

GEORGE TOWN DECLARATION

5 March 2024

George Town, Penang, Malaysia

PREAMBLE

We, the participants of the “We Are Site Managers International Symposium” (held from 1-5 March 2024, George Town, Malaysia) from 37 countries, express our gratitude to the Penang State Government, George Town World Heritage Incorporated and the communities of George Town Historic City for organizing the Symposium. Participants expressed that the Symposium was very welcome, providing a transparent and stimulating platform to discuss and highlight opportunities and challenges faced by Site Managers in the context of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Site Managers work with passion, and it is through them that World Heritage can show leadership in defining what best practice looks like in conserving, protecting, and safeguarding the world’s outstanding places for the present and future generations. Site Managers are the fundamental link between the international and local: they are the ones who work at World Heritage and advocate for World Heritage. They work on the ground, implementing the State Party’s commitment to the protection, conservation, and transmission of heritage, as well as ensuring that heritage contributes to the sustainable development of the local community.

ACKNOWLEDGING that Site Managers face daily challenges in executing their complex yet essential day-to-day responsibilities, including managing and mitigating increasing threats at World Heritage Properties, it is important and urgent to address the challenges and opportunities of the role and the effective functioning of Site Manager, which differs greatly with the applicable management and governance systems, as well as the local geo-context.

NOTING that Site Managers often operate in environments where they are not involved directly in the decision-making processes of the World Heritage system, resources are scarce, opportunities are limited, Site Managers' voices are not heard, and appropriate mechanisms for Site Managers to function efficiently are absent and/or lacking. Therefore, we call for urgent action to address the role and effective functioning of Site Managers at World Heritage Properties across the World.

We **INVITE** all State Parties, the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies, the Category II Centres, UNESCO Chairs, international, national, and local organizations, communities and stakeholders, to support the shared vision, strategic positioning, and formally recognise the Site Managers’ role and function in the World Heritage system for the effective implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention by adopting the George Town Declaration.

ACTIONS

- (1) **FORMALLY RECOGNISE** the Site Manager’s mandates, roles, and functions, as well as their formal involvement in the decision-making process of the World Heritage system at international, national and local levels. In particular, there is a necessity to establish a registration category specifically for ‘Site Managers’ during various activities and projects. Enabling the direct participation of Site Managers in the formal decision-making process of the World Heritage Committee will allow transparent information sharing on the state of conservation of World Heritage properties, and support Site Managers to benefit from first-hand exposure to the Committee’s decision-making, learn valuable lessons from other sites, as well as the discussions and debates that take place during these Committee sessions.
- (2) **RECOMMEND** that the Site Manager is an important party to the development of the site management system even before the inscription. Therefore, it is highly recommended for the formal establishment of a Site Manager office/entity/authority during the nomination process, that can function effectively within the local context and frameworks. Such establishments should include clearly articulated site management mechanisms with long-term, continuous and sustainable resources (such as sufficient time, financial support for operation, political will, synchronized legal framework at international and local levels, professional recognition, inclusion in decision-making, and sufficient human resources), to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of a Site Manager for the World Heritage property.
- (3) **REQUEST** that voices and concerns of Site Managers be sought, considered and addressed, through a transparent, informed, and responsible decision-making process, facilitated by early, inclusive and meaningful communication with all the relevant actors in the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention at both national and international levels. Site Managers possess extensive expertise in local knowledge, know-how, and often maintain strong connections with the local community, including facilitating monitoring of conservation indicators to retain the Outstanding Universal Values, integrity and authenticity of properties and in its wider setting. Given opportunities, Site Managers can provide independent insights that prioritize long-term interests over short-term gains, thereby adding significant value for any monitoring exercise, capacity building, policy evaluation, development of management guidelines or strategies, or establishment of legal frameworks.
- (4) **FACILITATE FURTHER CAPACITY BUILDING** of Site Managers, their teams and other colleagues for them to function efficiently in the long term as professionals, and this should include skills and competence areas that facilitate the overall effective functioning of the Site Managers at World Heritage properties in administration, project management,

policy-making, negotiation, effective communication, financial and budget preparation, project execution, and more.

- (5) **INVITE SUPPORT** for the establishment of a World Heritage Site Managers Global Network recommended by the Symposium to serve as a global collective platform for Site Managers across the world. This Network aims to maintain a transparent, inclusive and updated list of Site Managers of World Heritage properties, thus encouraging **PEER-TO-PEER** dialogue and collaboration, sharing relevant information, maximizing science and technology, finding pragmatic solutions at the site level, promoting sustainable development of heritage sites, and supporting the World Heritage Committee in their adopted decision, including the implementation of Periodic Report, Action Plans and other activities. Established site managers and site managers' networks will be consulted on the formation of the inaugural World Heritage Site Managers' Working Group, to promote bottom-up leadership processes and explore opportunities for formalizing the Network. Site managers on the tentative list will also be invited to the network.

We **ACKNOWLEDGE** that these discussions started in the context of the World Heritage Site Managers' Forums (Kraków, 2017, Manama 2018, Baku 2019, Fuzhou/online 2021, and Riyadh 2023) and other World Heritage Leadership activities, and thank the participants of those events for their contributions.

This final version of the George Town Declaration (in English) has been edited by the rapporteurs of the We Are Site Managers International Symposium. Translated version of the Declaration will be available in the local language to mobilize collective support. For more information on this Declaration, please contact secretariat@gtwhi.com.my.