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**CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE
WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

**WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE
Twenty-second session**

**Kyoto, JAPAN
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Information Document: Report of the Fourth Global Strategy Meeting for West Africa, 16-19 September 1998, Porto Novo, Republic of Benin.

Thirteen States Parties and non-parties to the Convention were invited to this meeting organized in co-operation with ICOMOS and the Heritage Directorate of Benin. The meeting was carried out in accordance with the programme decided upon in March 1998 by the Scientific Committee. The members of the Scientific Committee present in Porto Novo were: Mr D. Munjeri (ICOMOS), Professors Tidjani Serpos and Adjahonoun (Benin) as well as Mme C. Le Cour Grand Maison (France). The participants presented papers that described the diversity and wealth of their countries' heritage, and the Nature/Culture links. Once again a thematic approach enabled a verification of the applicability of the categories defined during the Global Strategy meetings in Harare and Addis Ababa, and the importance of the intangible aspects inherent in the African heritage. The participants adopted recommendations that should encourage the inscription of Routes and itineraries, transborder sites, the creation of national committees to better promote the Convention and support for training. They also requested a substantial increase in the sums allocated for Preparatory Assistance for the preparation of nomination files. Niger offered to organize a meeting in 1999 in order to pursue exchanges and harmonize the tentative lists.

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1. Introduction

A meeting on African cultural heritage and the World Heritage Convention concerning thirteen western and equatorial countries was held in Porto Novo (Benin) from 16 to 19 September 1998 at the invitation of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre; it was a follow-up to the decision taken in Naples in December 1997 by the World Heritage Committee at its twenty-first session. This Global Strategy meeting was the third to be held on the African continent¹. It is recalled that the objective of the Global Strategy meetings is to obtain a more balanced representation of the different cultures of humanity and in the case of Africa, to obtain both the recognition of the wealth and diversity of its heritage and a better representation of this heritage on the World Heritage List, where until now, it has been very poorly represented.

The experts of thirteen countries of western and equatorial Africa responded favourably to the invitation: Benin, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome, Senegal and Togo. However, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania and Sao Tome did not participate.

The different Benin authorities responsible for the development of the cultural policy of their country were also associated with the meeting. They participated actively in the debates.

A Scientific Committee, composed of the ICOMOS Secretary General, Mr J.L. Luxen, Ambassador Tidjani-Serpos, Permanent Delegate of Benin to UNESCO, Mr D. Munjeri, Director of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, member of the World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS Executive Committee, Professor L.Pressouyre and Mme C. Le Cour Grandmaison, Research Director at the CNRS, had previously met in Paris on 24 March 1998 at a meeting chaired by the Deputy Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Mr G. Zouain. The Committee approved the introductory text and established the programme for the meeting

In preparation for this meeting, the representatives of the invited countries had been provided with several documents relating to the World Heritage Convention, including the introductory text prepared by C. Le Cour Grandmaison.

This text emphasised the very low representation of African countries on the World Heritage List. The preliminary urgency of this fourth meeting was therefore the preparation by each country of a tentative list of properties which could eventually be proposed for inscription. To this end, the terms of the 1972 Convention were recalled, drawing attention to the criteria concerning inscriptions of cultural properties and to the new categories defined by the Committee - such as cultural landscapes - which would enable better definition of the specificity of African cultures. The five themes selected by the representatives of the African States during the first Global Strategy Meeting (Harare 1995)

¹ Places and dates of earlier Global Strategy meetings: the first was held in Zimbabwe (Harare 1995), the second in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa 1996), the third in the Pacific (1997) and the fourth in Benin (Porto Novo).

were recalled, e.g.: archaeological heritage, technical heritage and traditional know-how, religious and spiritual heritage, permanent or non-permanent human settlements, cultural itineraries and trade routes. It is in this thematic framework that the States should inventory and choose the sites that they judge as representative of their cultures and their heritage.

Sites of the countries invited to the Fourth Global Strategy Meeting already inscribed on the World Heritage List

- Benin: Royal Palaces of Abomey
 - Ghana: Forts and Castles, Volta Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions; Ashanti Traditional Buildings.
 - Côte d'Ivoire/Guinea: Mount Nimba Strict Nature Reserve
 - Mali: Old Towns of Djenné, Timbuktu, Cliff of Bandiagara
 - Mauritania: Banc d'Arguin National Park, Ancient *ksour* of Ouadane, Chinguetti, Tichitt and Oualata
 - Niger: Air and Ténéré National Reserves, W National Park of Niger
 - Senegal: Island of Gorée; National Parks of Niokolo-Koba and Djoudj (birds).
- Nigeria and Gambia who had requested inscription of certain cultural properties on the World Heritage List had their requests deferred.

