

# EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

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## 43rd Session of World Heritage Committee Baku, 30 June-10 July 2019

The total number of objects regarded as world heritage sites after the 43rd session of World Heritage Committee, which was held between 30 June and 10 July 2019 in Baku (Azerbaijan), is now 1121. During the discussions of the Committee members reflecting the new inscriptions on the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger a lot of interesting issues were raised regarding the future of the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

The condition of the world heritage protection system has recently come under criticism, especially with respect to the threat of excessive politicization of the listing mechanism and the lack of financial support. At the same time, this year's session proved that there are many other challenges to face as well. New solutions were sought to provide stabilization in the international system, one of which was the new Baku Declaration on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage, which was adopted on 1 July 2019. It appealed to all the stakeholders of the Convention to enhance their proactive policies towards the protection and rehabilitation of cultural and natural heritage sites, especially those included on the List of World Heritage in Danger; and to address the emerging global challenges,

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including such diverse factors as climate change, natural and human-made disasters, and other various pressures on heritage sites. Even though the Declaration does not contain many concrete solutions, it calls upon the State Parties of the World Heritage Convention to intensify cooperation in the protection of the outstanding universal values inherent in the world's cultural heritage, and to integrate their efforts aimed at sustainable recovery and reconstruction as a response to events such as natural disasters and armed conflicts.

Despite the political pressure – which was evident at the session of the World Heritage Committee – a total of 29 new sites were inscribed on the World Heritage List: 1 in Africa; 2 in the Arab States; 10 in the Asia Pacific region; 15 in Europe and North America; and 1 in Latin America. Several major archaeological sites were also enlisted, including the Dilmun burial mounds (Bahrain); the ancient ferrous metallurgy sites of Burkina Faso; the Krzemionki Opatowskie region (Poland); and the iconic site of Babylon (Iraq), once the centre of the Neo-Babylonian Empire and site of the Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. As regards the importance of safeguarding the cultural and natural heritage of the world, as well as recognizing its intangible aspects, it is worth mentioning the inscription of the Budj Bim cultural landscape within Australia's Gundijmara Aboriginal region, and Canada's Writing-on-Stone (Áísínai'pi), a sacred landscape of the Blackfoot (Siksikáítsitapi) people.

One property was added to the List of World Heritage in Danger: the islands and protected areas of the Gulf of California (Mexico), while two sites were delisted: the Humberstone and Santa Laura saltpeter works (Chile); and the birthplace of Jesus: the Church of the Nativity and pilgrimage route, Bethlehem (Palestine).

The World Heritage Committee also decides on measures for the protection of the world heritage sites, as well as budgetary and general issues related to the state of their conservation. This year the Committee examined 112 world heritage properties.

In accordance with tradition, two additional initiatives to the World Heritage Committee sessions took place: the World Heritage Site Managers Forum; and the World Heritage Young Professionals Forum. The message from the World Heritage Site Managers Forum was to support “States Parties in initiating, developing and implementing capacity-building opportunities for diverse actors”. Site Managers, as key actors of the World Heritage Committee decision-making processes, also called for their formal recognition in the Operational Guidelines, highlighting their crucial role in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. Moreover, they appealed to the States Parties to include them in their delegations to the World Heritage Committee.

At this year's World Heritage Young Professionals Forum, participants from 30 countries discussed matters surrounding the topic: “World Heritage: Local Insights for Global Challenges”. The results of their work were presented in the form of a Declaration delivered on 1 July at the 43rd session of the World Heritage

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Committee. The document indeed provided local insights into the global challenges of urban heritage and cultural landscapes, as well as acknowledged the need for local communities to play a central role in the interaction between human society and nature.

Another excellent platform for discussing the challenges of the world heritage protection system consists of the side events which take place during the ongoing debates on many matters involving world heritage sites. Recently, reflections on taking a more holistic approach to cultural heritage protection and safeguarding have gained momentum. At this year's World Heritage Committee session the topic was continued during a side event called "World Heritage Recovery: Strategy and Planning", following up on the International Conference organized in May 2018 in Warsaw under the title: "The Challenges of World Heritage Recovery. International Conference on Reconstruction".

During the panel session, which gathered together experts from ICOMOS, ICCROM, and the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, the critical importance of implementing the Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage was emphasized. It was agreed that it is a key document; one which establishes guidance for universal principles in the field of recovery and reconstruction of cultural heritage. It was also pointed out that an in-depth analysis needs to be continued, especially regarding the examples of recovered cities destroyed during times of armed conflict or natural disasters. Moreover, since the recovery and reconstruction of cultural heritage is a long and complicated process, a synergy in the implementation of the relevant culture conventions is essential. As regards this multidimensional approach, a new UNESCO Recommendation on the Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage in Times of Emergencies has been proposed.

The next World Heritage Committee session in 2020 will take place in the city of Fuzhou (China).