

ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

ICOMOS Statement to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) Sharm El Sheikh (Egypt), 6-18 November 2022

Preamble

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is committed to the conservation and protection of cultural heritage places which have significant cultural and socio-economic values to their custodian communities. ICOMOS is present in Africa through National Committees in sixteen (16) countries and has individual members in many more.

It is an advisory body to the World Heritage Committee for the implementation of the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention and a unique global non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting the application of theory, methodology, and scientific techniques to the conservation of cultural heritage. ICOMOS is also the Secretariat of the Climate Heritage Network (CHN), a voluntary, mutual support network of government agencies, NGOs, universities, businesses, and other organizations committed to tackling climate change and achieving the ambitions of the Paris Agreement by working to reorient climate policy, planning, and action at all levels to account for dimensions of culture - from arts to heritage.

On the occasion of the COP27, ICOMOS:

Recalling:

- The [African Union's Agenda 2063](#) and its Aspiration 1 "*A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development*" (using mainly adaptive measures to address climate change risks) and Aspiration 5 on "*An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics*".
- Global commitments to climate action, in particular the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report "[Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#)" with particular reference to Chapter 9 on Africa, which also highlights the climate risks to cultural heritage;
- The [Ngorongoro Declaration \(2016\)](#) to promote sustainable development while guaranteeing the conservation of African cultural and natural heritage in line with its visionary Agenda 2063;
- The [Climate Heritage Network Manifesto](#) for COP27 which provides key messages on culture and climate change to inspire climate action and engagement in climate change policy development through culture and heritage, and encourages greater synergistic collaboration on climate action with other sectors and partners in response to the urgency of the situation.

Recognizing, that:

1. The African continent, the cradle of humanity, is rich in heritage resources and endogenous, traditional knowledge, as represented by its 141 World Heritage sites.
2. Africa's cultural heritage is severely threatened by climate change with climate hazards such as sea level rise, coastal erosion and floods induced by increased precipitation. Many of these heritage sites are not adequately prepared or adapted to future climate change;
3. Climate change has already led to the devastating loss of traditional cultures and ways of life; loss of language and knowledge systems; and irreversible damage to heritage sites;
4. The potential severity of risks, loss and damage to African heritage from climate change is high and is already seen at emblematic sites such as the Lamu Old Town and Archipelago in Kenya, where sea level rise has impacted low-lying areas and climate variability affected protective mangroves; the Golden Gate Highlands, South Africa, where rainfall and atmospheric changes have caused lush lichen growth on rock art; in Libya, where Sabratha, the Roman coastal city is affected by sea level rise, local flooding and coastal erosion;
5. There are knowledge gaps regarding climate risk to African cultural heritage, particularly in the understanding of its nature, intensity, impact and limits;
6. The African Risk Capacity (ARC) Group - a specialized agency of the African Union - the African Development Bank and other development partners, can provide a parametric pooling insurance system against climate-related disasters to manage climate risk in Africa;

7. The African Group of Negotiators (AGN) has prioritized the protection of coastal communities and cultural sites as requiring finance.

Commends the efforts that have been provided by the Member States of the World Heritage Convention, the World Heritage Centre, the African World Heritage Fund as well as the scientific community and heritage professionals towards identifying and addressing the impacts of climate change on World Heritage; and

Reiterates its commitment to the protection of heritage sites in Africa from the impacts of climate change, that began with the development of the document "The Future of our Pasts" through to ICOMOS' Triennial Scientific Plan for 2021-2024 focusing on Cultural Heritage and Climate Action and the flagship project "Climate Vulnerability Index-Africa" (CVI-Africa) implemented by ICOMOS and the African World Heritage Fund with other partners at two African World Heritage Sites: Kilwa Kisiwani (Tanzania) and Sukur Cultural Landscape (Nigeria). ICOMOS has further supported, through the CHN, the presence of African cultural heritage specialists at a special session at the COP27 (#AfricanHeritageVoicesCOP27).

And **calls for joint action** by various institutions such as the African Development Bank, the African Union and its African Risk Capacity Group, the African Group of Negotiators and development partners:

1. To enhance learning for climate action from the diversity of African indigenous knowledge and local knowledge systems to provide a solid basis for local/national adaptation and mitigation actions at African heritage sites and to apply at larger scale for urban and development initiatives;
2. To address loss and damage to cultural heritage through the Santiago Network for Loss and Damage;
3. To encourage research to advance the understanding of climate-related risks and impacts on heritage sites in Africa, and to provide responses to build site and community resilience, particularly through livelihood diversification for tourism-dependent economies;
4. For the creation of a thematic area on cultural heritage under the Nairobi Work Programme to help accelerate climate adaptation action;
5. To include cultural heritage considerations in the disaster risk management planning of African governments and incorporate them as an integral part of planning at the level of the African Union's specialized African Risk Capacity agency.
6. To invest in early warning systems recognized by the disaster management community in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (priority 4) and the Paris Climate Agreement (Article 7).

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