2. Meeting plan

The meeting was conducted in four stages:

- i) During the opening session, each speaker emphasised the low level of representation of African cultural and natural sites inscribed on the World Heritage List and on the urgent need for each country to propose tentative lists bearing witness to the wealth, diversity and specificity of this heritage.
- ii) Each African expert then presented the state of cultural and natural heritage in his country and indicated the most important sites (afternoon of the first day).
- iii) The morning and the afternoon of the second day were devoted to the study of the sites according to the thematic approach; each theme presented by an international expert was followed by discussion and debate amongst the participants.
 - concept of landscape and the nature-culture links
 - historical heritage, human settlements and living cultures
 - religious places, places of technical production, itineraries and trade routes
 - conservation plan of the Royal Palaces of Abomey (Benin).
- iv) The morning of the third day was devoted to workshop sessions during which participants were able to communicate amongst themselves, ask questions and request clarifications from Mme G. Saouma-Forero of the World Heritage Centre and Mme C. Le Cour Grandmaison. Additional information was provided for the establishment of

tentative lists by countries and on the procedure for inscription on the World Heritage List. The afternoon of the third day was devoted to reading the recommendations that a small working group had prepared on behalf of all the experts.

3. Opening session: Need for a balanced representation of Africa on the World Heritage List

The meeting was opened with speeches from Mr F. Jondot, UNESCO Representative for Benin and Togo, Ambassador Tidjani-Serpos, Mr D.Munjeri, Member of the World Heritage Committee and the ICOMOS Executive Committee and Mrs R. de Souza, Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture and Communication of the Republic of Benin.

Mr F. Jondot, in his speech, underlined the effort undertaken by the Committee to encourage African States to establish tentative lists of cultural and natural African heritage that they wish to see on the World Heritage List. He recalled that the World Heritage Committee in 1994 had revised the criteria for inscription on this List; and that an evolution in the content and the broadening of the concept of cultural heritage had led to a departure from the "monumental" vision in favour of the adoption of a more anthropological and global concept of tangible testimonies of different cultures of the world. In practise, it was recalled that the States Parties - in addition to providing proof of the outstanding value of the property proposed for inscription - should establish a complete nomination file, containing the history and significance of the property proposed, and defining the modalities for its legal protection, conservation and management. The complexity of establishing these files, implies, on the one hand, the active and interdisciplinary participation of the Heritage Directorates and Ministries of Culture of the States concerned; and on the other hand, that the World Heritage Committee, its Secretariat and the World Heritage Centre provide technical assistance and financial support to States Parties. Finally, it calls for the creation of a network of African experts who, after this meeting, would be available for concertation and consultation, in order to effectively support the policy of the World Heritage Centre and promote the representivity of African heritage on the World Heritage List. The partnerships established *de facto* between regions and nations will certainly work along the same lines.

Mr Tidjani-Serpos followed this presentation by emphasising once again to what extent African cultural heritage is absent on the World Heritage List. This imbalance, linked for a certain time to the pre-eminence of Europe and its monumental architecture, was partially corrected during the different expert sessions convened by the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS. However, during the twenty-second session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee (June 1998 in Paris) it appeared that of the 41 nominations for inscription which were submitted to it by the different countries of the world, there was not one nomination for inscription from an African country. Once again, this confirmed the urgency for States to propose natural and cultural African heritage for inscription on this List. Co-ordination between States should enable the harmonization of requests and nominations of transborder sites. The material phase of establishing these dossiers must be carefully conducted, if

necessary by requesting Preparatory Assistance under the World Heritage Fund. The conceptual parameters deserve further in-depth reflection, particularly the authenticity criterion - despite revisions already made - and that of intangible heritage, essential in African cultures. Finally, the local populations should be associated in the decision-making process for the inscription of a property on the World Heritage List; they constitute a local and regional expertise of prime importance which does not in any way reduce the determining role *in fine* of the policy-makers.

Mr D. Munjeri, drawing on several examples that illustrate the singularity of African culture, questioned the adequacy of certain global conceptions of the World Heritage Convention to the specificity of sub-Saharan Africa. For the inscription of a property on the World Heritage List, he favoured "the African perspective" because it is familiar with the nature of the property, its value and significance. He illustrated his words with the example of the site of Great Zimbabwe. An unfortunate western restoration activity begun at the turn of this century was not only in opposition to the African concept, but also to the opinion of the traditional chiefs. In fact, "Great Zimbabwe incarnates the spiritual heritage of the country as a whole, and the mediums in contact with the spirits, in particular". The collapse of the walls following the restoration could be interpreted as a manifestation of anger of the spirits who had not tolerated the introduction of new material hence foreign, the cement, in the restoration which was carried out. Sometimes, for the African "the spirit of the site predominates its substance". According to the conclusions elaborated during the Regional Meeting of Harare (1995), "the importance given to the analytical rigour of listing, division and qualification should be counterbalanced by synthetic methods of interpretation, integration and association² generally preferred in the African traditions and cultures". The explicit message which must guide the Fourth Global Strategy Meeting in Africa - and for Africa - is to try to counterbalance this under-representation of African cultural heritage and the over-representation of natural sites on the World Heritage List by achieving a new equilibrium.

