

**UNESCO Sub-regional Conference on World Heritage  
17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> April 2023, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh**



UNESCO New Delhi and the Tourism Department of the Government of Madhya Pradesh organised UNESCO Sub-regional Conference on World Heritage on 17-18 April 2023 at Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh with the title **“The Next 50: Ways Forward for South Asia World Heritage”**. The objective was capacity building in the field of maintaining and safeguarding world heritage sites. Delegation from Mountain Railways of India led by Ms. Vinita Srivastava, Executive Director (Heritage), Railway Board also participated in the Conference. The UNESCO Vision Statement 2023 is attached for information and guidance of all Railway Officials concerned with conservation and promotion of Railway Heritage. Extract on **“Cultural Landscape”** relevant to railway industrial heritage is reproduced below:

**Cultural Landscape**

**We acknowledge the rich repository of cultural landscapes in South Asia with its diverse geography, centuries old histories, traditions and the wide range of indigenous communities.**

**We agree to address the gap in recognition of Cultural Landscapes in South Asia including Archaeological landscapes, Institutional landscapes, Military landscapes, Industrial landscapes, Sacred landscapes and the like, we intend to move forward in a more inclusive, community-led recognition of Cultural Landscapes on World Heritage and the Tentative lists.**

## UNESCO Sub-regional Conference on World Heritage: The Next 50 Ways Forward for South Asia World Heritage

### The Bhopal Vision Statement

18 April 2023

#### Preamble

We, the participants<sup>1</sup>: Governments, civil society, academics, cultural institutions, and corporate foundations from **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka**, gathered in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India, on the occasion of *the Sub-regional Conference on World Heritage marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: The Next 50*", wish to acknowledge the generous hospitality of the State Government of Madhya Pradesh and support provided by the Ministry of Culture of India, and the institutional leadership of UNESCO New Delhi for providing a forum to reflect on the achievements, present issues and ways forward for the future of the World Heritage Convention for South Asian state parties;

**We recall the theme of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention *World Heritage: Sustainable Development and Local Communities*"** and reaffirm that the relationship between World Heritage and local communities is indeed at the heart of the Convention;

**We acknowledge** the significance of the theme adopted for this Fiftieth Anniversary, "**The Next 50**", taking into account the enormous challenges confronting World Heritage properties, associated with development pressures, conflicts, human-made and natural disasters, as well as climate change;

#### Achievements of 50 years of the World Heritage Convention

**We recognise** that the World Heritage Convention, with its 194 States Parties, is one of the most potent tools for conservation of our heritage, with a shared vision combining the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value in one single instrument, but also for achieving 2030 Sustainable Development Goals;

**We acknowledge** the significant contribution of the Convention to social cohesion, dialogue, tolerance, cultural diversity, and peace through its emphasis on the common and shared importance of World Heritage for all of humankind and for the promotion of international cooperation for its safeguarding;

#### The Next 50 and the Role of World Heritage

**We are conscious** of the enormous challenges our planet is facing to ensure its sustainability, which would take into consideration a broader picture of human progress beyond mere material well-being;

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<sup>1</sup> The full list of the participants is attached in the annex

**We acknowledge** the need to continue to strive to implement the Global strategy for a more representative, credible and balanced World Heritage list for South Asia;

**We acknowledge** the growing urbanisation of South Asian countries and that this is placing an enormous strain on historic urban settlements in our region;

**We further acknowledge** that climate change is a particularly serious challenge to cultural and natural heritage of South Asian countries, given our geography, topography, and historical settlement patterns based around water;

**We acknowledge** the role of communities and the importance of enabling all its members to be actively engaged in safeguarding our World Heritage and protecting the environment for sustainable development. We recognise that improved participation of community depends upon, inter alia, strengthening access to information and building capacity;

**We recognise** that the traditional/ indigenous knowledge, technologies, innovations, and practices of indigenous peoples and local communities make an essential contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and their wider application and interpretation can support social well-being and sustainable livelihoods. Unless such a sustainable development perspective is integrated and acknowledged in the management of World Heritage sites but also all other cultural and natural heritage sites, it will be difficult in the long run to ensure its Outstanding Universal Value;

### **A Call for Action**

For fifty years, the World Heritage Convention has embodied global ideas and ethics of conservation. **For the Next 50 years to come, we want to highlight the increased importance of a holistic approach in our endeavours to include wider dimensions arising from new emerging challenges that threaten the foundation of our societies**

### **Local Community**

**We reiterate** the important role of communities, including local communities and indigenous peoples, in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, in accordance with one of its five strategic objectives, the fifth "C" adopted in 2007 by the World Heritage Committee;

In this context, we recall the **Article 5 of The Convention, recommending the State Parties to "give heritage a role in the life of the community"**, thereby stating that the concerns and aspirations of communities must be taken into account in the conservation and management efforts of the World Heritage. Only through strengthened **relationships between people and heritage** will "sustainable development" be possible and attainable;

### **World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism**

**We advocate** that properly planned and responsibly managed cultural heritage tourism must involve participatory governance with diverse cultures, rights-holders, and stakeholders, which **can be a powerful vehicle for the preservation of cultural heritage and sustainable development, and local communities empowerment. Responsible tourism** promotes and creates cultural heritage awareness, provides opportunities for personal and community well-being and resilience, and builds respect for the diversity of other cultures;

In this regard, we affirm that **benefits derived from well-protected cultural and natural heritage should be equitably distributed to communities** to foster sustainable development. In this regard, the empowerment of communities and appreciation **of cultural diversities by visitors** should be considered as one of the most important basic principles for

sustainable tourism.

**We advocate** that cultural heritage tourism stakeholders place **the protection of cultural heritage and community rights at the heart of cultural heritage tourism policy and projects** by providing principles that will inform responsible and sustainable tourism planning and management, community resilience, and adaptation;

### **Cultural Landscape**

**We acknowledge** the rich repository of cultural landscapes in South Asia with its diverse geography, centuries old histories, traditions and the wide range of indigenous communities;

**We agree** to address the gap in recognition of Cultural Landscapes in South Asia including Archaeological landscapes, Institutional landscapes, Military landscapes, Industrial landscapes, Sacred landscapes and the like, we intend to move forward in a more inclusive, community-led recognition of Cultural Landscapes on World Heritage and the Tentative lists;

### **Historic Urban Landscape/Historic Cities and Sustainable Development**

**We acknowledge** that historic urban environments contribute to the quality of life by providing a sense of place and belonging, creating inter-generational connections and opportunities for social cohesion, thus building stronger communities.'

**We recognise** the need for conservation and the revitalization of historic urban areas in balance with sustainable development and that the preservation of the physical environment must be combined with a focus on the entire human environment with all of its tangible and intangible qualities. If rehabilitation is carefully planned and well implemented, it can greatly leverage the cultural and natural heritage of urban areas and historic city centres for people-centred sustainable development and considerably increase the quality of life;

**We realise** that **historic urban environments** are dynamic and an approach must be adopted that sees and interprets them **as a continuum in time and space**;

### **World Heritage and Climate Change and Traditional Knowledge/Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**We recognise** intangible cultural heritage is enabled by the traditional knowledge systems;

**We acknowledge** the importance of preserving traditional knowledge systems which are specific to climatic, social and cultural environments, as they offer valuable insights on how to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change;

**We advocate** strengthening of community based solutions along with traditional knowledge systems to build resilience and to reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts;

**We recommend** safeguarding of traditional knowledge systems as well as considering its integration into modern practices to promote sustainability.

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India  
18 April 2023