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State of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List

60. Mosi-oa-Tunya / Victoria Falls (Zambia, Zimbabwe) (N 509)

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List 1989

Criteria (vii)(viii)

Year(s) of inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger N/A

Previous Committee Decisions see page https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/509/documents/

International Assistance

Requests approved: 6 (from 2001-2022) Total amount approved: USD 118,585 For details, see page https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/509/assistance/

UNESCO Extra-budgetary Funds

Total amount granted: USD 50,000 in 2015 through the UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism programme (Flanders Funds-in-Trust)

Previous monitoring missions

November 2006: joint World Heritage Centre / IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission; February 2022: joint UNESCO/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission

Factors affecting the property identified in previous reports

- Air pollution
- Drought
- Housing (uncontrolled urban development driven by population increase)
- Impacts of tourism / visitor / recreation
- Invasive/alien species
- Major visitor accommodation and associated infrastructure
- Management systems/ management plan
- Solid waste
- Surface water pollution
- Water extraction (related to existing hydropower production)

- Water infrastructure (project to construct a dam downstream of the property)
- Water infrastructure (Project to construct a dam across the gorge) (issue resolved)

Illustrative material see page https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/509/

Current conservation issues

On 2 February 2024, the States Parties of Zambia and Zimbabwe submitted a state of conservation report for the property available at https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/509/documents/, reporting the following:

- The States Parties commit to ensuring that the revision of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) for the Batoka Gorge Hydro Electric Scheme (BGHES) is in line with the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context, stakeholders are being engaged in mobilizing resources to conduct the recommended studies including the geomorphological and/or geological assessments and a Sustainable Development Programme.

- Discussions with the World Heritage Centre regarding the potential hosting of a Conference on Sustainable Development, including to share ideas on how projects of the magnitude of BGHES could be implemented without negatively impacting the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), are in progress. Further details will be disseminated to stakeholders by June 2024;

- The Joint Integrated Management Plan (JIMP) is being revised with International Assistance funding and co-financing by the States Parties, and expected to be finalized by June 2024;

- The implementation of mitigation measures for the Mosi-oa-Tunya Livingstone Resort Hotel as part of legal conditions of approval issued by the Zambian Environmental Management Authority (ZEMA) and contained in the JIMP, is ongoing. The process to revise the ESIA has been initiated including the development of a comprehensive Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP);

- The requested boundary modification will be submitted;

- The States Parties take note of the Committee's request to seek early inputs and technical guidance from IUCN in undertaking the second phase of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) on cumulative development and environmental pressure on the property;

- The States Parties are monitoring the effects of water entitlement and abstraction on the water flow within the property, which considers climate change;

- The States Parties endeavour to implement all the recommendations from the 2022 joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission;

- The 10-year (2023-2033) General Management Plans for the Zimbabwean components of the property have been completed;

- Ongoing research, monitoring and management activities include biannual bird surveys, annual vulture aerial surveys, indigenous tree planting, wildlife rescue and de-snaring, human-wildlife coexistence, wildlife collaring, annual site inspections, use of mechanical and chemical control methods against invasive species and undertaking controlled burning for fire management.

- A number of developments have been proposed to be undertaken within the property and its buffer zone, which are mostly at the scoping stage and, as required by environmental laws and the World Heritage Convention, have to undergo an Environmental and Heritage Impact Assessment process (EHIA); these developments are not specified in the report.

On 16 April 2024 the States Parties transmitted to the World Heritage Centre, an interim report on the progress of review of the JIMP, also highlighting their progress on the review of the zonation of the property.

Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN

The continued cooperation between the States Parties and their partners to improve the state of conservation of the property is appreciated, as is the ongoing research, monitoring and management activities that have been reported. The proposed conference on Sustainable Development may further strengthen these efforts.

The property continues to face significant development pressure from both individual and cumulative infrastructure projects. In this context, it is recommended that the Committee urge the States Parties to expedite the SEA on the cumulative development and environmental pressure on the property, seeking inputs and technical guidance from IUCN.

In March 2024, several news outlets reported plans by the States Parties to

retender the BGHES by April 2025, with new potential developers expected by September of the same year. The commitment of the States Parties to revise the ESIA for BGHES in line with the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context is noted, and this revised ESIA should be submitted to the World Heritage Centre before taking any decisions that may be difficult to reverse. As recommended by the 2022 Reactive Monitoring mission, the ESIA should ensure an assessment of alternative scenarios to avoid negative impact on the OUV of the property.

