

Workshop Oslo 9-11 March 2011

'Our common dignity: Towards Rights-Based World Heritage Management'

INTRODUCTION

The Workshop aspires to identify a set of recommendations that illustrate how planning and implementation of World Heritage work may benefit from adopting a clearer perspective on the meanings of human rights and entitlements.

Grounded in thinking about how to further sustainable development, the World Heritage concept, and concern for the future of the World Heritage Convention, such recommendations are intended to strengthen the respect for and fulfilment of human rights in all activities that affect our world's common heritage by serving as a 'sustainability check' complementing the WHC Operational Guidelines.

Is the World Heritage Convention (WHC), dating from 1972 (and with no direct references to human rights) sufficiently well equipped to deal with conflicts that may arise between local communities and national authorities when properties are identified as World Heritage? Can understanding of human rights be of help in handling potential conflicts and channel them into calmer waters?

In 1993 in Vienna all of the world's nations reaffirmed their belief in the universality and indivisibility of human rights. Today references to human rights are included as a matter of routine in virtually all international policy and legal documents. Moreover, during the years since then rights-based approaches have been elaborated and put into use everywhere in world politics, particularly in the UN system.

"World Heritage" as a UNESCO flagship program – and UNESCO as a member of the UN family – remains pledged to respect, protect and fulfil international human rights obligations. The WHC Operational Guidelines point to how local acceptance and participation is necessary in different planning procedures. Nevertheless, processes involved in identifying and managing natural and cultural heritage property are seen to be affected by difficult and sometimes violent social, cultural and political conflicts.

In a world that is increasingly using human rights as a common yardstick of achievement as well as a tool in development, further awareness of how WH property identification and management affect and can be affected by human rights seems necessary. There is a growing realisation that by basing social, economic and cultural policies on the human rights and entitlements of all stakeholders, we are empowering the actors involved and contributing to building more peaceful societies.

Discussions of such issues at the Oslo Workshop shall hopefully demonstrate how human rights-based approaches can represent a useful complement to existing routines and procedures in WH work.

In addition to a number of key presentations that shed light on the general themes of the workshop – human rights and world heritage management – a selection of cases will be presented in order to enrich the understanding and sharpen the argument. The cases range from natural areas to townscapes, and, as importantly, involve very different state administrative practices and management strategies.

In this way we hope to share between us a wider understanding of how concrete WH-related issues can impact on human rights, and – even more important for reaching the goal of this workshop – understand how human rights considerations might positively influence our future World Heritage work.

Oslo, March, 2011

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