



World Heritage Sites and Indigenous Peoples

Tenth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), New York, 16-27 May 2011

Item 3 (b), Environment

Madam Chairperson,

On behalf of IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature I congratulate you on your appointment as Chair of the UNPFII. I congratulate also the Members and Chief of the Secretariat on their appointment and I wish the UNPFII all success under your guidance.

IUCN welcomes the opportunity to address the Permanent Forum on the item of the follow-up to its Recommendations on Environment. IUCN uses a rights-based approach to its conservation work, and specifically uses the UNDRIP as a key reference for planning and implementing actions relevant to indigenous peoples and their environments. This is elaborated in the report that we submitted to the UNPFII and which the Secretariat has kindly posted as CRP8.

I would like to follow up on a topic that the Permanent Forum addressed in its ninth session, which is the designation of World Heritage sites. This is reported on para 24 of the document E/C.19/2011/13 “Analysis prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: economic and social development, the environment and free, prior and informed consent”.

World Heritage sites are established under the World Heritage Convention; they are key places for the conservation of cultural and natural values of the world. IUCN is the official Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee on natural and mixed World Heritage sites, and as such evaluates new site nominations and monitors the state of conservation of inscribed sites.

As many of these sites overlap with traditional lands, the involvement of indigenous peoples and local communities in the establishment and management of World Heritage sites is paramount. Issues such as land rights, free prior and informed consent, access to resources and benefit sharing mechanisms are of crucial importance.

We would like to convey to UNPFII the importance we attach to these issues. We recognize the often long-established indigenous peoples’ stewardship of areas contained in natural World Heritage sites and the associated tangible and intangible cultural heritage. We also value the commitment, ecological knowledge and customary practices of indigenous peoples living in and around World Heritage sites. Indigenous peoples therefore represent key actors and logical allies for us in the protection of these outstanding places. We believe that to assure realization of human rights gives the local populations long-term security and promotes lasting stewardship of their common heritage.

IUCN has engaged on this topic with the other Advisory Bodies to the Convention,

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IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges by supporting scientific research; managing field projects all over the world; and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN, international conventions and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

IUCN is the world’s oldest and largest global environmental network. IUCN is a democratic union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and some 10,000 volunteer scientists in more than 150 countries. IUCN’s work is supported by 1,100 professional staff in 62 countries and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

ICOMOS and ICCROM, who have parallel roles to ours in advising the World Heritage Convention on cultural heritage, and associated capacity building. ICOMOS and ICCROM have asked us to reinforce the similar commitment they have to these issues. ICOMOS notes in particular that a number of its National Committees are attaching a high level of importance to these issues. ICOMOS Norway has instigated a reflection concerning the link between World Heritage and human rights, which is gathering momentum. IUCN is participating in that process to mainstream rights-based approaches in operative World Heritage management while ICCROM is also considering its engagement.

We consider that the Convention has much to offer in strengthening the appreciation of the heritage of indigenous peoples, but there is also much scope to enhance policy and practice to recognize local and indigenous peoples as key actors in the protection of their sites in full respect of their rights and responsibilities.

We are keen to identify, with UNESCO and other partners, how best meet the aim to focus more on indigenous peoples and local communities and promote and apply more inclusive conservation approaches. We are also keen to facilitate exchange with other stakeholders in preparation of the 40th Anniversary of the Convention in 2012 themed "*World Heritage and Sustainable Development: The Role of Local Communities in the Management of World Heritage*". We believe that next year's anniversary provides a good opportunity to strengthen collaboration with the Committee on this topic.

IUCN is seeking to mainstream rights-based approaches and good governance into protected area management to reduce social vulnerabilities and enable effective management. We note that nature conservation objectives are frequently aligned with UNDRIP's Article 29.1 which establishes the right of indigenous peoples to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. World Heritage sites with their high visibility and public scrutiny could act as flagships in this process to raise national and global awareness of the need to address indigenous peoples' issues in protected area governance and world-wide conservation initiatives. World Heritage nomination and status should be used as an entry point for participation rights and to give marginalized communities the appreciation from outside that they sometimes do not receive from their immediate environment. IUCN considers that the engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities, from the earliest stages of the nomination process, is crucial. Decisions about boundaries, zoning, management set-up, user rights and stakeholder involvement which are determinants for the future conservation of each site, and the degree to which it achieves benefits for local people, are taken during this early stage. Equally engagement in ongoing monitoring is crucial.

IUCN looks forward to jointly working with ICOMOS, ICCROM and UNESCO on these matters, and would welcome opportunities for collaboration with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in this process.

Thank you Madam Chairperson.