



Citizens Advancing Protection of Earth's Treasures

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Launch of OurWorldHeritage

16 November 2020

14:00 - 15:00 CET

[Live on Facebook](#)

[Live on YouTube](#)

Press Release

Launch of OurWorldHeritage

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November 16, 2020. OURWORLDHERITAGE – a new initiative by citizens of more than 50 countries – launches today at 14:00 CET. Join us live online for this special event featuring a discussion on the challenges facing our shared heritage with political and professional leaders. Moderated by the international journalist Zeinab Badawi, further details are available on the initiative's [website](#). The event is free and open to the public and press, and can be attended online today from 14:00 - 15:00 CET (Central European Time) on both [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

This open initiative is being launched by concerned citizens from across the globe, bringing a rich diversity of cultures, ages, genders, background and expertise to bear on the challenges our heritage is facing. Created to guarantee the conservation/protection of the World's Heritage by increasing the role of civil society, the initiative welcomes all who believe that in our rapidly changing world there is an urgent need to preserve all heritage, at international, national and local levels.

The UNESCO World Heritage Convention is an important international treaty that has for almost 50 years played a major role in expanding heritage legislation worldwide and identifying and promoting the protection of a growing list of the World's most unique sites – both cultural and natural.

Sadly, today however, this instrument risks to collapse under its own success: with 1,121 listed sites, the crucial “protection and conservation” outlined in the treaty¹ has taken second place to list-making, and properties are increasingly threatened as politics and bargaining between States overrides protection. In simple terms corporations and governments often ignore the necessity to safeguard our World Heritage for the future, instead prioritizing immediate profit over long term values and the need to preserve our shared past.

Cases of failure to protect great heritage sites are common, ranging from Venice, where the issue of the large ships in the lagoon has yet to be resolved, to Vienna, where high-rise construction is spoiling the urban landscape, to the Selous National Park in Tanzania, endangered by the construction of a major dam, or Machu Picchu, where a new airport under construction will destroy the sacred landscape of the site.

When World Heritage was created in 1972, it was the expression of a collective vision for the protection of the masterpieces of human genius and of the marvels of nature.² But as the Convention approaches its 50th anniversary in 2022, safeguarding has become a secondary concern as many sites have lost or are about to lose their value due to extractive industries, the impact of tourism and for short-term financial development gains.

Today unfortunately, democratic and inclusive mechanisms that can help in monitoring and preventing damage to properties barely exist. The public – from local communities to international organizations – are seldom aware of how their States vote and behave at sessions of the international World Heritage Committee and often have very limited information on a site's *true* state of conservation. “*These human-made threats are on the top of others nearly non-manageable threats that come from natural disasters, climate change and military conflicts and wars,*” said Sibongile Masuku, from Sol Plaatje University (Heritage Studies,

¹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

² “...that deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world” - Preamble of the World Heritage Convention

<p>Sofia Sydney Toronto Venice Zurich</p>	<p>Northern Cape, South Africa), one of the initiative's founders. <i>"Only NGO's and communities' efforts can foster and force movement towards solutions"</i>.</p> <p>OURWORLDHERITAGE seeks to counter this destructive trend and renew the original spirit and mission of the World Heritage Convention, by engaging citizens, civil society groups and professional and academic organizations. The initiative aims to fill the void with new information gathering and monitoring tools open to the public. During 2021 solutions and tools will be developed in a series of monthly online activities open to all, aimed at debating the critical issues facing heritage conservation today and shaping practical proposals to adapt the World Heritage system to the needs of the 21st-Century.</p> <p>Founded with the premise that "Our cultural and natural heritage (continue to be) increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage or destruction" this new initiative is being founded and launched today by heritage leaders and concerned citizens from across the world. Its secretariat is based in The Netherlands and its governing board is global in representation.</p> <p><i>"OURWORLDHERITAGE is ready to cooperate with all international and national NGOs operating in the field of cultural and natural heritage protection to strengthen its ability to promote change in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention,"</i> stated Francesco Bandarin, Former Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, another of the initiative's founders.</p> <p>A major global event and conference on the future of the world's heritage will be organized in April 2022, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.</p>
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Press contacts:

Name	Languages	Telephone	City	Email	Availability (CET time)
Alec Marr	English	+61 417 229 670	Sydney	troopie28@gmail.com	11:00 pm. (NOV 15) 11:00 am.
Alonzo Addison	English	+1-510-280-4284	San Francisco	lonaddison-owh@yahoo.com	4:00 pm. 6:00 am.
Francesco Bandarin	English/French /Italian/Spanish	+33 6 8511 2095	Paris	f.bandarin@gmail.com	8:00 am. 8:00 pm.
Jad Tabet	French/English/ Arabic	+961 70 666 281	Beirut	jad.tabet@orange.fr	8:00 am. 6:00 pm.
Ivan Blokov	English/Russian	+7 903 795 80 55	Moscow	ivan.blokov@gmail.com	6:00 am. 9:00 pm.
Michael Turner	English, Hebrew	+ 972-2-6716492	Jerusalem	turnerm@013.net	8:00 am. 7:00 pm.
Sibongile Masuku	Siswati/ isiZulu/English	+27 82 345 5154	Kimberley	sibongiles.place@yahoo.com	8:00 am. 8:00 pm.

