

THE MEANING OF WORLD HERITAGE

By the end of the 20th century humankind has taken the conquest of nature so far that environmental damage threatens the human race with extinction. For nature the reckoning is too heavy: massive deforestation; the erosion and degradation of soils; depletion of the ozone layer and global warming; the disappearance of many plant and animal species; water, air, land and marine pollution of many kinds; expanding human populations, concrete and asphalt; dwindling open spaces, disappearing wilderness . . .

The World Heritage Convention is an attempt to halt the world's slide into environmental chaos, to preserve nature and wilderness and to preserve the legacies of the human cultures that have shaped civilisation.

In an era when nature is under extreme pressure around the globe, the World Heritage Convention has managed to transcend political differences and unite more than 100 nations worldwide to work together to protect more than 200 wonders of the world as the common heritage of all humankind. The Rocky Mountains, Mt Everest, Ecuador's the Galapagos Islands, the Great Barrier Reef and the Serengeti plains of Africa are all now protected as World Heritage sites. In an increasingly pessimistic world it is a shining example of international cooperation.

What is the World Heritage Convention?

The World Heritage Convention is described as the Red Cross for the world's natural areas. It is now the world's most successful conservation agreement, with more than 200 sites protected.

Adopted by UNESCO in 1972, the Convention developed from widespread concern at the disastrous consequences of the flooding

by Egypt's Aswan dam on the Nile's archaeological treasures and a desire by many nations to work to protect these and other threatened wonders of the world. The convention is administered by a committee comprising representatives of 21 signatory nations with rotating membership. This committee can comprise delegates from the communist and non-communist world.

Does it affect sovereignty?

New Zealand loses no sovereign rights over any area that becomes a World Heritage Site. The only force that the Convention can apply is moral – if the rules are flouted, the area could lose World Heritage status and thus New Zealand's international reputation may be tarnished. Article 6 of the convention says that "it fully respects the sovereignty of the states where sites are situated."

Is Private Land affected?

No, article 6 of the Convention excludes private land. If however owners of private land wish to protect their land through statute and it meets the criteria it can be added to a World Heritage site. However, such a step is entirely at the landowner's discretion.

Do World Heritage Sites have to be National Parks?

No, but they have to be protected by statute or policy. In New Zealand they could, for example, be Conservation Parks, Wilderness Areas, Wildlife Reserves and so on. Sites have to have "outstanding universal value", however, and the test is a very stringent one. Natural sites try to preserve the finest representative examples of the processes that have shaped the earth's evolution (e.g. glaciation, volcanism, crustal movement), areas with unique features and areas that

host rare and threatened plant and animals.

World Heritage in Danger and the World Heritage Fund

The World Heritage Committee regularly prepares a list of threatened World Heritage Sites – for example by war, natural disaster, logging, mining, roading or settlement. Member nations are levied and provide voluntary contributions to a Fund which is used to help protect at-risk areas. In Sagarmatha (Mt Everest) National Park the Fund is supporting solar power development to reduce demands on scarce firewood and so save surrounding forest. In Tanzania it is helping fund the College of Wildlife Management which trains staff from the country's World Heritage Parks, such as Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater.

New Zealand and World Heritage

New Zealand signed the World Heritage Convention in November 1984. Other member states include the United States, Australia, Poland, Sweden, Turkey, West Germany, France, Canada, Switzerland, Norway, Libya, Cuba, Chile, Argentina and the United Kingdom. It is notable that amongst this list are nations that may have political differences. Despite these they work together in the World Heritage Committee. Although the UK and USA withdrew from UNESCO, they have remained as enthusiastic supporters of the World Heritage Convention. The USA has more World Heritage sites than any other nation. Since 1984, New Zealand has been able to nominate areas for inclusion on the World Heritage list. Two nominations to date – Fiordland and Mt Cook/Westland National Parks – have been accepted as World Heritage Sites.

Wonders of the World

by Georges Fradier

The notion that a communist conspiracy lurks behind the World Heritage Convention may seem faintly ludicrous, but unfortunately a number of New Zealanders appear to fear that this is the case. In order to clarify any misconceptions which have arisen, the following article on the meaning of the World Heritage Convention is reproduced. It first appeared in the Unesco Courier.

In a sense the World Heritage Convention is a reflection of the state of national cultures in the late twentieth century.

But it is much more than that; unlike many a diplomatic treaty, it is ahead of its time. For the property it presents to us is considered to be of universal value. Now what civilization has ever acknowledged that areas of national territory, or objects of every possible origin and form can possess

a "universal" value? (True, the ancient Greeks drew up a list of Seven Wonders of the World. But what a small world it was! Five of the seven had been built by the Greeks themselves, six were products of their own times. The Egyptian pyramids were the only exception; they were already 1,500 years old and are, incidentally, the only wonder to have survived). How justified is the proposition that monuments and sites admired in one country should command admiration in all the rest – in other words that the whole of humanity now has a common heritage?

No Frontiers

In the case of natural property the idea is not too hard to accept. The world's biological reserves are of concern to everyone on earth. The great ecosystems know no frontiers, and there is something faintly ludi-

crous about "national" ownership of geological phenomena. Everyone feels that "the beauties of nature" should be shared or respected by all human beings precisely because they were not made by human hand. As for our own works, it requires little imagination to realize that we are all heirs to the treasures of human knowledge and thought. The trouble is that we are dealing here not with abstractions but with tangible, immovable things: buildings firmly established on a plot of land, inseparable from a landscape, built by the children of that particular piece of soil acting in accordance with their own specific aims and standards.

The list urges us to appreciate the universal value of the temples of Abu Simbel and those of Tikal. Mont Saint-Michel and its bay are included as being capable of stirring the emotions of people all over the world.