On behalf of the Minister for Culture and Communication, Mrs R. de Souza, Secretary General of the Ministry for Culture and Communication, welcomed the participants. She applauded the holding of this meeting in Benin and more particularly at Porto-Novo, a town rich in its traditional culture and glorious past. The immense wealth of the African continent, whether archaeological, architectural, technical or spiritual, its populations' remarkable spatial organisation and land-use, remain little known and barely recognised, as is confirmed by the small number of African properties inscribed today on the World Heritage List. The Government of Benin has worked towards this recognition by inscribing on the List the Royal Palaces of Abomey "a living and invaluable cultural testimony for World Heritage". All the States present at this meeting should establish tentative lists and submit proposals for inscription of African properties on the List so that "the values of civilisation and culture" of this continent may be eminently represented.

² Underlined by us.

The holding of this Global Strategy Meeting on the African continent - now for the third time - gave great satisfaction to the participants. Benin, which during the last session of the World Heritage Committee had proposed to host this meeting, was warmly thanked for its initiative and welcome.

4. Nominations by country of natural and cultural properties likely to be inscribed on the world heritage list

The papers of the experts of the African countries attending the meeting: Mr J. Bocco for Benin, Mr Oumarou Nao for Burkina-Faso, Mr C. de Carvalho for Cape Verde, Mr Baba Ceessay for Gambia, Dr I.N. Debrah for Ghana, Mr S.K. Kourouma for Guinea, Mr Tereba Togola for Mali, Mr A. Zodi for Niger, Dr Yaro Gella and Dr Joe Eboeime for Nigeria, Mr Mbaye Bassine Dieng for Senegal and Mr N. Djanguenane for Togo, took a thematic approach to the sites in accordance with the present terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

The majority of the papers contained a preliminary evaluation, by country, of all the natural and cultural properties that might be eligible for future inscription on the World Heritage List, a selection of which will be proposed in the final tentative lists of each country.

Several experts indicated the authorities and institutions responsible for the cultural policy of their countries, and defined the means of internal diffusion of these policies and the national legislation in force for the safeguard and conservation of their heritage. Others on the contrary, stressed the lack of co-ordination amongst the institutions and deplored a rigidity and compartmentalisation that hinders all action. They thus voiced the desire for a rapid improvement of these conditions in order to launch an effective collaboration between the institutions responsible for the protection of their countries' heritage.

Natural properties

Fifteen sites that meet the criteria for these properties as defined in the *Guidelines* (paragraphs 43 and 44) were proposed for inscription³.

Natural habitats the most representative of biological diversity, and home to certain endangered species, the Reserves: the Reserve of Fazao-Malfakassa in Togo, Lake Bosomtwe in Ghana⁴, Gashaka Gumpti National Park in Nigeria, the site of Konoî-Mindala (watering place for birds) of Guinea, the W National Park of Niger, a transborder park spreading over several States and of which the portions in Benin and Burkina Faso could be proposed for inscription.

³ Only a few examples are given for both the natural and cultural sites; the complete list of these properties, by country, can be found in each expert's paper which will be published in the Proceedings of the Meeting.

⁴ Lake of volcanic origin, it seems, the level of which rises annually by three metres and which is home to a unique type of fish, the *chromus bosomanus*.

Eminent example of the earth's history and witness to species of the past: the archaeological deposit of the Dinosaurs of Gadafawa in Akaba, Niger.

Natural sites, biosphere reserves: the River Delta Mono or Bocca del Rio in Benin, and the mangrove delta in Nigeria.

Cultural properties

Cultural landscapes

Cultural landscapes, such as the natural reserves with many species of flora and fauna, special geological formations (sandstone hills), numerous vestiges of Neolithic encampments, rock carvings, necropolises, metallurgy sites: the Boucle du Baoulé National Park in Mali.

Prehistoric, archaeological and rock art sites

The Sahel region, crossroads since time immemorial of trans-Saharan trails and trade routes, and the dwelling place of ancient populations, in its western part from Mauritania to Niger, reveals a wealth of vestiges of this past. Prehistoric sites of the region of Dahr Tichitt-Oualata in Mauritania; rock carvings of Trab al Hajra and the massif of Rkiz in Mauritania, of Pobe in Burkina Faso, of the Baoulé National Park in Mali and those of Djado in Niger.

The immense Senegal-Gambia megalithic area, composed of both circles and tumuli, is an archaeological transborder site that could be proposed for inscription by two countries participating in the meeting, Senegal and Gambia.

Permanent human settlements

The African village groups offer many examples of traditional architecture, remarkable for the use of available materials, their integration into the environment, building techniques, spatial organization and land-use for their social, family and economic structures: villages in the hills of Kona in Nigeria, the vernacular fortified habitat of Tamberma (called Tata Tamberma) in Benin and Togo, huts of *impluvium doilo* of Casamance (Senegal), *banco* architecture of the bozo villages of Mali, lakeside constructions of Ganvié (Benin).

