

Background to the Meetings:

The 12th Expert Working Group Meeting for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley World Heritage Property:

In March 2001, two Buddha statues located in the Bamiyan valley and believed to be dating back respectively to the mid sixth and the early seventh century AD, were destroyed. This destruction led to the mobilization of the international community to safeguard the remains of this outstanding component of Afghan Heritage. These unique Buddhist monuments, considered together with multiple monumental sites in the Bamiyan Valley from different Islamic periods in the history of Afghanistan, attested to the successive interactions between the peoples living in this region and those who traversed it on their journeys along the legendary Silk Roads.

The outstanding value of this cultural landscape was recognized by the World Heritage Committee in 2003, the year in which the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List. At that time, the Valley was simultaneously placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to ongoing challenges to conservation and development of the site. Over the past decade, UNESCO and the Afghan Government have worked in partnership in undertaking a series of actions to safeguard the various elements of the site with generous contributions from the Government of Japan through the UNESCO/Japanese Funds-in Trust for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage. This project has focussed on the massive task of stabilizing the Buddha niches and preventing their collapse, as well as overall archaeology, mural painting conservation and management planning for the various components of World Heritage property (Zohak, Kakrak, Foladi Valley and Shar-i-Gholgholah). In recent years international support increased with a Switzerland / UNESCO project for the rehabilitation of vernacular religious architecture in the Foladi Valley and from 2013 the Government of Italy has undertaken the conservation of the site of Shar-i-Gholghlah with UNESCO and the Ministry of Information and Culture. Contributions to the conservation and development of the property and international cooperation for cultural heritage and sustainable development in Bamiyan is also set to expand greatly in 2014 with contributions from the Republic of Korea for the development of a Museum / Culture Centre, cooperation with a number of UN agencies, including UNOPS and UNEP on roads and environmental management in the WH property, the World Bank and a range of Governmental Ministries and Departments.

From 2002 to 2012, the Afghan Government and UNESCO have facilitated a series of meetings of the Bamiyan Expert Working Group which includes an ever increasing number of national and international development partners and a wider range of Afghan Ministries and Departments, reflecting the complexities and reach of the overall development programme for the Bamiyan Valley and Central Highlands region, as well as underlining the importance and central role of culture in sustainable development of the region. The meeting being convened in 2013 will provide another opportunity to enhance and increase national and international cooperation and coordination for the benefit of cultural heritage and sustainable development in Bamiyan.

The Ministry of Information and Culture, UNESCO and the Geological Service of Italy in cooperation with the Municipality of Orvieto, are co-organizing the 12th Expert Working Group Meeting for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley World Heritage Property, which will be held at Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo, Orvieto, from the 10th to 11th of December 2013. The aim of the meeting is to advise the Afghan authorities and UNESCO on their ongoing efforts related to the conservation and sustainable development of the Bamiyan World Heritage property, as well as to promote better coordination of the national and international efforts for development of the Bamiyan Valley in general. In this regard, the meeting will provide a forum to discuss ongoing activities by a broad range of actors in Bamiyan to ensure the maintenance of the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Property and to promote sustainable development of the Valley and surrounding region as a whole.

Extraordinary Session of the Afghanistan World Heritage Management Advisory Board:

The Ministry of Information and Culture has also convened an *ad hoc* meeting of the Afghan World Heritage Management Advisory Board which was recently established by the Minister in 2013 in order to provide another level of in-country coordination and advice on projects, proposals, interventions and activities in and around World Heritage properties and properties on Afghanistan's Tentative List of World Heritage, and other significant Afghan monumental and archaeological sites. The organizers wished to take advantage of the presence of a range of national and international experts and Government authorities attending the Bamiyan Working Group meeting and to insert into the agenda other sites and issues, including extractive industries and cultural heritage, the historic city of Herat and the World Heritage property of the Archaeological Remains and Minaret of Jam. The agenda reflects the inclusion of the extraordinary session of the Board in the last session of Wednesday 11th of December. All participants to the Bamiyan Working Group are invited to the *ad hoc* session of the Board which will be held at the same venue and room in the Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo.

The closing speeches for the entire event will take place after the Board meeting has concluded at 4:30pm on the 11th of December.