



The Montserrat Statement

on sacred natural sites in technologically developed countries

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the papers and case studies from three continents presented during the Montserrat Workshop on Nature and Spirituality, held on 23-26 November 2006 in the Monastery of Montserrat in Catalonia, Spain, in the framework of the IUCN/WCPA Delos Initiative, part of the Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas, as well as the discussions that followed;

BENEFITING from the knowledge and experience of the 40 participants from 8 countries, including representatives of Christian and Buddhist monasteries, international, national and local environmental authorities and conservation organisations, academics and individual experts;

APPRECIATING the work carried out by the Delos Initiative during the past two years on sacred natural sites in technologically developed countries;

REALISING that sacred natural sites are under threat even in developed countries from ignorance and neglect, and specifically from cultural or spiritual breakdown, unsustainable development projects and resource exploitation, urbanization, mass tourism and lack of appropriate land use planning and control;

THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE WORKSHOP

MAINTAIN that the sacred has been one of the most powerful drivers or realities for conservation, inspiring feelings of awe, veneration and respect. Sacred natural sites, landscapes, species, or particular elements have been one of the most effective forms of nature conservation over the ages, some of them being of local significance, whereas others have significance for wider groups, cultures, traditions, and regions;

RECOGNISE that nature has intrinsic values and meanings, including cultural and spiritual, and is understood by followers of various faiths and spiritual traditions as a divine manifestation of some deeper, sacred reality, however that may be conceived;

FURTHER RECOGNISE that for assurance of long-term sustainability, conservation goals, programs and messages need to be grounded in deeply held values, beliefs, ideas, and practices. The conservation community needs to recognize these aspects and give these deeply held values, beliefs, ideas, and practices the place that they deserve in the conserva-

tion of protected areas. This constitutes both a challenge and a great opportunity to build further support for the conservation movement, involving partners and stakeholders that up to the present have not been supportive, because they felt excluded by the materialistic outlook that nature conservation has often adopted;

RECOGNISE AND CONFIRM the actual existence of sacred natural sites in all of the IUCN categories of protected areas found in technologically developed countries;

FURTHER CONFIRM that the spiritual aspects of sacred sites in protected areas can contribute significantly to the conservation of natural heritage in various ways, mainly through raising awareness of faithful, inspiring people and involving them in conservation initiatives;

INSIST that the diachronic rights of the custodians of sacred sites must be safeguarded both from insensitive public and private development and from political ignorance and that their participation in determining the future of protected areas must be ensured;

ACKNOWLEDGE that the appropriate management of protected areas can enhance the maintenance of the spiritual values of sacred natural sites, thus creating positive synergy among natural, cultural and spiritual values not only for protected sites, but for nature in general;

FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGE that positive synergies between natural, cultural and spiritual values extend to sacred sites beyond the boundaries of designated Protected Areas and therefore function as a vehicle for supporting and communicating nature conservation;

MAINTAIN that such synergy can be established only through close and equitable collaboration between the traditional custodians of sacred sites and those charged with the management of protected areas, with mutual respect of the prerogatives and responsibilities of the two sides;

SUGGEST that dialogue between these two sides should be encouraged and strengthened, so that objectives and requirements can be fully understood and a common language and -- eventually-- a common approach, which integrates both views, can be developed;

FURTHER SUGGEST that a future goal would be the development and implementation of integrated management plans for sacred natural sites, which would take into account both spiritual and nature conservation goals; such plans, however, must be prepared with full participation of all those concerned;

POINT OUT that any management measures concerning cultural, spiritual and natural values in sacred natural sites must respect the universal rights of people and be based on a broad participatory approach;

PLEAD FOR CAUTION that particular care should be devoted to sites in protected areas that are sacred for indigenous and traditional peoples and for minorities; in addition, the role and contribution of new immigrants must be taken into account;

SUGGEST that in places where multiple faiths coexist, a diversity of perspectives must be recognised, and the collaboration between these faiths on nature conservation, emphasizing shared values, must be promoted;

INDICATE that education and art can play a key role in creating a climate of co-operation and understanding in regard to sacred natural sites;

ENCOURAGE the Delos Initiative to continue its work in facilitating integration processes between the spiritual-faith groups and the nature conservation organizations and consequently develop and disseminate guidance on the integrated management of sacred natural sites;

FINALLY EXPRESS THEIR GRATITUDE to the Monastery of Montserrat, the Board of the Mountain of Montserrat, the Ministry of Environment and Housing of the Government of Catalonia, the Fundació Territori i Paisatge of Catalunya Savings Bank, and the Delos Co-ordination for the excellent organisation of the Montserrat Workshop.