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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION  
OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Eighteenth session

Phuket, Thailand

12-17 December 1994

Information note: Nara Document on Authenticity. Experts meeting,  
1-6 November 1994

Background:

At the sixteenth meeting of the World Heritage Committee, held at Santa Fe, USA, issues concerning authenticity of cultural heritage were discussed at length in the context of the test of authenticity found in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. At the suggestion of ICOMOS, the World Heritage Committee requested that the concept and application of authenticity to cultural heritage be further elaborated through international discussions among experts.

The Government of Japan generously offered to sponsor a major international conference of experts at the historic city of Nara, Japan, to further examine authenticity in relation to the World Heritage Convention.

To prepare for the Nara conference, the Norwegian and Canadian governments, in collaboration with ICOMOS, ICCROM, and the World Heritage Centre, sponsored a preparatory workshop in Bergen, Norway, from 31 January to 2 February 1994. The workshop proceedings were published by Riksantikvaren of Norway under the title Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention.

Nara Document on Authenticity:

At the Nara Conference on Authenticity, held from 1-6 November 1994, forty five participants from twenty eight countries discussed the many complex issues associated with defining and assessing authenticity. It was noted that in some languages of the world, there is no word to express precisely the concept of authenticity.

The results of the experts' deliberations are contained in the Nara Document on Authenticity. The World Heritage Committee will note that there was a general consensus that authenticity is an essential element in defining, assessing, and monitoring cultural heritage. The experts gave particular attention to exploring the diversity of cultures in the world and the many expressions of this diversity, ranging from monuments

and sites through cultural landscapes to intangible heritage. Of particular importance in the view that the concept and application of authenticity as it relates in cultural heritage is rooted in specific cultural contexts and should be considered accordingly.

The experts considered that an expanded dialogue in different regions of the world and among specialist groups concerned with the diversity of cultural heritage was essential to further refine the concept and application of authenticity as it relates to cultural heritage. Such on-going dialogue will be encouraged by ICOMOS, ICCROM, and the World Heritage Centre, and will be brought to the Committee's attention as appropriate.

#### Recommendation

The World Heritage Committee is encouraged to take into consideration the principles and views contained in the Nara Document on Authenticity in its evaluation of properties nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

### THE NARA DOCUMENT ON AUTHENTICITY

#### Preamble

1. We, the experts assembled in Nara (Japan), wish to acknowledge the generous spirit and intellectual courage of the Japanese authorities in providing a timely forum in which we could challenge conventional thinking in the conservation field, and debate ways and means of broadening our horizons to bring greater respect for cultural and heritage diversity to conservation practice.
2. We also wish to acknowledge the value of the framework for discussion provided by the World Heritage Committee's desire to apply the test of authenticity in ways which accord full respect to the social and cultural values of all societies, in examining the outstanding universal value of cultural properties proposed for the World Heritage List.
3. The Nara Document on Authenticity is conceived in the spirit of the Charter of Venice 1964, and builds on it and extends it in response to the expanding scope of cultural heritage concerns and interests in our contemporary world.
4. In a world that is increasingly subject to the forces of globalization and homogenization, and in a world in which the search for cultural identity is sometimes pursued through aggressive nationalism and the suppression of the cultures of minorities, the essential contribution made by the consideration of authenticity in conservation practice is to clarify and illuminate the collective memory of humanity.

#### Cultural diversity and heritage diversity

5. The diversity of cultures and heritage in our world is an irreplaceable source of spiritual and intellectual richness for all humankind. The protection and enhancement of cultural and heritage diversity in our world should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of human development.
6. Cultural heritage diversity exists in time and space, and demands respect for other cultures and all aspects of their belief systems. In cases where cultural values appear to be in conflict, respect for cultural diversity demands acknowledgment of the legitimacy of

the cultural values of all parties.

7. All cultures and societies are rooted in the particular forms and means of tangible and intangible expression which constitute their heritage, and these should be respected.
8. It is important to underline a fundamental principle of UNESCO, to the effect that the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all. Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it. However, in addition to these responsibilities, adherence to the international charters and conventions developed for conservation of cultural heritage also obliges consideration of the principles and responsibilities flowing from them. Balancing their own requirements with those of other cultural communities is, for each community, highly desirable, provided achieving this balance does not undermine their fundamental cultural value.

#### Values and authenticity

9. Conservation of cultural heritage in all its forms and historical periods is rooted in the values attributed to the heritage. Our ability to understand these values depends, in part, on the degree to which information sources about these values may be understood as credible or truthful. Knowledge and understanding of these sources of information, in relation to original and subsequent characteristics of the cultural heritage, and their meaning, is a requisite basis for assessing all aspects of authenticity.
10. Authenticity, considered in this way and affirmed in the Charter of Venice, appears as the essential qualifying factor concerning values. The understanding of authenticity plays a fundamental role in all scientific studies of the cultural heritage, in conservation and restoration planning, as well as within the inscription procedures used for the World Heritage Convention and other cultural heritage inventories.
11. All judgments about values attributed to cultural properties as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgments of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong.
12. Therefore, it is of the highest importance and urgency that, within each culture, recognition be accorded to the specific nature of its heritage values and the credibility and truthfulness of related information sources.
13. Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, and its cultural context, authenticity judgments may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. The use of these sources permits elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined.

#### Definitions

**CONSERVATION:** all operations designed to understand a property, know its history and meaning, ensure its material safeguard, and,

if required, its restoration and enhancement.

**INFORMATION SOURCES:** all physical, written, oral, and figurative sources which make it possible to know the nature, specificities, meaning, and history of the cultural heritage.

[NB This text was adopted at the close of the Nara Conference. It remains subject to further minor modification to reconcile fully the English and French versions.]