



Belgium's candidacy to the World Heritage Committee 2021-2025

Belgium has the honour to present its **candidacy** for a seat on UNESCO's World Heritage Committee for the term 2021-2025. We strongly believe that UNESCO's World Heritage Committee continues to be an essential part of international efforts to preserve and safeguard heritage of Outstanding Universal Value.

Particularly in these times, we believe the contribution of heritage to society and the challenges we are facing is significant. As a member of the World Heritage Committee, Belgium would like to invest in this discussion, looking at the 5 C's – credibility, conservation, capacity building, communities and communication - for guidance.

5 C's

Since its ratification of the World Heritage Convention, Belgium has shown a strong commitment to the text and its spirit, and the international cooperation it stands for, as shown by our active interventions, transnational nominations and financial contributions.

Both during working groups and committee sessions, Belgium has consistently defended the credibility of the World Heritage List. We have a well-established practice of relying on and working with the Advisory Bodies, both in the context of nominations and state of conservation (SOC) issues. In support of a more representative, balanced and **credible** World Heritage List, we have been funding assistance to the development of World Heritage in Africa over the last 10 years, including the ongoing project 'Improving the representation of African sites on the World Heritage List'.

Belgium also offers relevant expertise and takes up responsibilities with regard to the protection and **conservation** of natural and cultural World Heritage. At home, we ensure the conservation and presentation of a varied typology of World Heritage properties, ranging from prehistoric, over industrial, to 20th century architectural sites in all their forms. We share our expertise with these sites internationally in various ways (ICOMOS ISC's, Art Nouveau Network,...). Additionally, Belgium also serves as a member of the International Coordinating Committee for the Safeguarding and the Development of World Heritage site '*Preah Vihear*' (Cambodia). Furthermore, in 2020 Belgium took over the secretariat for the coordination of the serial transnational World Heritage property '*Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe*', demonstrating our keen interest in natural World Heritage.

We promote a dynamic approach towards heritage, including the use of new technologies in the service of a better understanding of heritage, as well as enlarged and sometimes more suited **communication** and accessibility.

Belgium is a reliable donor to the World Heritage Community, with up to 3,5 million USD of voluntary contributions over the last decade, and an additional 3 million USD for UNESCO's cultural sector at large. Support was given not merely for strengthening conservation efforts, but also for **capacity-building** and attention for the involvement of local **communities** as beneficiaries. In doing so, Belgium contributes to the implementation of the main UNESCO priorities: we focused especially on heritage projects in Africa, and on the development of the marine programme for the benefit of small island development states. In addition, we offered financial assistance for urgent needs in the Middle East and for cross-cutting issues such as the launch of a climate programme, awareness raising among the private sector for respecting and protecting World Heritage sites, and setting up the State of Conservation Information System.

The legacy of our first mandate, and commitment as a new committee member

This is only the second time that Belgium expresses its wish to become a Member of this prestigious Committee, after a first membership in 1999-2003 with a lasting impact. During that mandate, Belgium contributed to the drafting of the Budapest Declaration, which introduced the concept of 4 C's (credibility, conservation, capacity building and communication)¹. Moreover, we were closely involved in the revision of the rules of procedure for the World Heritage Committee and in co-authoring the Operational Guidelines, bringing together all relevant texts in one single document. Furthermore, a reflection on electoral procedures was launched, with a view to a better representativity within the Committee. In that regard, Belgium was the first State Party to announce, before its election, that it would limit its mandate in the World Heritage Committee to a four year term, in order to offer more State Parties the opportunity of committee membership. We are pleased that this practice has become a standard ever since.

With the 50th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention coming up, Belgium will particularly be committed to investing time and effort into the following themes and topics:

- **Credibility of the World Heritage Convention:** this relates to the decisions made by the Committee and how the Convention is implemented;
- **World Heritage Convention in an era of major changes:** these offer opportunities (e.g. digital technologies), challenges (e.g. sustainable tourism) and existential threats (e.g. climate change);
- **Convention's procedures and processes:** the workload and cost of the Convention's procedures and processes is significant, both to State Parties, the Secretariat and the Advisory Bodies. This is something we need to look at. Similarly, we believe synergy, both within and outside of UNESCO, could be beneficial to the World Heritage Convention;
- **Managing change, both inside and outside of World Heritage properties:** both man-made and involuntary developments (e.g. climate change) are the basis of many SOC's. State Parties need assistance to be better prepared to handle these changes. We need to look at this issue and learn from each other;
- **Collaboration with the Advisory Bodies:** respect is the starting point, also financially. Efforts to improve dialogue need to be continued and reinforced.

In the last few years, Belgium has been a very active and involved member of the Committees for the 1954 and 2003 Conventions. We believe that therein we have made a difference with valuable contributions. We aim for a similar impact in the World Heritage Committee with an experienced team of diplomats, focal points, academics and members of our national UNESCO Commission, who have been actively engaged in the World Heritage Convention for a long time.

If elected, Belgium commits to not submitting any World Heritage nominations of its own during its mandate, in order to be able to fully focus on being a true representative of all State Parties to the Convention.

We look forward to discussing the above-mentioned topics with all delegations, to fostering an ongoing dialogue with State Parties for the duration of our mandate and to working with all of them on delivering on the protection of heritage, in particular heritage of Outstanding Universal Value.

¹ The Budapest Declaration was extended to the 5th C "Community" by a decision of the 31st session of the Committee.