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The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

THE HA NOI OUTCOME DOCUMENT

on Heritage and Authenticity

With the contribution of:

unesco Viet Nam National Commission for UNESCO

HÀ NỘI

Ninh Bình

PREAMBLE

1. We, the participants, gathered in Ha Noi and Ninh Binh (the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam) for the Asia-Pacific Dialogue on Heritage and Authenticity (hereinafter referred to as "the Dialogue") held from 27 September to 1 October 2026, and being mindful of the exemplary experience at the Thang Long Citadel, engaged in a robust exchange on the concept of authenticity in heritage, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific. The Dialogue aims to contribute to the effective implementation of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (hereinafter referred to as the "World Heritage Convention"), in line with Decision 46 COM 11 and Decision 47 COM 5C of the World Heritage Committee and Resolution 25 GA 9 of the General Assembly of States Parties, and responding to Decision 48 COM 6C, by which the Committee "encourages States Parties, in cooperation with the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies, and relevant institutions, to organize similar regional expert dialogues on authenticity, taking into account their respective cultural contexts, so as to contribute to a broader global reflection on any future methodological developments related to authenticity". The present document sets out an Asia-Pacific perspective on authenticity, grounded in the cultural contexts of this region.

2. We recall the key reference instruments which guided the Dialogue and its outcomes, including the Venice Charter (1964); the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994); the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003); the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005); and the Nairobi Outcome Document on Heritage and Authenticity (2025). The Nara Document established that judgements about the values attributed to cultural properties, and about the credibility of related information sources, may vary across and within cultures, and that such judgments should not be confined to fixed criteria but must respect the cultural contexts to which the heritage belongs. Traditions in the Asia-Pacific understand and express the relationships between people, nature, place and heritage in different ways; each must be considered in its own cultural context.

3. Building on the outcomes of the Nairobi Outcome Document and drawing on the distinct experiences of the Asia-Pacific, we examine how relationships among people, places, practices and environments sustain heritage values as they evolve over time, and how changes to these relationships, including their transformation or disruption, can be documented and assessed within the World Heritage framework.

4. The Dialogue builds on the outcomes of:

i. the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994);
ii. the Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage (2004);
iii. the Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas (Xi'an, China, 2005);
iv. the Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia (2009);
v. the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter (2013);
vi. Nara + 20: On Heritage Practices, Cultural Values, and the Concept of Authenticity (2014);
vii. the revised Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China (2015);
viii. the Warsaw Recommendation on Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage (2018);
ix. the Gunma Declaration on Heritage Ecosystems (2025);
x. the Nairobi Outcome Document (2025);
xi. the Busan Declaration on World Heritage (2026).

These contributions address different aspects of heritage practice. Together, they invite closer attention to cultural context, the relationship of tangible and intangible heritage, setting, living culture, careful intervention and the networks of people, places and skills that sustain heritage.

5. We consider the values attributed to a heritage place, the physical features and living practices through which those values are expressed, and the evidence that they continue to convey those values despite changes to the place. For a property proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List, this assessment must relate the attributes to its Outstanding Universal Value.

6. We recognise the extraordinary diversity of the Asia-Pacific, encompassing continental, mountain, river, coastal, maritime and island environments, and cultural, natural and mixed heritage that must be understood in its cultural and environmental context when identifying and assessing the attributes that convey its significance. In some islands and coastal settings in the region, culturally significant routes, places and practices change with environmental conditions. Their significance may therefore need to be assessed through knowledge, use and custodianship, alongside physical attributes.

7. We also recognise that, in many parts of the Asia-Pacific, many heritage are sustained through the renewal of materials, the transmission of knowledge and skills, and customary, social, religious and spiritual practices. A certain scope of periodic renewal of timber, earth, thatch, stone, painted surfaces and fibre may sustain a heritage place, but it may also alter the attributes through which its values are conveyed. Assessment should therefore examine what changed, which knowledge and techniques guided the work, who made the decisions and carried them out, and whether relevant uses, practices and relationships to place continue. The age of the materials, or the description of a practice as “traditional”, is not sufficient on its own to establish authenticity. What matters is whether the materials, practices and knowledge continue to express the identified heritage values, including where they have changed over time.

