



Press Release

Water Resources Become a Major Factor Affecting World Heritage Sites

Global Civil Society Network calls on UNESCO to take tougher decisions

Bahrain, 23 June 2018

Water has emerged as a new factor affecting many UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This is a conclusion from a meeting of civil society groups organized in the global World Heritage Watch network.

The detrimental effect of hydroelectric dams on biodiversity and landscapes is an established fact recognized by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. Several sites in Eastern Africa are threatened by dams. Lake Turkana National Parks may join the Selous Game Reserve on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger on its upcoming annual session. Several dams projected in Mongolia may further deplete the water level of Lake Baikal, one of the iconic places on the UNESCO List holding 20% of the world's freshwater resources. And a whole cascade of dams threatens India's Kanchendzonga National Park which protects the world's third highest mountain and the sacred sites of the indigenous Lepcha people.

In its recent 2018 Report, however, the World Heritage Watch group reveals a whole list of new threats: Rice Terraces of China and the Philippines may run out of water due to tourism, mining and the privatization of water resources. The marshlands of the Tigris River in Iraq, home to a unique Arab group adapted to this ecosystem just revitalized after being drained, are now facing new water shortage from the bitterly contested Ilisu Dam upstream in Turkey. And a projected Coal Power plant may take away critical freshwater supply from the Kenyan town of Lamu, another site on the UNESCO List. While UNESCO has expressed concern about the effects of pollution on the town, the less obvious problem of water shortage was revealed only by the local group "Save Lamu".

The World Heritage Watch group whose mission is to alert the UNESCO on emerging threats has called upon the UN body to adopt a tougher stance with member states who don't report and assess such ill-designed projects before decisions on their implementation are taken. UNESCO depends increasingly on local groups to have full information on developments of concern at World Heritage sites.

Contact:

Stephan Doempke +49 151 1167-4691
contact@world-heritage-watch.org