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### REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL ON THE FOLLOW-UP TO DECISIONS AND RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AT THEIR PREVIOUS SESSIONS

#### ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT TO CELEBRATE 2010, INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE RAPPROCHEMENT OF CULTURES

#### INFORMATION DOCUMENT SUBMITTED BY UKRAINE

#### CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FOLLOW-UP OF THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE RAPPROCHEMENT OF CULTURES WITH REGARD TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KYIV STATEMENT<sup>1</sup> TOWARDS MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND DIALOGUE

### Introduction

1. As one of the co-initiators of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, Ukraine proposed to initiate a general discussion regarding the protection of monuments and sites with religious or spiritual meaning (hereinafter referred to as *religious*<sup>2</sup> and *sacred*<sup>3</sup> properties) at the international level. This discussion was timely and in line with one of the four themes, selected to build an action plan for the Year in the fields of UNESCO's competence, namely to promote reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity.

2. This initiative, having constituted one of the essential elements of the International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures, is aimed at enhancing protection and management of religious properties. It stems from the appeal of the Ukrainian authorities, launched at the 35th session of the UNESCO General Conference (2009), inviting all Member States to participate in the International Seminar "The Role of religious communities in the management of World Heritage properties" (2-5 November 2010). This announcement was welcomed by UNESCO within the framework of the Year. Numerous Member States expressing their support for the proposal

<sup>1</sup> Kyiv Statement on the protection of religious properties within the World Heritage Convention, adopted at the International Seminar "Role of Religious Communities in the management of World Heritage properties", organized under the patronage of the President of Ukraine and the patronage of UNESCO, 2-5 November 2010, Ukraine (document attached).

<sup>2</sup> "Religious property: Any form of property with religious or spiritual associations: churches, monasteries, shrines, sanctuaries, mosques, synagogues, temples, sacred landscapes, sacred groves, and other landscape features, etc." (2005 ICOMOS study "Filling the Gaps – an Action Plan for the Future").

<sup>3</sup> "Sacred site: An area of special spiritual significance to peoples and communities. Sacred natural site: Areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities." The UNESCO/IUCN Guidelines for the Conservation and Management of Sacred Natural Sites, 2008; <http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-016.pdf>.

designated representatives to participate in this Seminar. The elaboration of the Kyiv Statement (as one of the main outcomes of the Seminar) and its adoption in close cooperation with representatives of religious communities contributes to the creation of a culture of dialogue.

### **Methodological development**

3. In recent years UNESCO played a leading role in the development and promotion of a powerful normative action related to the protection of cultural and natural heritage in all its forms. A corpus of standard-setting documents, including charters and recommendations, exists on the subject of monuments and sites. A number of research studies and analyses of religious heritage and sacred sites were carried out by the Advisory Bodies – ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN. There were a number of conclusions and recommendations drawn from previous meetings and activities on religious and sacred heritage, such as the ICCROM 2003 Forum on the conservation of Living Religious Heritage, the 2005 ICOMOS General Assembly resolution calling for the “establishment of an International Thematic Programme for Religious Heritage”, and the UNESCO MAB/IUCN *Guidelines for the Conservation and Management of Sacred Natural Sites*.

4. Several recommendations directly or indirectly concern the safeguarding of the spirit of place, namely their living, social and spiritual nature, in particular the *Nara Document on Authenticity* adopted at the Nara Conference on Authenticity in relation to the World Heritage Convention held in 1994 and the Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place, adopted at the 16th General Assembly of ICOMOS in 2008.

5. A question on the importance and urgency to further develop joint initiatives on the protection of religious and sacred heritage, using effectively the potential of existing programmes in the framework of UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, IUCN and other relevant international organizations and institutions, was also raised by the Ukrainian authorities during the Working Group on the Reflection on the Future of the World Heritage Convention (34th session of the World Heritage Committee, Brasilia, 2010). This topic was seen by the States Parties to the Convention 1972 as a newly emerging theme and it was agreed that the outcomes of the Kyiv Seminar will provide the platform for launching discussions and consultations on this issue.

