobilization. The celebration of its 50th anniversary is an opportunity to take stock of the actions it has made possible and to identify future challenges in order to continue transmitting heritage of universal value to future generations.



Learn more
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