THE DIALOGUE THEREFORE MAKES THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS:

8. Authenticity in a Changing World

Heritage properties can be shaped by environmental, social and cultural processes. The understanding of heritage of the Asia-Pacific is therefore constantly evolving from individual monuments and sites to their being interconnected within a larger heritage ecosystem, thus changing the discourse on how heritage values and authenticity are understood, assessed and safeguarded. This calls for credible evidence and appropriate methodologies to assess how values and their relationships and practices persist, change or cease, and how changes in one element or relationship may affect others; such changes do not, however, justify presuming that every change sustains authenticity.

Findings

8.1 Relational and Dynamic Authenticity

Heritage may derive authenticity not only from what it is, but also from the relationships through which its values are created and sustained. Change does not necessarily imply a loss of authenticity: material evidence, traditional materials and techniques, living practices, knowledge, memory and other sources may contribute, in different combinations, to continuity through renewal, including the complete replacement of fabric in special cases, as well as adaptation or transformation. Their significance should be understood in relation to the nature of the heritage concerned, its cultural context, and the credibility of relevant sources of information.

8.2 Networks, Linkages and Heritage Ecosystems

The understanding of authenticity is shaped by communities' relationships with the heritage place, which may extend beyond the boundaries or immediate setting of an individual property. Networks provide a structural dimension, while linkages describe the processes connecting and transforming their elements. This is particularly relevant for expansive, serial and transboundary heritage in the Asia-Pacific. Networks and linkages, and a heritage ecosystem approach, can take this further by examining systemic interdependence.

8.3 Towards a Methodology for Assessment

Further methodological development is needed to identify relevant elements, relationships and interdependencies, understand how they change, evaluate different sources of information and knowledge, and assess the implications of interventions. Such an approach can help structure that assessment, complementing rather than replacing existing attribute-based approaches. It should not establish a new universal model of authenticity, but may offer a common analytical framework for different cultural and regional configurations of continuity and change.

9. Evidence of Continuity and Change

The Operational Guidelines recognise use, function, traditions, techniques, management systems, language and other forms of intangible heritage among possible attributes through which cultural values may be expressed. In examining authenticity, we should consider whether the relevant attributes continue to convey the property's Outstanding Universal Value. This examination should draw on the knowledge of those who sustain the heritage, together with oral, documentary, material and environmental evidence. Where knowledge holders and other sources give different accounts, these differences should be acknowledged. When knowledge is sacred or restricted, its custodians should be consulted on its use.

10. Periodic Renewal and Transmission

The continued renewal of a heritage place should be assessed in relation to the transmission of relevant knowledge and skills, the reasons for replacing materials, changes in techniques and decision-making, and the effects of these changes on the attributes that convey its values. While customary renewal is often culturally rooted, repeatedly replacing materials does not, by itself, show that the knowledge, skills and heritage values associated with the place have continued.

11. Reconstruction, Recovery and Continuity

Heritage properties are affected by, among others, disasters, conflicts, displacement, urbanisation and unsustainable tourism. Reconstruction following conflict, disaster, environmental change or development pressure raises questions concerning the extent of loss, the reliability and completeness of the available evidence, displacement of knowledge holders, interruption of access or use, and the risk of conjecture. Assessments of authenticity should identify what has continued, what has changed and what has been lost, and examine the consequences for Outstanding Universal Value. Where reconstruction of archaeological remains or historic buildings or districts is proposed, paragraph 86 of the Operational Guidelines should be applied.

Findings

11.1 Continuity Beyond Physical Reconstruction

Post-loss recovery should not be understood simply as restoring heritage to its pre-event physical condition. Recovery should also support the resumption, continuity and transmission of use, practice, knowledge, function, social relationships or connections among people, nature, and place. The legitimacy of post-loss reconstruction always depends on the specific situation and on an understanding of the broader societal and cultural context.

11.2 Evidence-Based and Compatible Intervention

Recovery and reconstruction should be grounded in a credible and transparent assessment of multiple forms of evidence, including surviving fabric, documentary, archaeological and scientific evidence, as well as oral knowledge, traditional practices and craft skills. Surviving material should be salvaged and stabilised through appropriate techniques and procedures. Traditional knowledge and compatible contemporary expertise may be combined where they support the heritage values and attributes concerned and avoid conjectural or value-eroding reconstruction.

