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WORLD MONUMENTS FUND AND AMERICAN EXPRESS ANNOUNCE FUNDING FOR A SUSTAINABLE VISITOR RECEPTION CENTER ON EASTER ISLAND, CHILE

US\$200,000 GRANT IS PART OF THE AMERICAN EXPRESS-WMF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM INITIATIVE

For Immediate Release—Santiago, Chile, December 1, 2009... World Monuments Fund (WMF) and American Express announced today that, as part of their ongoing Sustainable Tourism Initiative, they have teamed up with the National Forestry Corporation of Chile (CONAF) to develop a sustainable visitor reception center on Easter Island in Chile. The design plans for this pioneering project in adaptive reuse and sustainable tourism on Easter Island have been finalized and construction is scheduled to begin early in 2010.

The new visitor center, the *Centro de Recepción de Visitantes de la Aldea Ceremonial de Orongo*, is located at the entrance to the Orongo Ceremonial Village, one of the most significant archaeological sites in Rapa Nui National Park and the most visited place on Easter Island. Severely impacted by increasing numbers of tourists each year, Orongo has been the focus of an intensive conservation and interpretive program supported by WMF and American Express since 2001. The visitor center is the last redevelopment component of this program, and will serve as an introduction to the national park, providing information and educational materials for visitors as well as helping to monitor and manage visitation to the site.

“We are happy to be working with our longtime partners American Express and CONAF to complete the work at Orongo,” said **Bonnie Burnham, President of the World Monuments Fund**. “This new visitor center demonstrates how preservation work goes hand in hand with educating tourists and helping local communities to develop long-term strategies to manage sensitive sites such as Orongo.”

“American Express has been committed to historic preservation for decades,” said **Timothy J. McClimon, President of the American Express Foundation**. “The extension of our efforts to focus on the sustainable tourism aspect of historic locations is a logical evolution of these efforts. We have seen the

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impact of our earlier work at Orongo, and know this new visitor center will be an important addition to the site. Since tourism is the lifeblood of many iconic sites around the world, including Easter Island, enhancing the visitor experience while finding effective ways to protect and preserve these sites is critical for their survival.”

“This type of initiative leverages both cultural preservation and ecosystem protection in very fragile places like this one,” said **Catalina Bau, Executive Director of CONAF**. “Easter Island is a landmark in the tourism world, and that is why we need to work hard to preserve its resources, as well as offer all kinds of information and education to its visitors, both national and international. This is the only way to preserve an area, by all of us knowing well what it has. Another important thing I would like to underline is the partnership in this project made by the Government of Chile, represented here by CONAF, with international entities such as the World Monuments Fund and American Express. It is in uniting our efforts that we can progress in the conservation of our own heritage for future generations.”

A volcanic island in the southeastern Pacific Ocean, at the southeastern-most point of the Polynesian triangle, Easter Island is a special territory of Chile that was annexed in 1888 and is now a national monument. It is most famous for its more than 880 extant large carved monolithic statues, known as *moai*, that were created to represent ancestors by the Rapa Nui people from approximately the ninth to the seventeenth centuries. Easter Island is also renowned for its great variety of archeological sites that offer evidence of a highly developed culture whose descendents still inhabit the island. Forty-three percent of the island is protected within Rapa Nui National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site that is managed by CONAF (Corporación Nacional Forestal de Chile), the organization responsible for the management, administration, and conservation of Chile’s national parks and wildlife.

The design of the visitor reception center at Orongo integrates the existing facilities: the core of the new building is the old warden station, and much of the original structure will be retained, with construction materials to be recycled and incorporated into the new building. Because electric power is not available, alternate sources of energy, including solar and wind, will be used. New restrooms will utilize state-of-the-art composting toilets and a rain water recycling system will be implemented. The new center will provide a heritage interpretation and information program for visitors, will regulate and manage visitation to enhance visitors’ experience at the site, and will minimize negative impacts on the site’s fragile archeological resources.

World Monuments Fund has worked on Easter Island since the late 1960s and has been particularly active since the mid 1980s. Together with CONAF, WMF has organized training courses for park rangers, conducted climate studies, collected meteorological data, carried out site protection and interpretation studies, installed monitoring systems, developed a conservation database of the Orongo petroglyphs, and more. Planning for the conservation and redevelopment of the Orongo Ceremonial

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Village began in 2001 in close consultation with community leaders, organizations, and local stakeholders. Over the years the World Monuments Fund has held a series of workshops focused on redevelopment, interpretation, conservation, and management plans for the site. Local craftsmen will play a major role in the construction of the visitor reception facility.

The support of American Express and World Monuments Fund for the new visitor center is part of the organizations' joint Sustainable Tourism Initiative, which in turn is part of the American Express Partners in Preservation initiative launched in 2006. Partners in Preservation aims to increase public awareness of the importance of historic and environmental conservation, preserve global historic and cultural landmarks, educate visitors on sustainable tourism, and strengthen local communities through preservation efforts.

American Express

American Express Company (www.americanexpress.com) is a leading global payments, network and travel company founded in 1850.

World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund (www.wmf.org) is the leading independent organization devoted to saving the world's most treasured places. For over 40 years, working in more than 90 countries, our highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to preserve important architectural and cultural heritage sites around the globe. Through partnerships with local communities, funders, and governments, we inspire an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations. Headquartered in New York, WMF has offices and affiliates worldwide.

National Forestry Corporation of Chile (CONAF)

CONAF's (www.conaf.cl) objective is to contribute to the preservation, management, and conservation of Chile's natural resources. CONAF has offices and agencies across the country and manages 95 sites, among them the National Reserves, National Parks, and Natural Monuments that in total are 14.3 million ha., with more than 1,800 employees.

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