6. The religious and sacred properties represent perhaps the largest single category of properties to be found in most countries around the world. According to ICCROM, living religious heritage has characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of heritage. Sacred sites, which, according to the UNESCO MAB Programme, “are indeed the oldest protected areas of the planet”, and “have a vital importance for safeguarding cultural and biological diversity for present and future generations.”<sup>4</sup> This heritage provides people with a sense of identity. Collectively, the religious and sacred properties capture a range of cultural and natural diversity, and each can singularly demonstrate the spirit of a particular place.

7. Understanding the continuing nature of religious and sacred heritage, having the capacity to protect its authenticity and integrity, including its particular spiritual significance, and sharing the knowledge of our common history, are the three pillars necessary for building mutual respect and dialogue between communities. Today, the international community should define the appropriate measures to preserve the values of religious and sacred places, which form the foundation of our cultures, thereby aiming to prevent any gradual loss of our traditions.

8. The preservation of the spirit of place, the knowledge and understanding of traditions and the willingness to accept each other, are the necessary components to be respected for the protection and preservation of the living sites. An essential step to be taken is to establish appropriate measures for respecting the identity of properties with religious or spiritual meaning, for studying

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<sup>4</sup> “Declaration on the Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes in the Conservation of Biological and Cultural Diversity” adopted at the International Symposium “Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The Role of Sacred Natural Sites and Cultural Landscapes,” Tokyo, Japan, 30 May to 2 June 2005 [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/tokyo\\_final\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/tokyo_final_declaration_en.pdf)

the traditions they hold, for collaborating with the communities involved in their safeguarding and for understanding which benefits their protection represent for humanity.

### **Kyiv Statement on the protection of religious properties within the World Heritage Convention**

9. For the first time in the history of the World Heritage Convention, the issue regarding the protection of religious and sacred heritage has been discussed at the international level, involving active participation of the religious authorities during the international seminar, organized under the patronage of the President of Ukraine and UNESCO. This Seminar, on the role of religious communities in the management of World Heritage properties, provided a great opportunity for discussing the possible ways of establishing a platform for dialogue and mutual knowledge among stakeholders concerned towards the development of a new universal approach for the protection of religious and sacred heritage. The question of the importance and urgency of the development of such a new universal approach indicating principles and norms for the safeguarding, management and use of religious and sacred places has been unanimously raised by the international experts, national representatives and representatives of religious communities.

10. The Kyiv Statement on the protection of religious properties developed in close collaboration with national authorities, international experts, site managers and representatives of religious communities is the first and most unique document to give general recommendations to these kinds of properties. In the Statement it is “stressed that culturally and environmentally sustainable management of such heritage should be the responsibility of all stakeholders concerned, and that mutual acceptance and respect will bring different and complementary perspectives to shared cultural and spiritual values.” It was also considered that “it is particularly timely to define an integrated strategy for the development of a World Heritage Thematic Programme for Religious Heritage in collaboration and close coordination between all stakeholders, and that this Programme should create an action plan for the protection of religious heritage worldwide aimed at enhancing the role of communities and the avoidance of misunderstandings, tensions, or stereotypes.”

11. It was suggested that this strategy should be developed through an inter-Conventions approach. Taking into account that the integrity and authenticity of religious sites cannot be integrally preserved without their cultural objects, a special link should be created between the 1970 and 1972 Conventions in order to develop appropriate management principles aimed at preventing illicit traffic of cultural objects. One of the main inter-Conventions activities could be the preparation of an inventory of places with their cultural objects and the development of an international register.

### **Symbol of Peace, Mutual Respect and Constructive Dialogue**

12. New meaning<sup>5</sup> and a contemporary historical dimension could be given to places, monuments and sites with religious and spiritual meaning that should no longer be considered only as cultural, religious, sacred or holy sites, but also as educational places for enhancing mutual respect, knowledge and understanding of this specific heritage by all communities.

