



**Statement of World Heritage USA
Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations for the State Department's Contributions to International
Organizations Budget and Related Issues
Prepared for the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
May 31, 2023**

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Graham and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to present World Heritage USA's recommendations for Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations. My name is Thomas Cassidy, and I am the Advocacy Chair of the organization's Board of Trustees. World Heritage USA is a privately funded nonprofit organization that is part of a worldwide network of people, institutions, government agencies, and private corporations that support the conservation of the world's heritage. A principal focus of our domestic work is advocacy in support of existing and potential U.S. World Heritage sites, which also advances the standing of the U.S. in the global World Heritage community.

Thank you for the FY 2023 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill. It provided robust funding for the State Department's Contributions to International Organization's (CIO) budget which among other things is the source of funding for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Heritage Committee. We are also pleased to see Congressional enactment of authorities that permit the President to waive the restrictions on contributions to UNESCO established in P.L. 101-146 and P.L. 103-236.

In addition to fully funding the Administration's FY24 budget request for CIO, we specifically and urgently request the Committee to direct the Department of State to use its FY 23 appropriation to pay this year's World Heritage Committee dues, which we understand to be approximately \$588,000, and to use its FY24 appropriation to pay both annual dues and any arrearages that have accrued since the U.S. last paid dues in 2011.

We look forward to working with this Subcommittee as you address the ongoing needs for investments in international cultural and environmental programs through the CIO and other budgets, especially paying U.S. dues to the World Heritage Committee.

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United States Committee, International Council on Monuments and Sites
Comité des Etats-Unis, Conseil International des Monuments et des Sites
Comité de los Estados Unidos, Consejo Internacional de Monumentos y Sitios
Комитет США Международного совета по вопросам памятников и достопримечательностей

Background on the World Heritage Program

In 1972, UNESCO adopted the World Heritage Convention (Convention) which has subsequently been ratified by 195 states parties. The United States was a prime mover in the creation of the Convention which seeks to foster international cooperation to protect globally-significant sites. The U.S. was also the first nation to ratify the convention. The Convention established the World Heritage Committee within UNESCO to coordinate all matters related to World Heritage, including maintenance of the list of World Heritage Sites. For expert assistance, the Committee has three advisory bodies: the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS); the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

As the professional and scientific adviser to the Committee on all aspects of cultural heritage, ICOMOS is responsible for the evaluation of all nominations of cultural properties made to the World Heritage List using the criteria established by the World Heritage Committee.

World Heritage USA is the United States National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites. We are the oldest and one of the largest of the 110 ICOMOS National Committees. For over 50 years, we have worked to deliver the best of international historic preservation and heritage conservation practices to the U.S. domestic preservation dialogue, while sharing and interpreting for the world the American historic preservation system.

World Heritage Sites in the United States

There are 24 World Heritage Sites in the United States, including Yellowstone and Mesa Verde National Parks, which were both among the 12 sites first inscribed in 1978. Other U.S. sites include the Statue of Liberty, Chaco Culture, Independence Hall, Hawaii Volcanoes, Great Smoky Mountains, Everglades, and Cahokia Mounds.

This year the World Heritage Committee is considering the U.S. nomination of Ohio's Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks. And in February the U.S. announced its first multi-country nomination to the World Heritage List for Moravian Church Settlements, which include the Historic Moravian Bethlehem District in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and historic settlements in Herrnhut, Germany, and Gracehill in Northern Ireland, United Kingdom. The sites would join Christiansfeld, Denmark, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2015, to form a single World Heritage listing for all the Moravian Church Settlements.

Sites on the U.S. Tentative List that are actively moving towards nomination include a serial nomination of U.S. Civil Rights Movement Sites and the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

UNESCO and World Heritage Committee Dues

In 2011, UNESCO voted to admit Palestine as a member state and thereby triggered a Congressional suspension of payments to U.N. agencies that recognized Palestine, including UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee. In 2017, President Trump withdrew the United States from UNESCO. The United States continues to be a signatory to the World Heritage Convention and, fortunately, U.S. nominations for World Heritage sites have continued to be considered by the World Heritage Committee.

The United States last paid World Heritage dues of approximately \$700,000 in 2011. Total arrearages are about \$8 million, and the current annual dues are estimated to be \$588,000. World Heritage USA believes strongly that continued – and ideally enhanced – engagement by the United States with the World Heritage Committee requires payment of dues. Quite simply, and understandably, other state parties have openly complained that it is not fair for the U.S. to utilize the system, including consulting with the World Heritage Committee on details of future designations, without paying for the program’s costs. Although several U.S. nominations have been approved by the Committee since the suspension of paying dues, we are concerned that other countries may look askance at future U.S. nominations thereby jeopardizing acceptance of future U.S. sites.

Additional Reasons to Reengage with the World Heritage Committee and UNESCO

This Committee – and the Biden Administration – have recognized for several years that engagement with UNESCO would enable the United States to counter Chinese influence and promote other national interests of the United States. China’s involvement in the World Heritage program has accelerated as U.S. participation has decreased. In addition to hosting previous World Heritage Committee sessions, the number of World Heritage Sites in China has increased dramatically over the past 20 years to include 56 sites, the second largest total of sites just after Italy’s 58 sites. China is also using the cultural legacy of the Silk Road to advance its One Belt, One Road initiative and promote its geopolitical and economic interests in Asia, Africa and elsewhere.

With the increasingly visible interests of the U.S. in the Pacific, there is an opportunity to advance four sites on the U.S. Tentative List for possible future inscription, including the Pacific Remote Islands National Monument, as a strategic element of our soft diplomacy in the region.

Plainly, there is also a need for the United States to counter Russian influence in the international community. We were pleased that last year the United States was one of 46 nations to join the United Kingdom in urging the World Heritage Committee to cancel its scheduled meeting in Russia and stating that the signatories would not attend a rescheduled meeting chaired by Russia in any other nation.

Earlier this year, the World Heritage Committee, at the request of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, utilized its emergency procedures to both inscribe the Historic Center of the Port City of Odessa on the World Heritage List and to include the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Last year World Heritage USA was honored that Ukraine’s Deputy Minister of Culture and World Heritage joined our annual celebration to describe the destruction and challenges of preserving her nation’s heritage resources. We look forward to engaging in international efforts to invest in programs that can preserve and reconstruct Ukraine’s national heritage.

Thank you for considering our testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.