Cities

Three types of historic cities, of different epochs, have been proposed for possible inscription.

Centres or capitals of large state configurations of the Sahel region or ancient kingdoms and the monuments that bear witness to these ancient functions: fortifications (*ksour*) of the ancient cities of Mauritania, ruins of Hamdallahi, capital of the Peul Empire of Macina (Mali), Kano, one of the biggest trade centres of West Africa, and Oyo in Nigeria, Agadez in Niger, Porto-Novo and its palaces in Benin.

Trading post cities, contact points between local and foreign cultures in the framework of commercial relations: the ruins of James Island (Gambia).

Colonial cities which owe their blueprint to colonial decisions or where constructions of their districts or blocks are characteristic of the architectural concepts of the different colonisers: the Island and City of Saint Louis (Senegal), called the city "of the great plan" which was intended to be the capital of the French colonial empire south of the Sahara; examples of so-called 'Brazilian' architecture in Porto-Novo (Benin) and in Lagos-Badagry (Nigeria).

Religious monuments and non-built sites

These two categories of sacred places are well represented in West Africa: ancient monuments built during the lengthy implantation of Islam (or, more recently, during the diffusion of Christianity), animist religious sites or those pertaining to ancestral traditions, represented by a building, trees, woods, bodies of water or carved reliefs which have become cult places: mosques (some of which are already listed) of the Sahel region (Mali), of Agadez (Niger), of Larabanga (Ghana), of Earia (Nigeria).

Places of technical production

Mines, raw material deposits associated with transformation and production centres, integrated into long-distance exchange networks: iron metallurgy, furnaces of Bassar-Nanjani (Togo) and Nigeria, deposits of Taruga (north), Enyong (south-east), mines and furnaces of Igbo-Lejja.

Routes

Salt Route of the Aïr à Kaouar that could be proposed for inscription by Niger.

The Slave Route is a project that has already been inaugurated by UNESCO. Benin proposed to inscribe the ancient quarters of the city of Ouidah (vestiges of the slave trade) on the World Heritage List. In 1992 "the journey of the memory" was created in this same city; it traces the different phases of the slave trade from the marking and selling points to the embarkation beaches.

In accordance with the programme, the meeting was then devoted to thematic exposés

followed by debates and discussions amongst the countries' experts and the members of the Scientific Committee.

5. Thematic approach

5.1. The notion of cultural landscape and the nature-culture links in Africa

Reflection on this theme was introduced by the remarkable allocation of Professor E. Adjanohoun, international expert and member of the Scientific Committee. The category of "cultural landscapes"⁵ -- the "combined works of nature and of man" -- is an improvement in the description and qualification of African sites. There are many examples of landscapes transformed by man during his economic, technological and social evolution in the West-African bio-geographical system. The structural degradations observed throughout recent history⁶, notably the over-exploitation of resources, affect Africa all the more because of its inter-tropical geographical situation. In spite of this difficult biophysical milieu, the populations have known for thousands of years how to profit from and exploit the range of natural resources of these different territories. During this century, the dangers posing a threat to biodiversity have already modified the African cultural landscapes: reduction of fertile soils, extensive deforestation. "Rare are the stabilised and African cultural landscapes of universal value that have been spared by the natural or anthropic modifying phenomena". A policy for the protection of sustainable balanced sites must be sought at State level as well as at the level of intergovernmental organizations, in order to halt the destruction and maintain our environment in a process of sustainable development.

International organizations such as the UNCED⁷, UNESCO's World Heritage Convention and its MAB Programme, as well as AFRI-MAB launched in Seville in 1995, have produced concrete guidelines for the protection of sites, affirmed the need for a world strategy for conservation, advocated the rational use of natural resources, and recommended the management of biosphere reserves in Africa for the conservation of biodiversity.

Presently, out of the 48 African sites on the World Heritage List, there are only seven in West Africa. It is therefore essential to give priority to the inscription of West-African cultural landscapes on the List: national parks, botanical gardens in order to safeguard endangered species. To this end, in November 1994, a Regional Pilot Centre for African Biodiversity (CENPREBAF) was created in Benin, based on the renovation and

⁵ Defined in 1994 by the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: *Guidelines*, Feb., 1997, Criteria for the inclusion of cultural properties in the World Heritage List (para.35) p.9.

⁶ Harsh climates, high temperatures, physico-chemical evolution of the soils encourage the processes of induration, acceleration of chemical and biological reactions, stimulation of pathogenic organisms and their vectors...

⁷ UNCED (1992): United Nations Conference on the Environment and Sustainable Development.

development of the former botanical and zoological gardens. This Centre receives financial assistance from different ministries and institutions of Benin, and from international organizations.