13. UNESCO in all its fields of competence could be invited to initiate the development of an Integrated Strategy regarding the protection of religious and sacred heritage, mentioned in the Kyiv Statement, which should include the promotion of religious and sacred heritage as a symbol of peace and reconciliation. This process could be launched by enhancing a constructive dialogue with religious communities in all its dimensions, in conformity with the UNESCO Constitution,<sup>6</sup> as well as in accordance with the Kyiv Statement, as well as with previous UNESCO decisions and

<sup>5</sup> “Today, ‘heritage’ is an open notion, one that can develop new objects and new meanings, because it reflects a living culture rather than a fixed image of the past.” (Extract of brochure *Heritage for a Culture of Peace*, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> The UNESCO Constitution calls explicitly and implicitly for the promotion of dialogue: “The Organization will ... collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples”.

resolutions,<sup>7 8</sup> and in follow-up to programmes and activities, such as “United Nations International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures”, “Peace in our hands through local heritage” or “A List of Monuments: Messengers of the Culture of Peace”<sup>9</sup> (Programme “Heritage for Culture of Peace”, International Year for Cultural Heritage 2002).

14. A broad sense of commonality could be reached through the mutual adherence to the universally shared cultural and spiritual values of religious monuments and sites, which cut across all cultures and civilizations. The major challenge will be to establish this dialogue through concrete interregional and subregional joint activities which should be developed in close consultation with all Member States.

**Exploring and examining possible means to promote religious<sup>10</sup> and sacred heritage as a symbol of peace and dialogue**

15. Ukraine proposes to explore and examine possible means to promote religious and sacred heritage as a symbol of peace and dialogue. Taking into account the crucial necessity to establish an all-round coordination and dialogue between all stakeholders regarding the protection of religious and sacred heritage, Ukraine also suggests examining in the future possible ways of establishing an International Scientific Committee for Religious and Sacred Heritage. Composed of international specialists and open to participation to the representatives of the religious and indigenous communities, such a Committee could become an advisory platform with the objective of facilitating communication and exchanges with communities, as well as performing analysis, reflection and development of an integrated strategy on the protection and promotion of religious and sacred properties.

16. In this regard the Secretariat could be requested to begin a study to compile a feasibility report and provide the necessary scientific and institutional rationale for establishment of such an International Scientific Committee.

17. This issue is ever more important considering the new challenges that have emerged with regard to the protection of monuments and sites with religious or spiritual meaning and the significance of their transmittal to future generations. To date, the existing standard-setting instruments may not adequately address the matter, as it was noted by all official representatives of the Member States, who have participated during the above-mentioned International Seminar in Kyiv.

18. Considering “the continuing nature of religious heritage” that calls “for dialogue and mutual understanding between communities” that is recognized in the Kyiv Statement and necessity of “enhancing the role of communities to avoid misunderstandings, tensions or stereotypes”, it is important that UNESCO play a leading role in defining a strategy and principles for the protection of monuments and sites with religious and spiritual meaning in coordination with all Member States and religious communities. These properties could be regarded as potential educational places for

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<sup>7</sup> The Executive Board has already requested, at its 174th session, the Director-General “to fulfill its commitment towards mutual understanding and respect for all peoples’ religious and cultural values, and freedom of expression” (174 EX/Decision 49).

<sup>8</sup> The General Conference at its 33rd session “invited the Director-General ... to strengthen activities designed to promote respect for and dialogue among all cultures” (33 C/Resolution 49) “Respect for freedom of expression and respect for sacred beliefs and values and religious and cultural symbols”.

<sup>9</sup> The NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee created an ad hoc group and developed a joint project entitled “Cultural Heritage for a Culture of Peace” to establish “A List of Monuments: Messengers of the Culture of Peace”. The project was developed also in accordance with the action plan for the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage in 2002” (implementation of United Nations General Assembly resolution 56/5, report submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 56/5 of 5 November 2001, entitled “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010”).

<sup>10</sup> “Considering the many initiatives of ICOMOS National Committees, the reflections carried out by organizations like ICCROM or the Council of Europe, and the current cooperation agreements between ICOMOS and other international organizations [...], bearing directly or potentially on the theme of religious heritage”, the 15th General Assembly of ICOMOS adopted its Resolution 32 on “Religious Heritage” (Xi’an, China, October 2005).

enhancing mutual respect, knowledge and understanding between communities that is in line with the UNESCO mandate for peace and dialogue.

19. Given the importance of the subject, Ukraine proposes to the Member States to consider and contribute to the development of this initiative.