

**REPORT ON THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION
JULY 2-12, 2017**

The 41st Session of the World Heritage Committee inscribed 21 new sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List last month during its annual meeting, increasing the number of listed properties to 1,073 that have received this highest designation available globally for a cultural or natural site. Convened in Krakow, Poland, July 2-12, 2017, the representatives of the 21 State Parties elected by the United Nations General Assembly to oversee the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage discussed a number of issues related to the list.

In addition to the 21 elected members of the World Heritage Committee, delegates from among the 193 Member States of the United Nations watched the proceedings as did specially credentialed Observers including Professor Glenn T. Eskew of the Georgia State University World Heritage Initiative and Mr. Ed Hall of the Alabama Tourism Department which is funding the GSU effort to develop a Serial Nomination of U. S. Civil Rights Sites.

Now with Murrell-Hall International and a consultant for the state agency he once served as founding director, Hall stopped by UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in route to Krakow in order to meet with George C. Papagiannis, the Chief of the Media Services Section of UNESCO, who has been a longtime advocate of historic sites associated with the American civil rights movement being inscribed on the World Heritage List.



Left: Mr. George C. Papagiannis, Chief of UNESCO Media Services Section, who previously toured movement sites with Birmingham Mayor William Bell and supports the Serial Nomination of U. S. Civil Rights Sites.



Right: As the State of Alabama's first director of tourism, Hall pioneered in state-sponsored African-American tourism with the production of Alabama's Black Heritage and he sees his work on behalf of inscribing civil rights sites on the World Heritage List as the culmination of these efforts.

Photographs courtesy of Ed Hall

National Park Service Historian in the Office of International Affairs, Phyllis Ellin, represented our State Party along with Director Gregory D. Thome of the Bureau of International Organizations in the U. S. State Department and First Secretary, Political Advisor Michael J. Garuckis of the United States Mission to UNESCO.

Professor Jacek Purchla of Jagiellonian University chaired this year's deliberations with assistance from the World Heritage Committee Director Dr. Mechtild Rossler. Officials from the Advisory Bodies—the International Council on Monuments and Sites or ICOMOS, which oversees cultural properties, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature or IUCN, which oversees natural properties—weighed in with expert opinion regarding the nominations.

At its annual meeting, the Committee evaluates the nominated sites and determines what new properties meet the stringent UNESCO Criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List. The committee hears reports concerning the conservation of existing sites and what properties are not being managed properly or what properties should be put on or taken off the List of World Heritage in Danger. Also the committee allocates the use of the World Heritage Fund.

Currently 182 State Parties have submitted Tentative Lists to the World Heritage Committee and these lists consist of 1,710 sites being prepared for nomination. This year's committee evaluated 33 nominations but only 21 received approval for inscription.



Under the judicious eyes of Chairman Jacek Purchla and World Heritage Committee Director Mechtild Rossler, committee members discuss the nomination by Japan of the Sacred Islands of Okinoshima as delegates of State Parties, observers, and the media listen from their seats in the ICE Krakow Congress Centre, Poland.

The session had plenty of excitement. At the onset of deliberations that resulted in the inscription of 18 new cultural and 3 natural sites came the nomination by Palestine of the ancient

city of Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town which is located in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, resulting in political recriminations after the committee both approved Hebron's listing but also identified it as a World Heritage in Danger Site.

While critics expressed concern over the listing of Okinoshima, a sacred island off the coast of Japan that bans women, the committee approved its inscription after advisors explained that other World Heritage Sites had gender proscriptions. The nomination of the modernist architecture in Asmara from its days as a colony of Italy proved controversial too because its state party, Eritrea, bans foreign travelers to the city and has been accused by the UN of crimes against humanity.

Of significance to the GSU World Heritage Initiative was the inscription of Valongo Wharf in Rio de Janeiro, the place of arrival for ninety percent of the enslaved Africans to South America and a Site of Conscience and Memory.

Popular places made the list this time including England's Lake District, which already attracts 18 million tourists a year, the island of Kulangsu near Xiamen, China, the Greco-Roman Aphrodisias in Turkey, the Sambor Prei Kuk temples in Cambodia, the walled city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, India as well as such remote places as a national forest in Patagonia, Argentina and the Landscapes of Dauria between Russia and Mongolia.

Reports warning of removal from the World Heritage List were also handed down. Perhaps unsympathetic development offers the greatest threat to the treasured status of inscription. At this year's meeting the Historic Center of Vienna became the fifty-fourth property currently placed on the World Heritage in Danger List because recent construction projects impact adversely the outstanding universal value of the site. Other currently listed endangered properties such as the Tower of London with its increasingly compromised viewshed by postmodern skyscrapers such as the "Gherkin," and Liverpool, with its proposed waterfront redevelopment, struggle to remain on the list.

Only one site has ever been removed from the World Heritage List since its creation in 1972, that being the city of Dresden, Germany, because of the ill-placement of a controversial bridge over the River Elbe in 2013. At this year's session, the Gelati Monastery in Georgia was taken off the Endangered List.

The twenty-one state parties that comprised the World Heritage Committee in 2017 were Angola, Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Croatia, Cuba, Finland, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Tunisia, Turkey, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam, Zimbabwe.