The discussion that followed this exposé took note of Professor Adjanooun's conclusions which included the following recommendation: the need to set up a unitary strategy of neighbouring countries, such as Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin, so that the entire natural site of the W Park, can be inscribed in the World Heritage List, and not only the part within Niger. The need for agreements between the countries for the inscription of a transborder site was acknowledged and recommended by the participants.

The major issue that surfaced in the subsequent discussion was the relation of neighbouring populations to the protected sites, traditionally governed by strict legislation. The creation

of protected zones forbidden to them can be seen by the populations as a deprivation of their territory and space. They feel threatened in their economic survival (scarcity of land accentuated by demographic pressure), their traditional privileges (hunting rights), their symbolic heritage (cult places, areas inhabited by spirits). The inscription of these sites must not be contrary to the needs and beliefs of the local populations. How to deal with the feelings of exclusion? What measures should be taken to respect these needs and beliefs? The participants suggested: that the populations be associated with the management of the sites, that concessions such as hunting rights linked to initiation practices be granted in buffer zones (most often on the periphery of the protected area), that access to the site be authorised if it is the place of their religious and traditional practices.

If the African heritage is essentially a living heritage that closely associates nature and culture, there must not be rigid conservation measures that hinder the expression or expressions of these living cultures.

5.2. Religious places, spiritual itineraries and trade routes, places of technical production

In the title of his paper, Mr. Dawson. Munjeri placed the accent on what, for him, is the cornerstone of the African heritage: the non-monumental heritage.

In this regard, a slow but certain evolution has been taking place since the meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Santa Fe in 1992, towards the progressive acceptance of the notion of traditions and living cultures that enhances the importance of the intangible heritage. This category includes sacred sites, cultural and religious itineraries, commercial trade routes. Oral tradition⁸, to which allusion is made in the introduction to this paper, bears witness to the living traditions and could justifiably find a place in this dimension of

⁸ Genealogies, hagiographies of famous political or religious chiefs, legendary heroes cited by the griots, accounts of myths (founding and others), tales...

intangible heritage.

Sacred places, spiritual sites – and beliefs and practices pertaining to them – are an integral part of this intangible heritage. The *Guidelines* specify (paragraph C24 vi) that a property should "be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs.....of outstanding universal significance"; however "this criterion should justify inclusion in the List only in exceptional circumstances". According to D. Munjeri, this restriction ignores the living nature of the beliefs and the experiences of the African spiritual traditions that are most often expressed through repetition (rites) and in daily life (living memory), and thus paralyses the content.

The understanding of cultural and spiritual itineraries as set out in the *Guidelines* is easier: "The itinerary is composed of material elements that derive their cultural significance from exchanges and a multidimensional dialogue between countries or regions that illustrate the interaction of the movement throughout the itinerary, in space and time". There are many examples in West Africa as was illustrated by the discussions of the experts following the presentation of the theme.

Finally, the places of technical production, whether related to metal processing, or complex agrarian or hydraulic techniques, attest to the mastery of these techniques and their age, confirmed by archaeological excavations (which does not exclude their continuing use today).

In support of this exposé, during the discussion, the experts gave examples of this non-material or intangible heritage which, for them also, is the very foundation of African cultures. Sacred groves, sanctuaries, sites inhabited by ancestral spirits are the places of "the living memory, of a past that blends with the present"⁹, a memory that governs the social and individual life of the African people.

The notion of itinerary – an open, dynamic and evocative concept according to D. Munjeri – provoked lively discussion: "Economic and cultural trade routes that engender relationships with different cultures (pastoral and sedentary), geographic areas or populations of diverse origins brought together by the same faith and destination along pilgrim routes or at the tombs of holy persons"¹⁰. Amongst the West-African itineraries crossing the countries from west to east are the routes of the different groups of nomadic breeders of the Sahél region. Dotted with material vestiges (archaeological sites, rock carvings) these breeders still live and wander here, thus testifying to a way of life and a living culture.

The Hadj pilgrimage routes to Mecca crossing the continent, siphon populations of different origins, cultures and languages towards Arabia. Caravan cities and relay cities marking the stopping points already have certain monuments inscribed on the World Heritage List

⁹ J. Bocco, expert from Benin, Presentation of the Heritage of Benin, p.1.

¹⁰ B. Hirsch, Summary Report, Second Global Strategy Meeting, Addis Ababa 1996, p. 151.

(Djenné-Timbuktu). However these routes that sprang to life annually were not only the vectors of the Islamic message and therefore of conversions, but also of economic and cultural exchanges.

The symbiotic relations between the communities with complementary competencies traced on the West-African territory perennial routes along which raw materials circulated: gold, iron, salt. Some of these routes are better known today, and Niger will propose the Salt Route of the Air à Kaouar for inscription.

Parallel to the Slave Route which is a UNESCO project, the participants wished to recognize the Slave Routes which, by taking into account the three continents involved in the western slave trade, would permit the analysis of the cultural interactions between Europe, Africa, America and the Caribbean. As they actually did in reality, these routes would link the "slave sites", sales points and holding stations, the stages of the routes, slave sites of maritime Guinea, slave trading centre of the Island of Goree (already listed).