Regarding tourism infrastructure development, recalling that the Mosi-oa-Tunya Livingstone Resort Hotel was constructed despite the Committee's request to halt further activities, details on the implementation of mitigation measures should be provided, ensuring that the infrastructure does not negatively impact the OUV of the property. It is regrettable that the State Party of Zimbabwe has still not provided a response to the third-party concerns transmitted in 2023 regarding a permit for two commercial tourism developments within areas of the property that are recognized as highly sensitive zones according to the previous JIMP (Cataract Island and its adjacent riverine rainforest area). Further information is also required on the developments proposed in the property and buffer zone that are currently under scoping stage and will require impact assessments; these projects should not proceed without the World Heritage Centre having been informed and the impact assessments concluded for review by the Advisory bodies.

Cumulative impacts from tourism infrastructure developments remain a concern for the protection of the OUV of the property and it is therefore important to emphasize again the need to ensure that any project proposal within, in the buffer zone, or in the wider setting of the property undergoes an ESIA in accordance with the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context, and to urgently conclude the SEA and implement the 2022 Reactive Monitoring mission recommendation to develop a blueprint for infrastructure development in and around the property to guide strategic level planning.

In this regard, recalling the concerns over increasing pressure from tourism infrastructure within and around the property, exacerbated by the absence of strategic planning, the reported progress and planned completion of the updated JIMP for the property by June 2024 is acknowledged. As requested by the Committee (Decision 45 COM 7B.10), the updated JIMP should incorporate the necessary safeguards and thresholds to mitigate against development pressures for the protection of the property's OUV, and it is recommended that the updated JIMP be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN prior to its adoption. It is positive that the 2023-2033 GMPs for the Zimbabwean components

of the property have been completed, which should ensure full alignment with the updated JIMP.

The States Parties' confirmation that a boundary modification request will be submitted is noted. Recalling that inconsistent boundary maps have been utilized to date, the update of the JIMP is an opportunity to review the boundary, zonation and buffer zones, aiming to enhance the protection of the OUV of the property and aligning the JIMP with past Committee Decisions and the property's Statement of OUV.

Draft Decision: 46 COM 7B.60

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/24/46.COM/7B.Add.2,

2. Recalling Decisions 36 COM 7B.7, 38 COM 7B.7, 44 COM 7B.177 and 45 COM 7B.10 adopted at its 36th (Saint-Petersburg, 2012), 38th (Doha, 2014) sessions and at its, 44th (Fuzhou/online, 2021) and 45th (Riyadh) extended sessions respectively,

3. Appreciates the continuous cooperation between the States Parties and their partners to improve the state of conservation of the property, and to conduct the reported research, monitoring and management activities;

4. Urges the States Parties to expedite the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) on the cumulative development and environmental pressure on the property, seeking inputs and technical guidance from IUCN, and to conclude full implementation of all the 2022 Reactive Monitoring mission recommendations, including the development of a blueprint for infrastructure development in and around the property;

5. Noting again with concern the likely negative impacts of the proposed Batoka Gorge Hydro Electric Scheme (BGHES) on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, also takes note that the States Parties will revise the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) in line with the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context, and requests the States Parties to ensure that the revised ESIA includes alternative scenarios to avoid impact on the property, and to submit the revised ESIA to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN prior to taking any decision that is difficult to reverse;

6. Recalls with regret that the construction of the Mosi-oa-Tunya Livingstone Resort Hotel was concluded despite the Committee's request to halt further activities until the ESIA had been submitted to the World Heritage Centre and reviewed by IUCN, notes that the mitigation measures integral to legal conditions of approval issued by Zambian Environmental Management Authority are being implemented, and also requests the States Parties to provide further details on the implementation of these mitigation measures to ensure that the infrastructure does not negatively affect the OUV of the property;

7. Further requests the States Parties to provide information on all developments proposed in the property, its buffer zone, and wider setting, including on a permit for two commercial tourism development sites within the Zimbabwean component of the property recognised as highly sensitive zones according to the previous JIMP, and also urges the States Parties to ensure that any project proposals that may impact the OUV undergo an ESIA in accordance with the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context before taking any decision that is difficult to reverse;

8. Also recalling its concern regarding the increasing pressure from tourism infrastructure within and around the property, exacerbated by the absence of strategic planning, acknowledges that the revision of the Joint Integrated Management Plan (JIMP) for the property is scheduled for completion by the end of June 2024, and request furthermore the States Parties to ensure that the JIMP incorporate necessary safeguards and thresholds to mitigate against developmental pressures for the protection of the property's OUV, set precise boundaries of the property, its zonation and buffer zones, be aligned with past Committee Decisions and the property's Statement of OUV, and be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN before it is adopted;

9. Further takes note of the States Parties' confirmation to submit a request for boundary modification;

10. Finally requests the States Parties to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 December 2025, a joint updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 48th session.

Source: https://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/46COM/documents/