



UNESCO World Heritage Centre

Statement on the occasion of the International Meeting

"Where the Earth meets the Universe"

9 -10 November 2009, La Palma, Canary Islands, Spain

Taking into account the increased number of requests to UNESCO concerning the recognition of the value of the dark night sky and celestial objects under the 1972 Convention, the World Heritage Centre made its first statement on that issue during the adoption of the La Palma Declaration in Defence of the night sky and the right to starlight in 2007. It underlined that the sky or the dark night sky or celestial objects as such cannot be nominated to the World Heritage List, as this heritage is not situated on the territory of a State Party.

The World Heritage Committee has identified and defined several specific types of cultural and natural properties and has adopted Operational guidelines to facilitate the evaluation of such properties when nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List.

The World Heritage Committee considers a property as having Outstanding Universal Value if the property meets one or more of the ten existing criteria for the assessment of outstanding universal value.

The World Heritage Centre recognizes the importance of the protection of natural and cultural sites which contribute by their exceptional night landscape to the astronomical research worldwide; as well as that light pollution can be considered as an imminent threat to the environment, including impacts on animal and plant life.

The World Heritage Centre notes that the Working Group "Starlight Reserves and World Heritage" during its meeting on 11 March 2009 developed a concept which defined as a "Starlight Reserve" a site where a commitment to defend the night sky quality and the access to starlight has been established. Its main function will be to preserve the quality of the night sky and its associated values, whether they are cultural, scientific, astronomical, natural, or landscape-related.

The World Heritage Centre underlines that it is necessary to join efforts in promotion of adapted lighting and that a common approach for the safeguarding of natural and landscape sites which can contribute by their exceptional night landscape to the astronomical research worldwide could be developed. Co-ordination and information-sharing could be enhanced between the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), Ramsar Wetlands, Organization of the World Heritage Cities (OWHC), World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and other Conventions, programmes and international organizations related to the conservation of cultural and natural heritage.

The World Heritage Centre informs that the coordination between UNESCO and the Secretariat of the Initiative "Starlight", has been established in conformity with the Integrated Implementation Strategy of the UNESCO Thematic Initiative "Astronomy and World Heritage" examined by the World Heritage Committee at its 32nd session (Quebec, July 2008).

The World Heritage Committee (Seville, July 2009) was informed on the recommendations of the "International Workshop on Starlight Reserves and World Heritage" held in Fuerteventura, Spain (March 2009). This Workshop welcomed the establishment of a "dark sky advisory group" within IUCN WCPA to support IUCN activities in relation to dark skies, promoting dark sky values where applicable to protected areas. It also encouraged adopting and implementing the requirements and orientations contained in the "Starlight Reserve Concept" document (March 2009) as guidance for those World Heritage properties and other protected areas that include astronomical values.

The World Heritage Centre supports activities aiming to promote an adapted lighting through the World Heritage Cities Programme (including approaching the World Heritage cities organization - OWHC) and other programmes.

The World Heritage Centre participated in the International Conference "Astronomy and World Heritage: across time and continents" (Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation, August 2009) which adopted a Resolution on astronomical heritage. This Kazan Resolution stipulates that the dark night sky areas where the ability to see natural starlight preserves important visual links to the sky that have connected humankind to the cosmos throughout history. The participants recommended promoting the recognition of the ability to see natural starlight in a truly dark night sky as an additional input in protected area management.

Concerning the nomination of cultural and natural sites for inscription on the World Heritage List, the World Heritage Centre underlines that in conformity with Article 3 of the *Convention 1972*, it is for each State Party to the World Heritage Convention to identify and delineate properties situated on its territory and that the World Heritage criteria, as indicated in the *Operational Guidelines*, can be used for the assessment of outstanding universal value of the cultural and natural properties.

The World Heritage Centre encourages the "Starlight" Initiative to further develop, in coordination with IUCN and all concerned Programmes and organizations, inputs for the management of existing protected areas and sites.

For more information visit the World Heritage Centre website at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/astronomy>.