The islands of Cape Verde were part of this transatlantic route. Let us briefly recall the singular history of these islands: discovered by the Portuguese in the 15th century, they remained a Portuguese colony until 1975. Having played the role of holding station in the triangular commerce, they have an important built religious (church, convent, cathedral) and military heritage, however in a severe state of deterioration. Their inscription on the Slave Route would break their isolation and give them the international recognition they strongly request.

5.3. Historical heritage, human settlements and living cultures

C. Le Cour Grandmaison recalled the importance in the history of West Africa - and the number - of the large political ensembles (state configurations of the Sahél region, ancient kingdoms and empires of Ghana, Benin, Kanem-Bornou and Oyo in Nigeria, prestigious chieftaincies of Moorish Guinea and Emirate). Criss-crossed by far-reaching trading networks, punctuated by caravan towns and cities that were temporary religious and/or commercial meeting places, these ensembles were defined within confines that obviously do not coincide with present political boundaries. The marks, traces, and vestiges of these large formations, of their political organization and their social and economic structures, remain. Their identification and inventory make it clear that the political segmentation linked to the present national frontiers should be abandoned.

West-African populations of different ecological areas – desert regions, savannah, humid coastal fringes – had to deal with determining climatic and pedological conditions which they approached with various solutions according to whether they were attached to the land, the sea or the seasonal migration routes. The profusion and diversity of the examples of human settlements that they created from the resources of their environment – or the limits imposed by it – illustrate the category of "cultural landscapes". These landscapes -- "combined works

of nature and man" -- have been transformed by the human communities throughout their economic, technological and social evolution.

However, this extreme diversity of African communities – of which certain are still relatively isolated – does not preclude cultural and structural similarities. A common language, and identical social and family organizations (chieftancy and clan systems, lineage structures) conjugate to determine socio-cultural groups whose contours cross frontiers. This is the case with the Akan group which embraces both the Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, and with the Tamberna communities that are present in both Togo and Benin.

Thus the methodology must take into account the geo-cultural areas and religious groups in order to reconstitute the context and respect history.

The discussion which followed was therefore based on the methodological principles that must guide the establishment of tentative lists and on the ensuing practical guidelines: reconstitution of the cultural context of the property proposed for inscription (origin, evolution in time up to the present), order of priority of the properties proposed for inscription, decided after local, regional and national consultation, which implies the constitution of working groups composed of specialists and persons responsible for the cultural polity of the countries concerned.

6. Conservation plan of the Abomey Royal Palaces (Benin)

Presented by Mrs de Souza, Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture and Communication at the request of the participants, this paper illustrates the efforts made by a State Party to set up monitoring measures.

The site of the Royal Palaces is a major material witness to the history and civilization of Danxomé from the 17th century to the end of the 19th century¹¹. Inscribed on the World Heritage List, this site, constantly threatened by natural phenomena and human activities, was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Placed under the responsibility of the Directorate of Cultural Heritage¹² and in spite of efforts made at national and international levels to support the efforts of the Royal families, the majority of the buildings continue to deteriorate (fragile materials, insufficient maintenance and proper resources to stabilize the state of conservation).

The need for a conservation plan, in order to channel the intentions of the various persons concerned with the improvement of the condition of the site, was recognized in 1995, at the

¹¹ The site is constituted of a group of buildings, spaces and walls of impressive height; it spreads over 44 hectares.

¹² It is under the Ministry of Culture and Communication that grants usage to the Royal families.

request of the World Heritage Committee. An instrument of collaboration and partnership, this plan is based on the following main principles: it is a living historic site situated in the heart of the city which should be integrated into the development process of the society and the city. All the resources mobilized for its safeguard must be devoted in priority to the maintenance of the existing structure and to the prevention of risks of degradation. Further research and in-depth studies are necessary to improve the present knowledge of the site.

The objectives of this plan are: co-ordination of actions and an increase in the museum's resources; at the institutional level, the creation of a monitoring and management advisory body by a strengthened museum team which would also oversee the stabilisation of the site and its legal protection; finally better promotion and enhancement of the site. All these measures should lead to the removal of the site from the List of Heritage in Danger.

"The important national effort agreed upon¹³, strengthened by international support and complementing the local efforts and the capacity of the team of the Historical Museum of Abomey that will be progressively strengthened, should allow the objectives of this plan to be attained, and thus truly ensure the perennity of the site of the Royal Palaces of Abomey for present and future generations".

7. Explicit messages

The experts unanimously felt that certain definitions of the *Guidelines* can still be improved, better defined and developed.

