

Statement of the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on World Heritage

Item 7B –

State of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List

Thank you.

Mr. Chair, as recognized in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making affecting them. The Declaration also clearly states that UN agencies and other intergovernmental organisations shall promote full application of the provisions of the Declaration and shall establish ways and means of ensuring participation of Indigenous peoples on issues affecting them.

The UNESCO Policy on Indigenous Peoples reaffirms that Indigenous peoples have the right to “full and effective participation in all matters affecting their lives and cultures” and notes that “the governing bodies of UNESCO’s Culture Conventions... can play an important role in developing ... operational mechanisms to ensure full and effective participation and inclusion of indigenous peoples in the processes of these instruments”.

In the Sustainable Development Policy, the World Heritage Committee itself has underlined the importance of effective involvement of Indigenous peoples in decision-making, and calls on States Parties to “Ensure... effective participation of indigenous peoples where... nomination, management and policy measures affect their territories, lands, resources and ways of life” and to develop operational mechanisms for indigenous peoples’ involvement in World Heritage processes.

In light of this, we simply do not understand why the Committee does not respect our right to effectively participate in decision-making *in its own sessions* and hears statements of Indigenous peoples only after its decisions have already been adopted, leaving us without a possibility to influence the decisions through the information we provide!

Mr. Chair, this is unacceptable. The decisions taken by this esteemed body have enormous impacts on our lands and territories, our cultures and our lives. We are also the supreme experts about our lands and more committed than anybody to taking care of them and safeguarding them for future generations. Looking at another intergovernmental body, the IPBES Assessment Report on Land Degradation and Restoration states that lands and territories under indigenous management are the best conserved in the world.

We therefore urge the Committee to change its practice and rules of procedure and ensure that henceforth, as in previous sessions, representatives of Indigenous peoples are consistently given the floor *before* the Committee takes its decisions. Obviously, this applies not only to decisions on the State of Conservation of sites, but to all decisions affecting us, including decisions on nominations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.