

# **International Conference on Cultural Heritage in Africa: A Global Dialogue on the Concept of Integrity and Authenticity Nairobi, Kenya, 6–9 May 2025**

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## **CONCEPT NOTE**

### **Background**

Africa boasts a rich cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. The UNESCO 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention) has positioned this heritage as a pivotal driver of sustainable development, an essential expression of cultural identity, and a source of livelihood for communities. Despite the universal ratification of the World Heritage Convention across Africa, the continent accounts for only 12.26% of the 1,223 sites on the World Heritage List, with 150 properties. Furthermore, Africa has the highest number of sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger (14 out of 56).

The adoption of the Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced, and Credible World Heritage List in 1994 by the World Heritage Committee, aligned with UNESCO's medium-term strategy prioritizing Africa and gender equality, has yielded significant progress. These advancements include identifying and inscribing heritage unique to Africa, such as cultural landscapes and archaeological and paleontological sites; establishing capacity-building programs like Africa2009, which led to the creation of two regional training centers—the Ecole du Patrimoine Africain (EPA) in Benin and the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA) in Kenya; founding the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF) in South Africa in 2006 to support robust nomination dossiers; and introducing the fifth “C” (for Communities) to the strategic objectives of the World Heritage Convention in 2007, acknowledging the role of local communities and traditional systems in managing World Heritage sites.

Despite these achievements, African heritage remains underrepresented on the World Heritage List. The existing approaches to heritage management, particularly the interpretation and application of the concepts of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), authenticity, and integrity, have yet to be fully adapted to Africa's cultural contexts. This has led to a gap between academic heritage theories and their practical application at local and regional levels.

African perspectives on authenticity and integrity require greater emphasis, acknowledging the cultural, socio-economic, and political dimensions of self-definition. These concepts, often associated with originality, must also consider the dynamic and evolving nature of heritage significance over time. Authenticity and

integrity are not static; they reflect continuous transformations in form, space, and meaning. Common traits across Africa include the vital role of heritage sites in daily life and the blurred lines between tangible and intangible aspects of nature and culture.

Numerous regional and national consultations have addressed these issues, resulting in declarations and policy documents, such as the 1995 First Global Strategy meeting in Zimbabwe, the 2005 African Position Paper presented at the 29th World Heritage Committee session in Durban, and the 2016 Ngorongoro Declaration on Safeguarding African World Heritage as a Driver of Sustainable Development. More recently, African States Parties have advocated for an in-depth reflection on authenticity and heritage within Africa, culminating in the 46th World Heritage Committee decision (46 COM 11) in New Delhi (2024) to host this conference in Kenya.

## **Rationale**

Organizing a regional consultation on cultural heritage and the criteria for authenticity and integrity in Africa will strengthen existing strategies and approaches, opening new perspectives for improved implementation of the Convention on the continent. It will contribute to increasing the number of African nominations and enhancing the management of already inscribed sites. A broad reflection and consultation will allow African experts and communities, as well as others, to share their research, experiences, knowledge, and observations to clarify the conditions related to authenticity and integrity criteria and heritage conservation in Africa.

As a result, an international conference on the concepts of authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage in the African context will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, from May 6 to 9, 2025. The event aims to facilitate the exchange of research, experiences, knowledge, and observations. This initiative will contribute to the identification, documentation, protection, enhancement, and promotion of humanity's heritage in Africa and beyond. The Conference will bring together African participants and international partners, including government officials, academics, heritage experts, community representatives, NGOs, and civil society members involved in the conservation and promotion of world heritage.

The International Conference will aim to explore the understanding of the concepts of authenticity and integrity of heritage in Africa and to determine ways to identify more African heritage properties to strengthen protection efforts. Ultimately, the conference will contribute to revisiting and deepening the concepts of authenticity and integrity of cultural heritage, both in their theoretical and practical dimensions, within the African context.

## **Objectives**

### **1. Foster a shared understanding of authenticity and integrity:**

- Create a dynamic platform for sharing findings, presentations, and discussions to establish a shared understanding of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) while considering regional contexts.
- Develop new approaches for identifying and nominating African heritage to the World Heritage List, enhancing its balance and representation.

### **2. Engage diverse stakeholders:**

- Facilitate inclusive participation from policymakers, academics, heritage experts, NGOs, and local communities.
- Emphasize active involvement of local communities, minority groups, and indigenous communities in heritage site management.

## **Expected Outcomes**

### **1. Recommendations to the World Heritage committee:**

- Develop actionable recommendations for inclusion in the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention, aligning with the Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced, and Credible World Heritage List.

### **2. Documentation and publication:**

- Publish a peer-reviewed volume documenting the conference discussions, presenting diverse perspectives on authenticity and conservation ethics within Africa and beyond. This publication will provide a scientific basis for a shared understanding of these concepts.

## **DIRECT BENEFICIARIES (public)**

- States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, particularly the 54 countries of the African continent
- Local and indigenous communities, community representatives
- Academics, heritage experts, and community representatives from all regions and the entire African continent
- Advisory bodies of the World Heritage Committee (ICOMOS, ICCROM, and IUCN)
- UNESCO Category 2 Centres
- Heritage training institutions

- Universities, UNESCO Chairs, research institutes, and researchers
- Non-governmental organizations
- Other regional representatives

## **SPEAKERS AND PARTICIPANTS**

The International Conference on Cultural Heritage in Africa will bring together a wide range of participants, including but not limited to:

- Representatives of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention
- Representatives of Advisory Bodies
- Heritage experts, academics, and community representatives
- Category 2 Centres and heritage training institutions
- Members of the community, including indigenous peoples and minority groups
- Representatives of NGOs

Selected speakers will be chosen through the abstract submission process, reviewed by the scientific committee, and overseen by the steering committee

## **Communication**

UNESCO, in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Kenya and the African World Heritage Fund, will ensure the visibility of the project through a comprehensive and specially tailored communication plan. This will highlight all activities through a communication campaign targeting States Parties to the World Heritage Convention and World Heritage experts from all regions, emphasizing the achievements and positive impacts of the conference. Global reach will be enhanced through the UNESCO websites (headquarters and field offices), while regional reach will be through the African Heritage Fund website, the relevant Kenyan authorities' websites, African heritage institutions, and other partners, as well as social media channels. Both global and regional websites will publish news, background articles, videos, photographs, infographics, and multimedia works. Project-related materials will also be distributed alongside all activities implemented at regional and national levels.