11.3 People-Centred Recovery and Decision-Making

Recovery of heritage is a people-centred process that forms part of wider social, cultural and economic recovery. Communities and knowledge holders, including affected and displaced groups where relevant, should

participate meaningfully in assessing options and their implications for sustaining authenticity, integrity and Outstanding Universal Value, with sufficient documentation, dialogue and reflection to preserve future choices.

12. Living, Spiritual and Associative Heritage

Heritage values of places may be conveyed by a range of tangible and/or intangible values and attributes, such as ritual, belief, memory, language, use, practice, traditional knowledge, social relationships and connections among people, nature and place, particularly where heritage significance is not primarily expressed through physical fabric. These attributes also play a key role in understanding and qualifying the authenticity of the heritage place. Continuing practices, rituals, beliefs, uses and relationships with place may themselves be attributes that convey a property's Outstanding Universal Value, alongside its physical features. Their relevance should be established in relation to the values claimed for the property, rather than assumed from the presence of a living practice alone.

Findings

12.1 Continuity of Living Relationships

Authenticity in living, spiritual and associative heritage may be conveyed through the continuing relationships among people, places, practices, beliefs and natural environments, rather than through material fabric alone. Ritual, pilgrimage, customary use, language, traditional knowledge, livelihood and other forms of practice may themselves contribute to the expression and transmission of heritage values. Their authenticity should therefore be understood not as unchanging repetition, but through credible continuity of meaning, function and transmission across generations.

12.2 Interdependence of Tangible and Intangible Attributes

Tangible and intangible attributes should be understood and assessed in relation to one another. Buildings, landscapes, sacred places, objects and natural features may derive part of their significance from the practices, beliefs, knowledge and social or ecological relationships associated with them, while such practices may in turn depend on particular places and settings. Assessment of authenticity should therefore consider whether these relationships continue to convey heritage significance, without treating material permanence as the sole benchmark.

12.3 Conditions for Living Heritage

Safeguarding living heritage should maintain the conditions that enable heritage to remain lived, used and transmitted, rather than freezing it at a selected moment in time. Assessment and management should be sensitive to the character of different forms of living heritage and consider the continuity of functions, practices, spiritual meanings, livelihoods and human-nature relationships alongside material attributes. Monitoring should therefore consider not only the condition of physical fabric, but also whether the relationships and practices through which heritage values are sustained remain viable over time.

13. Communities, Knowledge Holders and Disparate Values

Local communities, practitioners, elders, women, youth and other knowledge holders participate in defining, transmitting and safeguarding heritage values. Assessments should consider differences within and between communities and across local, national and transnational contexts, as well as disparate claims, displacement, restrictions on access to sacred knowledge, consent and the conditions under which knowledge is shared. They should explain how community knowledge and other sources of evidence have been considered, including where interpretations differ.

Findings

13.1 Plural Communities and their Participation

Communities should not be understood as homogeneous groups or only as consultees or beneficiaries. Heritage may be associated with multiple communities and knowledge holders who relate to the same place, practice or landscape in different ways, including across generations and across local, national and transnational contexts. Communities and knowledge holders may contribute as producers, practitioners, custodians and interpreters of knowledge, and as partners in identifying, interpreting, managing and monitoring heritage. Meaningful participation should therefore recognise these pluralities, respect customary governance and provide practical mechanisms for their knowledge and perspectives to inform heritage decisions.

13.2 Credible Evidence and Inclusive Interpretation

Different forms of knowledge and evidence should be assessed through transparent and credible processes. Documentary, material, scientific, oral, testimonial and practice-based sources may contribute to understanding heritage values and authenticity, with due regard to provenance, corroboration, consent, confidentiality and restricted knowledge. Different values and interpretations should be documented without assuming equal evidentiary weight. Dialogue across local, national and transnational scales can inform how heritage is interpreted and presented. Where credible evidence establishes difficult, divisive or contested histories, interpretation should appropriately reflect significant historical layers, contributing to a wider and more inclusive understanding of the heritage.

13.3 Continuity, Transmission and Collaborative Practice

Authenticity may depend not only on surviving material fabric, but also on the continuity and transmission of knowledge, practices, uses, skills and community relationships. Such continuity should be assessed in relation to the historical development and relevant attributes of the heritage, recognising that it may include adaptation, renewal or periods of interruption. Intergenerational transmission, community-led documentation, collaborative management and participatory monitoring can help sustain and assess these relationships. Further methodological development is needed to incorporate these dimensions into World Heritage identification, nomination, evaluation, interpretation, management and monitoring, with collaboration and shared responsibility underpinning the process.