The criteria of authenticity still poses a problem. The experts felt that its definition is marred by European ethnocentrism and that, in practice, it is difficult to apply in the African context. Although the Committee conducted reflection on this criteria, towards making it more adaptable to the diversity and the specificity of heritage of the different regions of the world¹⁴, it still incites numerous reservations amongst African experts. "The evolution of the criteria of authenticity allows us henceforth to take into account in a more satisfactory manner the significance of a property in the eyes of the human community that created it, as each work should be more thoroughly considered and evaluated in regard to the cultural context to which it belongs." The example of the site of Great Zimbabwe, analysed by D. Munjeri, appropriately reveals the complexity of the meanings and significance that a cultural-natural site can contain, the misunderstanding of which can cause numerous misinterpretations.

The notion of intangible heritage which relates to numerous African cultural sites has, it seems, an essential operational value in the African cultures. However, because of the

¹³ The Government of Benin, aware of the importance of the safeguard plan and the enhancement of the site....agreed to a 50% increase of the subvention allocated to the site over the next five years.

¹⁴ Léon Pressouyre, *The World Heritage Convention – twenty years later*, ed; UNESCO 1993, p.11.

extreme diversity of the cultural properties belonging to this heritage, and their heterogeneity, there results a haphazard grouping within this concept of all the "non monumental" cultural/natural properties concerning the spiritual and religious life of the African populations. As has been done for the criteria of authenticity, it appears necessary and desirable that the African experts carry out a further in-depth critical reflection on this concept.

An explicit message strongly expressed by all the participants was the absolute necessity of involving the local populations in the decision-making process for the inscription of a cultural-natural property on the World Heritage List.

Many sites, as the experts' inventories have shown, are managed by the traditional law of the communities living there. In certain cases, these communities ensure the management and protection of the site themselves. Only the values as expressed through the living cultures can enable the reconstitution of the property in its context and an understanding of its significance. The involvement of these populations is therefore necessary, all the more so because they constitute a local expertise that is essential for an understanding of the significance, but that can also guarantee the protection and maintenance of the site, if they do not feel excluded and subject to external decision-makers whose aims they do not understand.

These local communities can also be included in the network of expertise and action constituted from the base to the summit by the local populations (inhabitants, neighbouring communities...), public or private regional institutions, and at State level by the concerned Ministries (Patrimony, Culture, Heritage...) and political decision-makers.

Co-ordination of actions is necessary at both the financial level, as was evident with the conservation plan for the Royal Palaces of Abomey, and at the research level. A better knowledge of the majority of the sites calls for the gathering of supplementary documentation (compilation of written/oral documents, archives, plans of the sites or monuments...) and field surveys to be carried out. It is thus a long-term task that calls for the mobilization of national experts with training in complementary fields, and possibly an external and/or international expertise, if the request is made.

The creation of interdisciplinary national committees towards this same goal should avoid compartmentalisation and rigidity – so often stressed during this meeting - that paralyses actions and thwarts all attempts at co-ordination from the outset.

The West-African States represented were aware of the mutilation of certain transborder sites due to the definition of national boundaries. In this respect, they addressed an explicit message to UNESCO¹⁵: "that UNESCO, through its contacts and networks should facilitate the elaboration of a project for the inscription of sites and eco-cultural transborder

15 See the Recommendations of the experts: recommendations for transborder sites

landscapes on the World Heritage List".

8. Conclusion

The ratification of the Convention by all the African States was considered by the experts present in this Fourth Global Strategy meeting to be necessary and urgent for the protection and safeguard of the African heritage.

The extensive press coverage of the opening session, the presentation of the experts, the thematic approaches and the discussions that followed, contributed to the national, regional and international diffusion not only of the aims of this Fourth Global Strategy Meeting, but also the results: the recommendations formulated by the experts present.

The participants wished to thank UNESCO, the World Heritage Centre and the World Heritage Committee for having organized this meeting on African soil. Through its fruitful exchanges, the participants obtained a better understanding of the definitions of the *Guidelines*, and they were able to share information, express concerns and make progress in the definition(s) of the specificity of the African heritage.

The proposal to hold a seminar convening the experts present, to be organised in Niger at the end of 1999, and financed through a Preparatory Assistance request, was favourably received by all the participants. The aim would be to pursue exchanges and collaboration, and to make an effort at transborder harmonization with a view to establishing final tentative lists by country.

The participants were sensitive to the welcome they received from the Republic of Benin and they greatly appreciated the attentive and efficient collaboration of the representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Communication. They were very honoured, during the closing session of this Fourth Global Strategy Meeting where they presented their recommendations, by the adoption of these recommendations and the presence of the Minister for Culture and Communication, Mr Séverin Adjovi.

ANNEX I

MOTIONS OF THANKS

1. Motion of Thanks to the Government of the Republic of Benin

The experts participating in the 4th Global Strategy Meeting held at Porto Novo, Republic of Benin 16 - 19 September 1998:

Appreciative of the warm welcome and the excellent working conditions and the stay extended to them,

Express their gratitude

- 1) to the Government of the Republic of Benin for its substantial assistance,
- 2) to the Ministry of Culture and Communications for the open and frank co-operation displayed by the Minister and his collaborators,
- 3) to all the other institutions involved and which contributed towards the great success of this Global Strategy Meeting.

