

Summary Overview

1st Expert Panel Meeting on the Feasibility in the Development of ASEAN Cultural Heritage List (ACHL), 16 August, 2023, Jakarta, Indonesia

Purpose of Tour

To attend the 1st Expert Panel Meeting on the Feasibility in the Development of ASEAN Cultural Heritage List (ACHL), held on 16 August, 2023 at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Background

As part of the efforts to strengthen cooperation in the ASEAN arts and culture sector, the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting for Culture and Arts (SOMCA) in 2019 noted the proposed idea for the development of the ASEAN Cultural Heritage List. The aim of the proposed ASEAN Cultural Heritage List is to enable the ASEAN Member States to designate both tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets of regional value that represents the diverse and rich heritage of the region.

In this regard, this meeting was part of the initiative entitled “Set Up of the Expert Panel and Ad-Hoc Working Group on the Feasibility Study of the Proposed ASEAN Cultural Heritage List (ACHL)” funded by the ASEAN-India Fund.

Deliberations

The meeting was graced by SOMCA Chair (Lao PDR) and Vice Chair (Malaysia), SOMCA Focal Points (Thailand and Brunei Darussalam) and Indian Mission to ASEAN. It was attended by representatives from the 10 ASEAN member Countries, UNESCO Experts, External Experts and two Indian Experts with cultural and natural heritage expertise. The members gathered with a view to develop the feasibility study for the ACHL and to provide recommendations on substantive and operational matters related to the setup of the ACHL.

Rationale, Opportunities and Challenges for the Development of ACHL: The discussions revolved around the need for ACHL to reflect the unique heritage identity of the ASEAN region; exploring the scope of cultural heritage; diversity of country heritage legislative frameworks and the need to harmonise them towards a common objective; involvement of communities and sustainable development approach. The undersigned inquired about the inclusion of and underlined the importance of natural heritage in the ACHL concept.

Envisaging and Developing the Process and Mechanism for ACHL: Members underlined considering all different attributes of culture; capacity building on heritage conservation; cultural mapping for inventory of ASEAN region; aligning with existing UNESCO sustainable development policy, tentative list, etc. The undersigned highlighted that shared heritage of the region was also significant along with sites of individual countries which would facilitate greater collaboration.

Developing the parameters of ACHL: There was suggestion for a self-nomination process rather than external evaluation like World Heritage. Tangible and Intangible Heritage and their linkages should

be considered. Inscription process should be such that maintains credibility of sites. UNESCO Culture 2030 sustainable development indicators were mentioned for parameters to monitor protection and preservation of heritage. The undersigned indicated that new paradigm of linking culture and nature should be considered while looking at sites from a landscape point of view in the wider environmental context.

Operationalising the Setup of ACHL: A separate organisational structure was suggested for functioning of the ACHL as well as involving various departments, institutions, social enterprises, private sector, etc. The need for a fund-raising strategy was highlighted to support the ACHL and reduce potential burden on member states. The undersigned supplemented the view that a fund-raising consultation with potential donors and partners could be considered both to share the vision of ACHL and raise resources for it.

Summary Outcomes

- ACHL may be seen as a paradigm shift and distinguished from existing UNESCO World Heritage concept of Outstanding ‘Universal’ to ‘Regional’ Value; self-submission rather than nomination; collaborative rather than competitive inscription; bottom-up process; single list of criteria combining tangible and intangible heritage; consider site and surrounding environment/natural elements.
- There should be thematic classification of site categories such as based on geography, climate change, tourism, socio-economic conditions, etc.
- ACHL may also consider shared regional heritage along with individual country assets.
- There should be use of appropriate terminology in ACHL which is culture-sensitive and does not impose dominant global narratives.
- Need for capacity-building in protection and preservation of heritage, community participation and stakeholder engagement are emphasised.
- Cultural mapping of heritage may be undertaken to overcome challenge of inventory documentation in the region.
- Sustainability principles should be adopted in ACHL process.
- Fund-raising strategy is required for dedicated funding for a potential ACHL secretariat as well as for heritage protection.

Next Expert Panel Meetings have been proposed in November 2023 and April 2024.

Submitted by:

Niraj Kakati,

Technical Officer,

Wildlife Institute of India – Category 2 Centre (WII-C2C)

for World Natural Heritage Management & Training for Asia & the Pacific Region,

under the auspices of UNESCO,

Dehradun-248001, Uttarakhand, India

Email: nirajkakati@wii.gov.in, nirajkk@gmail.com

Tel: +91-135-2646295; +91-9435048834