14. From Regional Experience to World Heritage Practice

The findings of the Dialogue have implications for heritage identification, national inventories, Tentative Lists, Preliminary Assessments, nomination dossiers, evaluation, management, interpretation and presentation, monitoring, training, and national legal and policy frameworks. Selected cases from the Asia-Pacific should be examined alongside cases from Africa and other regions to develop practical guidance on assessing how attributes convey Outstanding Universal Value credibly, how conditions of authenticity and integrity are demonstrated, and how protection and management sustain these conditions over time. Applying this guidance from the identification stage may help reveal heritage overlooked by existing inventories and Tentative Lists and, in time, contribute to a more representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List.

Findings

14.1 Integrated and Context-Sensitive Practice

World Heritage management should address the interconnected environmental, social, economic and institutional conditions affecting Outstanding Universal Value and related attributes. Regional experience can inform wider practice, but approaches should be adapted to specific cultural, environmental and governance contexts.

14.2 Evidence-Based and Revisable Judgements

Assessments should clearly link Outstanding Universal Value and related attributes to relevant evidence. Judgements on authenticity should remain open to review as knowledge and conditions change.

14.3 From Principles to Sustainable Implementation

Effective safeguarding requires workable arrangements for governance, capacity, financing, partnerships and monitoring. Tourism and other developments should support conservation and sustainable livelihoods, with their ecological, cultural and social impacts monitored over time.

Recognising the global relevance of authenticity and the need to assess heritage within its particular cultural context in the Asia-Pacific, we make the following recommendations:

15. We call on States Parties to the World Heritage Convention to:

15.1 pilot inclusive, community-led identification before Tentative List selection, including heritage that existing inventories may overlook; identify, map and document the proposed values, attributes, evidence, custodians, differing views and any restrictions on access to knowledge.

15.2 recognise customary governance, provide for continuing dialogue and collaborative decision-making, and establish appropriate mechanisms that enable meaningful participation, shared responsibility and influence on heritage decisions.

15.3 strengthen the mechanisms for disaster and risk preparedness for heritage - through documentation, risk assessment and prior agreement on approaches - and protect the systems that make renewal possible.

16. We call on the World Heritage Committee to:

16.1 initiate a review of how authenticity is addressed in the Operational Guidelines, drawing on the Nairobi and Ha Noi Outcome Documents and comparative cases from different regions, and consider whether limited clarification of the text or further practical guidance is needed.

16.2 encourage the synergies between the World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage by taking due consideration of the living heritage practices, knowledge, skills, as well as their meanings and cultural functions, so that continuity of practice and transmission of living heritage by communities are recognised alongside material attributes.

17. We call on the Advisory Bodies ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN to:

17.1 contribute to the analysis of the provisions on authenticity in the Operational Guidelines, taking into account the Nairobi and Ha Noi Outcomes, in consultation with States Parties, the World Heritage Centre and relevant knowledge holders.

17.2 elaborate the concepts of networks and linkages, and heritage ecosystems, and, on that basis, develop and test, with States Parties and knowledge holders, a practical assessment tool based on selected cases.

17.3 develop guidance and methodologies in collaboration with communities to identify, map and document intangible attributes and their relationships, and to assess community-held, oral, customary and practice-based knowledge alongside material, documentary and scientific evidence.

18. We call on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre to:

18.1 support the Advisory Bodies in updating the 2004 report, The World Heritage List: Filling the Gaps – An Action Plan for the Future, as requested by the World Heritage Committee.

18.2 prepare, in cooperation with the Advisory Bodies, States Parties and relevant knowledge holders, an analysis of the gaps in the current provisions of the Operational Guidelines on authenticity, together with the findings of the Nairobi and Ha Noi Outcome Documents and any other relevant documents, for consideration by the World Heritage Committee.

18.3 support capacity-building, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and the exchange and pooling of accumulated experiences on living heritage, evaluation and management, as outlined in this Document, drawing on regional and thematic expertise, including that of the Category 2 Centres.

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