

Protecting the world's natural wonders from irreparable loss.

## Saving our Natural and Cultural Heritage: The World Heritage Convention

### What is it?

The *World Heritage Convention* designates monuments or places of particular interest which, if they were ever to disappear, would cause an irreparable loss for all humanity.

The Convention was conceived as a tool for international co-operation, controlled by national decision makers.

Expertise and skill is provided by the *Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, which co-opts two relevant NGOs to advise the Committee: IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), and ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites).

### When did the Convention come into force?

The *World Heritage Convention* was signed on 16 November 1972. It came into force in 1975, after it was ratified by the 20th country. As of December 1992, there were 132 member countries, or *Parties*, to the Convention.

In 20 years, 358 sites have been registered, 98 for natural heritage.



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### How does the Convention work?

A *World Heritage Committee* and a *World Heritage Fund* has adopted a set of *Rules of Procedures*. The Committee decides which sites and monuments nominated by the member countries are added to the *World Heritage List*.

This Committee has specialists from 21 countries, who are elected by the Parties to the Convention.

The Committee has two major tasks:

- ♦ To define *World Heritage*, by selecting the cultural and natural wonders that are part of this heritage. The Committee is assisted by ICOMOS for sites of cultural heritage, and by IUCN for sites of natural heritage.
- ♦ To administer the *World Heritage Fund*, and to determine the technical and financial aid to be allotted to the countries which need it and have asked for it.

### The Objectives of the Convention

The Convention aims to:

- create a *World Heritage Fund*, which allows it to call on international support for conserving the cultural and natural wonders on the *List*;
- define the worldwide list of the most significant testimonies of past civilisations and the most moving scenes of natural beauty; and,
- promote co-operation among all nations and people to contribute effectively to this natural and cultural protection.

The Committee has specified the criteria to be applied in establishing the *List*. These criteria are based on authenticity and integrity.

The criteria for a *Cultural Monument* are to:

- ♦ have exercised a great influence on a culture;
- ♦ contribute a unique testimony;
- ♦ have been associated with universal ideas or beliefs; and,
- ♦ continue to be an outstanding example of a traditional human habitat representing a particular culture.





The criteria for a *Natural Wonder* are to:

- be an example of a state of evolution on earth;
- be representative of a biological evolution;
- contain the natural habitats of endangered animals; and,
- present a scene of exceptional beauty or a spectacular view, or large concentration of unique animals.

When a site or monument on the List is specifically and seriously endangered, it can be added to a complementary list - the so-called *List of World Heritage in Danger*, which provides for emergency measures to save and protect the site.

### ***The World Heritage Fund***

The *World Heritage Fund* can call for international support in conserving the cultural and natural wonders on the List.

The Fund receives income from many sources. There is a compulsory contribution from the Parties to the Convention, which is 1% of their contributions to the ordinary budget of UNESCO. There are also voluntary contributions from various Parties, and donations from individuals and corporations.

### ***Responsibilities of the Parties***

Each Member country pledges to conserve those monuments and sites found within its borders that are recognised as having exceptional and universal value.

The Parties are responsible for nominating sites for the draft *List*.

### ***Parties to the Convention***

There are currently four Pacific island countries that are Parties to the Convention:

**Australia**

**Fiji**

**New Zealand**

**Solomon Islands**

Other Pacific island countries are encouraged to become Parties to this important international convention

For more information on the **World Heritage Convention**, and how to become a Party to the Convention, contact:

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