From the UN Sustainable Development Goals

With the UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11), countries have pledged to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. Within this goal, Target 11.4 aims to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage”.

The Tools

To achieve our goals, a cluster of independent information tools will be developed, including:

- Creating a global **partnership network** of concerned individuals, organizations and institutions, academic and professional, to foster and strengthen information exchange and to use the most effective tools, both analog and digital – by raising public awareness and engaging local and regional communities, releasing information in social and traditional media, creating petitions and campaigns.
- An open, online, real-time **crisis forum** for the public, professionals, NGOs, academics and the media to be able to flag and track situations where heritage sites are threatened.
- A comprehensive online **monitoring tool** available to the general public, professionals, academics, NGOs, the press and media to track conservation progress at World Heritage sites, both those that have already been adopted by UNESCO and those aspiring to be adopted. This will be supported by a global heritage index, assessing heritage protection over time.
- A series of online and in-person **advocacy forums** to discuss, promote change and transform the way in which heritage protection is managed nationally and how World Heritage sites are protected, conserved and interpreted by refocusing decision-making on a “thorough shared understanding of their universal, national and local values and their socio-ecological context by all stakeholders, including local communities and indigenous peoples; a respect for diversity, equity, gender equality and human rights and the use of inclusive and participatory planning and stakeholder consultation processes”³.
- A **repository of information** on critical issues facing sites, to help broaden public understanding of the fragility of our heritage.

³ Operational Guidelines to the World Heritage Convention, paragraph 111 (a) and (b)

Some of the initiators of OURWORLDHERITAGE

1	George Abungu	Archaeologist and former Director-General, National Museums of Kenya. (Nairobi, Kenya)
2	Alonzo Addison	Digital Heritage specialist, Architect, Professor, and former UNESCO Director. (Berkeley, California, USA)
3	Francesco Bandarin	Former Director, UNESCO World Heritage Centre and former UNESCO Asst. Director General for Culture (Paris, France)
4	Ivan Blokov	Program, Research and Expertise Director, Greenpeace. (Moscow, Russia)
5	Christina Cameron	Former Heritage Director, Parks Canada and former President of the World Heritage Committee, 1990 and 2008. (Canada)
6	Yonca Erkan	Professor of heritage management and UNESCO Chair in Management and Promotion of World Heritage Sites, Kadir Has University. (Istanbul, Turkey)
7	Maaïke Goedkoop	Urban Planner and Cultural Heritage specialist. (Zurich, Switzerland)
8	Anna Kirilenko	Executive Director of the Ecological Movement BIOM. (Kirgiz, Republic)
9	Cyril Kormos	Founder and Executive Director, Wild Heritage. (USA)
10	Kuanghan Li	Director of Programs, Global Heritage Fund; and Assistant Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Institute for Training and Research. (Beijing, China)
11	Jean-Louis Luxen	Professor, University of Louvain; former Secretary General, ICOMOS; and General Administrator of the Dept. of Cultural Affairs of Belgium. (Belgium)
12	Alec Marr	World Heritage strategist and lobbyist. (Sydney, Australia)
13	Sibongile Masuku	Environmental and heritage specialist, and Lecturer, Heritage Studies, Sol Plaatje University. (South Africa)
14	Lynn Meskell	Archaeologist, and Professor, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania and A.D. White Professor-at-large, Cornell University. (USA)
15	Dawson Munjeri	University of Great Zimbabwe. (Masvingo, Zimbabwe)
16	Nimmy Namrata	Architect and Conservation specialist. (India and Singapore)
17	Mônica Bahia Schlee	Architect and urban planner, Rio de Janeiro City Hall and Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, specialized in urban and landscape planning. (Brazil)
18	Fernando Perez Oyarzun	Architect and Professor, Catholic University of Santiago. (Chile)
19	Daniele Pini	Professor of Urban Conservation, University of Ferrara, and Consultant in urban conservation. (Italy)
20	Andrey Petrov	Geographer and Coordinator, World Heritage Campaigns of Greenpeace. (Russia)
21	Dennis Rodwell	Specialist, Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development. (Edinburgh, UK.)
22	Maria Eugenia Siguencia Avila	Asst. Professor, School of Architecture of Cuenca and Coordinator, ELUCIDARE H2020. (Ecuador)
23	Jad Tabet	President of the Lebanese Order of Engineers and Architects; and President of the Arab Union of Architects. (Beirut, Lebanon)
24	Imrana Tiwana	General Secretary of the Lahore Conservation Society. (Pakistan)
25	Michael Turner	Architect and planner; Professor and UNESCO Chair in Urban Design and Conservation Studies, Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design. (Jerusalem, Israel)
26	Minja Yang	President & Professor Emeritus, R. Lemaire Int'l Centre for Conservation, KU Leuven and former Director, UNESCO New Delhi Office. (Belgium)
27	Ege Yildirim	Urban Planner and Heritage management specialist; ICOMOS Focal Point for the UN SDGs 2016-2020. (Istanbul, Turkey)