2. Motion of Thanks to UNESCO and the World Heritage Centre

The experts participating in the 4th Global Strategy Meeting for West Africa

Aware that the present meeting provided the persons responsible for heritage in the countries of the West African sub-region with increased support to improve the presentation of cultural and/or natural sites with the aim of their wider recognition by the international community,

Thanked

UNESCO, the World Heritage Centre and the World Heritage Committee for having organized this meeting in Benin, on African soil.

The meeting provided the opportunity for fruitful exchange of experiences as well as an improved sharing of information concerning the Convention.

Porto Novo, Republic of Benin
18 September 1998

The Participants

ANNEX II

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendations on Routes

The experts participating in the 4th Global Strategy Meeting held at Porto Novo, Republic of Benin 16 - 19 September 1998:

* Considering the importance of the role played by routes in the history of peoples of the African continent as commercial exchange routes, but also of cultural and spiritual mixing and exchanges;

*Aware of the need to study and to rehabilitate them in the universal collective memory and promote them both on the cultural and tourist levels;

Recommend that in the implementation of the Convention:

1) The consideration of the following routes:

- * Slave Route
- * Pilgrimage Routes
- * Trans-Saharan Routes

2) A study of the ways and means to encourage the inscription of these routes on the World Heritage List.

2. Recommendations for Transboundary Properties

The experts participating in the 4th Global Strategy Meeting held in Porto Novo, Republic of Benin from 16 - 19 September 1998:

Noting that many cultural and/or natural properties extend beyond territorial boundaries of States as recognized by the international community, thus displaying a transboundary character;

Noting with regret, that until now, each State when establishing its tentative lists only considers the portion of the site situated within its sovereign territory, thus separating a part from a more significant coherent ensemble;

Considering the complexities which are involved in the procedures for joint inscription;

Recommend that:

UNESCO, by means of its contacts and networks, facilitates the establishment of a project with the objective to inscribe transboundary properties and eco-cultural landscapes on the World Heritage List.

* The intangible and spiritual aspects which constitute the essence of the African character (eg. its cosmology, history, art and architecture) be taken into account in the evaluation of properties proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List.

3. Recommendations on the Role of the States

The experts participating at the 4th Global Strategy Meeting held at Porto Novo, Republic of Benin from 16-19 September 1998:

Considering the central and supportive role that States Parties have to play in the implementation of the Convention;

Considering the need to help them to better play this role;

Recommend:

- 1) That the States that have yet to ratify the Convention do so as soon as possible;
- 2) The strengthening of the capacity of national administrations to permit them to better promote the Convention;
- 3) The creation of national committees to encourage the inscription of cultural and natural properties on the tentative lists, and on the World Heritage List.

4. Training Recommendations

Experts participating in the 4th Global Strategy Meeting held at Porto Novo in the Republic of Benin from 16-19 September 1998:

Based on the recognition of the very clear imbalance persisting between countries of the north and those of Africa in general, in comparison to the number of cultural and/or natural properties inscribed on the World Heritage List;

Considering the potential weaknesses in the training components used for the study and valorization of cultural and/or natural heritage of the West African sub-region;

Agreeing on the primary need to initiate training activities with the objective of preparing a sufficient number of qualified experts in each country for heritage management;

Aware that at present, acknowledgment by the international community of enormous cultural wealth to be found in the West African sub-region can be only recognized through the application of the criteria endorsed by the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, which requires the best possible preparation of each dossier;

After an in-depth examination of the possibilities which could improve the availability of national experts both in number and in quality,

Recommend the following:

1) The only way to provide the countries of the West African sub-region with experts in sufficient number and quality to ensure an improved promotion of their heritage on both a regional and international level is an acceleration in the implementation of training activities for national experts.

Considering the urgency (many important sites are in danger, or will be so shortly) and the small number of heritage of the sub-region inscribed on the World Heritage List, due more to insufficient technical and procedural knowledge than quality of the sites themselves, this training policy should be established within an acceptable time frame.

2) Firstly, the encouragement in each country of an internal transfer of knowledge through national training courses conducted by adequately qualified national experts. That those countries which do not have a sufficient number of specialists to ensure this training require, above all, the services of experts within the sub-region familiar with the social-cultural context.

3) For the participants of this meeting, the organization of a training workshop to establish dossiers for the inscription of cultural and natural sites on the World Heritage List.

5. Special Recommendations to the World Heritage Committee

The participating experts, aware of the importance of financial support provided by UNESCO towards safeguarding humankind's heritage;

Taking into account the ever-increasing financial difficulties encountered by a certain number of States Parties including those of the sub-region, to mobilize the indispensable

resources required to accomplish the tasks involved in the process of the inscription of their sites, requests UNESCO to examine the possibilities of substantially increasing the amounts allocated for preparatory assistance.

Porto Novo, Republic of Benin
18 September 1998

The Participants