

*Statement by
Mr. Pongpol Adireksarn
Chairman of the National World Heritage Committee of Thailand
at the 32nd Session of the World Heritage Committee
on Item 8 B : Nominations to the World Heritage List : the Temple of Preah Vihear
on July 7, 2008*

Madam Chair,

May I, as the Chairman of the National World Heritage Committee of Thailand, first request that the statement I am about to make be officially included in the record of the Committee meeting.

Madam Chair,

Thailand fully recognizes that the World Heritage Convention is about international cooperation for the conservation of World Heritage, for mutual appreciation and respect, and peace.

Out of this recognition, Thailand has repeatedly appealed for her participation in a joint nomination of Preah Vihear, an eleventh century Hindu Temple, situated on top of a cliff of a mountain that forms a border between Cambodia and Thailand, an area which is still being disputed by the parties concerned.

We are strongly disappointed that our appeal for the joint nomination has been repeatedly denied, and now Preah Vihear Temple has been exceptionally allowed to be listed as a World Heritage Property on the basis of criteria (i) alone, without the proper buffer zones, and without the necessary cultural and natural landscapes on all sides that would have given the dignity and the integrity of the Temple as it rightly deserves. For that reason, we are unable to accept the unilateral inscription of Preah Vihear on only one criterion. We would have liked to postpone the inscription until the two State Parties concerned have resolved the differences and come up with a joint nomination that would be acceptable to both parties. We also protest the use of any accompanied geographic plan or map of the property that it might lead to further dispute and unfriendly actions between the communities in the surrounding region in the future.

However, Thailand fully respects the Committee's decision, and we are thankful to you and all parties concerned for the hard work done outside the meeting room both before and during the Committee meeting.

May I also put on record our appreciation for ICOMOS' professionalism as reflected in the evaluations document, particularly their frank and to-the-point comments, their conclusions and recommendations, which are strictly in line with the principle of outstanding universal value, authenticity and integrity.

In ICOMOS's conclusion, it "considers that the full value of the Temple of Preah Vihear is inextricably linked to the surrounding landscape and that the planning and orientation of the Temple, facing North, is quite different from other Khmer temples."

May I explain that the northern orientation of the Temple signifies that it faces the area in Thailand where streams running from the watershed at the top of the cliff feed into a pond, considered to be a part of the sacred landscape, significant in any planning for the surrounding of a Hindu-style temple. The water subsequently flows into the Moon River in Thailand, a tributary of the Mekong. Around this area, traces of ancient communities as well as several ruins of Hindu monuments can still be discerned.

Madam Chair,

The World Heritage Convention is also about the promotion of public awareness and involvement, including the role of the communities, in support for the World Heritage.

The communities on the north of the Temple in the territory of Thailand had long been, for hundreds of years, able to visit and worship at the Temple. In ancient times, according to one inscription at the Temple, the indigenous communities were given the responsibility of looking after the Temple.

As suggested by ICOMOS, an extension of boundaries in the future should be jointly submitted to reflect the full value of Preah Vihear. This I fully agree, as it would also allow the communities in the northern as well as southern lower plains, to be able to participate in the conservation and in the cultural activities at the Temple as they had been able to do so in the past.

The inscription of Preah Vihear should be further extended with the cooperation of Thailand and should be developed into a model case of transboundary nomination, and even a mixed cultural and natural nomination, that could pave the way for enhanced mutual respect, friendship, and peaceful cooperation between the two neighboring States concerned, and between the local communities on both sides.

We are happy that the Committee, in its decision taken just now, has encouraged Cambodia and Thailand to collaborate for the safeguarding of the values of the property.

We are thankful that the Committee has agreed that it would be desirable in the future to have additional inscription to capture criteria (iii) and (iv). To do this, I strongly believe, the cultural and natural landscapes on the northern part of the Temple which lie in the Thai territory, and which have already been identified and registered under the Thai Preservation Law as being significantly related to the Temple of Preah Vihear in the ancient time, must be taken into due and fair consideration. Our delegation has already submitted informally to the World Heritage Center, the necessary documents which have been prepared for additional and possible transboundary inscription for preliminary comments and future assistance. We hope to continue the collaboration with all agencies concerned in the immediate future.

Thank you.
