

ICOMOS-USA

International Council on Monuments and Sites

Statement of ICOMOS – USA
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations, Department of State
May 31, 2024

Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Graham and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to present the recommendations for Fiscal Year 2025 State Department appropriations from the United States National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS-USA). My name is Thomas Cassidy, and I am the Advocacy Chair of the organization's Board of Trustees.

ICOMOS-USA is a privately funded nonprofit organization. As the oldest and one of the largest of the 110 National Committees of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), ICOMOS-USA has played a critical role in the conservation and protection of cultural heritage sites across the world for over half a century. ICOMOS-USA is a proud member of the worldwide ICOMOS alliance and a vital bridge linking preservation professionals in the United States with our counterparts in other countries. As the only U.S. professional preservation organization with a global focus, ICOMOS-USA remains the gateway for U.S. professionals to participate in worldwide heritage conservation. A principal focus of our domestic work is advocacy on behalf of the World Heritage program.

Thank you for the FY 2024 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill. We were inspired by Chairwoman Patty Murray's March 21 statement that the FY24 State and Foreign Appropriations bill provides "\$3.4 billion to meet our commitments and fully fund our dues to the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations." We were also pleased to see robust funding for both the State Department's Contributions to International Organizations (CIO) and International Operations and Programs (IO&P) accounts.

We support the Administration's FY25 request for increases over FY24 enacted for both of these accounts.

Our principal concern, however, is the United States' continued failure to pay its assessed voluntary contribution to the World Heritage fund. This despite our rejoining UNESCO last July. In fact, the last time the United States honored its commitment to the World Heritage Fund was in 2011 when we paid utilizing the IO&P account.

From our conversations with the State Department, we understand that it does not plan to use any FY24 or FY25 CIO funds for payment to the World Heritage fund. Given that, we have urged the Department to utilize the IO&P account for UNESCO's 2024 assessed contribution of \$753,989 to the World Heritage Fund.

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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

We request that the Committee direct the Department, at minimum, to pay the 2024 and 2025 assessments from the IO&P account and develop a plan to pay the United States' arrearages from the CIO or IO&P accounts in the near future. Our best understanding is that the total arrearages are about \$8,500,000.

Background on the World Heritage Program

The UNESCO adopted the World Heritage Convention in 1972. The United States was a prime mover in the creation of the World Heritage Convention, which seeks to foster international cooperation to protect globally significant sites and was also the first nation to ratify the convention. The World Heritage Center is responsible for coordinating within UNESCO all matters related to World Heritage, including maintenance of the list of World Heritage Sites. The Committee has three advisory bodies including the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

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 with the criteria established by the World Heritage Committee.

The value of the World Heritage Program has been well described by the State Department:

In 1972, the United States proposed the World Heritage Convention to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and was the first state to ratify that convention. The World Heritage Program promotes local and international cooperation for the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Significantly, it is the most widely accepted international conservation treaty in the world, which has resulted in the American concept of national parks being implemented worldwide.¹

Similarly, the State Department has recognized the importance of World Heritage in multiple reports and statements. For example, in December, 2022 attention was drawn to the Administration's action "withdrawing oil and gas development from the broader Chaco Canyon Landscape, a UNESCO World Heritage Site."² The Department's 2022 Report on Religions Freedom reported our Embassy in Iraq's announcement of "an additional \$750,000 in U.S. funding for the further renovation of the Lalish Temple, the holiest Yezidi temple and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, bringing total U.S. support to more than \$2.3 million."³ And the Department in its 2021 report on foreign terrorism

¹ <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/io/unesco/c48319.htm>

² "Highlighting U.S. Efforts to Combat the Biodiversity Crisis, Fact Sheet," Office of the Spokesperson, December 15, 2022; <https://www.state.gov/highlighting-u-s-efforts-to-combat-the-biodiversity-crisis/>

³ "2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: IRAQ," <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/iraq/>

cited the inhumanity of a terrorist group's destruction of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Mali.⁴

We understand the Department's Office of Cultural Heritage has identified over 260 historic structures and properties, *including 25 in UNESCO World Heritage Sites*, in U.S. embassies, consulates, and residences worldwide. These buildings have been described as "the stages on which our diplomats advance American ideals of democracy and free enterprise around the globe."⁵

World Heritage Sites in the United States

There are 25 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, Everglades, and Cahokia Mounds.

We are pleased that the State Department – and other federal agencies – continue to participate in significant World Heritage activities – including traveling to Saudi Arabia for last year's celebratory inscription of Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks on the World Heritage List. That inscription – like Chaco Culture National Historic Park, Taos Pueblo, Monumental Earthworks of Poverty Point, Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, and Mesa Verde National Park – is a powerful demonstration of the United States' commitment to the outstanding universal value of Indigenous cultures.

We look forward to this year's expected inscription of the serial transnational nomination of Moravian Church Settlement sites in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the United Kingdom, and Germany. And, in future years we look forward to successful inscriptions of both the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and the Serial Nomination of United States Civil Rights Movement Sites.

Additional Reasons to Reengage with the World Heritage Committee

ICOMOS-USA believes strongly that continued – and ideally enhanced – engagement by the United States with the World Heritage Committee requires payment of dues. Quite simply, representatives of 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 helping to meet the costs of the system. Although a number of U.S. nominations have been approved by the Committee, we are concerned that other countries may look askance at future U.S. nominations, thereby jeopardizing acceptance of future U.S. sites when we are not contributing to the costs of the World Heritage program.

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

⁴ "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021, Chapter 5, Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Africa"

<https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/>

⁵ See "Fund to Conserve United States Diplomatic Treasures Abroad," <https://fundtoconserve.org/program-in-honor-of-preservation-month>

World Heritage program has accelerated as our participation has decreased. Among other things, the number of World Heritage Sites in China has increased dramatically over the past 20 years, and now includes 57 sites, the second largest total of sites globally just after Italy's 59 sites. China is also using the cultural legacy of the Silk Road to advance its One Belt, One Road initiative and promote its geo-political and economic interests in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere.

There is also a well-recognized need for the United States to broadly counter Russian influence in the international community. We were pleased that in 2022 the United States was one of 46 nations to join the United Kingdom in urging the World Heritage Committee to not hold its scheduled meeting in Russia and stating that the signatories would not attend a meeting in any other nation chaired by Russia.

And last year, the World Heritage Committee, at the request of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, utilized its emergency procedures to both inscribe the Historic Center of the Port City of Odessa on the list of World Heritage and also to include the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger. In 2022, we were 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 and other sites damaged by conflict.

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 in U.S. Territorial Waters, as a strategic element of our soft diplomacy in the region.

Paying our annual contribution to the World Heritage Fund should be a part of our commitment to promoting our national values on the global stage. As we approach the one-year anniversary of rejoining UNESCO we believe strongly this is the time for the United States to once again demonstrate its financial commitment to this well-known UNESCO program.

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