



UNESCO Dhaka Office

House : 122, Road : 01, Block : F
Banani, Dhaka-1213, Bangladesh
Tel : 9873210, 9862073 FAX : 9871150
URL : www.unesco.org/dhaka
Email : dhaka@unesco.org

PRESS RELEASE

UNESCO Office in Dhaka, 11 July 2017

Attn: News Editor/ Chief Reporter/ Assignment Editor:

The Sundarbans World Heritage Site has been included in the agenda for discussion by the 41st Session of the World Heritage Committee, which is being held in Krakow, Poland from 2-12 July 2017.

Not only inscription of properties on the World Heritage List is the function of the World Heritage Committee, but among others also to examine the state of conservation of World Heritage sites.

Following a Reactive Monitoring Mission in March 2016 to the Sundarbans World Heritage Site, decided at a previous session of the World Heritage Committee, the mission report was shared with the government, which is standard procedure and also available to the public through the website of the World Heritage Centre since October 2016.

The report outlines three major threats (including freshwater flow, potential threats related to the construction and operation of the Rampal Power Plant and integrated management) and provides a set of recommendations necessary to ensure the protection of the outstanding universal value of the Sundarbans World Heritage site. The report also proposes for the World Heritage Committee to consider listing of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger at the 2017 session.

As part of the materials and documents routinely prepared for the World Heritage Committee sessions, a so-called draft decision on the Sundarbans World Heritage Site has been prepared for the 2017 session and is available on the website of the World Heritage Centre since mid-May 2017 quoted herewith:

Draft Decision: 41 COM 7B.25 (The Sundarbans, Bangladesh, N 798)

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/17/41.COM/7B,

2. Recalling Decision 39 COM 7B.8, adopted at its 39th session (Bonn, 2015),

3. Welcomes the State Party's decision not to approve the Orion power plant and Phase II of the Rampal power plant, and to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the South-West region of Bangladesh, including the property, and requests the State Party to ensure that any large-scale industrial and/or infrastructure developments (including the Rampal power plant) will not be allowed to proceed before the SEA has been completed, and to submit a copy of the SEA to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, as soon as it is available;

4. Also welcomes the information provided on ecological monitoring but notes with concern that sea level rise, salt intrusion and reductions in fresh water flows are posing a threat to the Sundarbans' ecosystem and that the property is particularly vulnerable to impacts from these threats;

5. Takes note of the critical importance of transboundary cooperation between the States Parties of Bangladesh and India on the World Heritage properties "The Sundarbans" (Bangladesh) and "Sundarbans National Park" (India), further welcomes the efforts made by both States Parties to enhance collaboration, and urges the State Party of Bangladesh to fully implement, as a matter of utmost urgency, the recommendations made by the 2016 mission in relation to ensuring adequate freshwater inflows to the property;

6. Also requests the State Party to fully implement all the other recommendations made by the 2016 Reactive Monitoring mission;

7. Welcomes furthermore the development of a draft "National Oil Spill and Chemical Contingency Plan" (NOSCOP), and further requests the State Party to ensure adequate provision of funding and human resources for the implementation of the plan once it is adopted, and to provide further information and data on the monitoring of long-term impacts from recent shipping incidents involving spills of hazardous materials in proximity to the property;

8. Regrets that the State Party did not update the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for dredging of the Passur River to include an assessment of impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, as requested by the Committee, and reiterates its request to the State Party to ensure that no dredging activities are conducted before the current EIA is revised in accordance with IUCN's World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment;

9. Also takes note of the mission's conclusion that the Rampal coal-fired power plant has a high likelihood for impacts on the property arising from air and water pollution, a substantial increase in shipping and dredging, and additional removal of freshwater from an already increasingly saline environment, and that there is insufficient evidence available to demonstrate that these impacts can be mitigated, and requests furthermore the State Party to ensure that these impacts are comprehensively assessed as part of the SEA, and in accordance with IUCN's World Heritage Advice Note on Environmental Assessment, and also urges it to not proceed further with implementation of the Rampal power plant in its current location;

10. Finally requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2018**, an 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 42nd session in 2018, **with a view to considering, in the absence of substantial progress in the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations, the possible inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger.**

End of quote.

This draft decision was already discussed by the 21 members of the World Heritage Committee and some amendments have been proposed.

Since the discussion of all sessions are available some key amendments of the draft decision has circulated, such as deletion of the sentence about possible inscription of the property on the World Heritage List in Danger and a revised date for Bangladesh government to submit an updated report on the state of conservation of the property to the World Heritage Centre by December 2018 (rather than February 2018).

The final adoption of all decisions including the decision on the Sundarbans will be made by the World Heritage Committee on 12 July 2017.

Ms. Beatrice Kaldun, Head and Representative of UNESCO in Bangladesh has shared this information with some interested members of the press and has cautioned not to circulate information not yet adopted by the World Heritage Committee. The final adopted version of the decision will be available on 12 July and available to the public.