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# WORLD MONUMENTS FUND

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## WORLD MONUMENTS FUND LAUNCHES NEW PHASE OF CONSERVATION WORK AT ANGKOR, CAMBODIA

**WMF TO BEGIN SECOND PHASE OF WORK AT PHNOM BAKHENG, WITH FUNDING SUPPORT OF NEARLY  
\$1 MILLION FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

**WMF'S PILOT PROJECT AT ANGKOR WAT TO CONSERVE  
FAMED *CHURNING OF THE SEA OF MILK* GALLERY PRAISED BY ICC EXPERTS  
AND WILL PROCEED ON SCHEDULE**

*For Immediate Release—Angkor, Cambodia, June 4, 2008 . . .* Bonnie Burnham, president of World Monuments Fund (WMF), announced today that WMF is launching a major new phase of its conservation program at Angkor, working closely with the governmental organization APSARA National Authority (Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap).

The U.S. Department of State has today announced the award to WMF of \$978,705 in funding through the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation to allow WMF to begin conservation work at Phnom Bakheng, the first Khmer temple constructed within the historic city of Angkor. Today the temple is visited daily by thousands of tourists who come to see the glorious sunset. A previous grant of \$550,000, awarded to WMF in 2004 by the U.S. State Department, supported a comprehensive multi-disciplinary plan for heritage and environmental conservation and tourism management at the site. The new funding will support the stabilization and conservation of the east elevation, the site's most visible yet most endangered section, making it safe for visitors while protecting it from damage.

In addition, WMF presented its project to conserve the gallery that houses the celebrated *Churning of the Sea of Milk* bas-relief at the iconic Angkor Wat temple at the meeting today of Unesco's International Coordinating Committee for Angkor. The ICC's Ad Hoc Group of Experts for Conservation praised the pilot phase of the work, which involves dismantling the roofing system and reconstructing it in order to prevent future water penetration that is causing increasing damage to the famed bas relief. The pilot project will be finished by December 2008, at which time WMF expects to proceed with the conservation of the entire gallery.

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“World Monuments Fund has been working at Angkor since the early 1990s,” said **WMF President Bonnie Burnham**. “The conservation of this magnificent complex of monuments is a critical part of our mission, because of its prominence and because we are able to play a very meaningful role here by providing technical expertise and training for a new generation of Cambodians to conserve and manage the site and its numerous cultural treasures. We are very happy to receive such a generous grant from the U.S. Department of State and to be able to continue our work at Phnom Bakheng, and to receive an affirmative review of Unesco’s expert committee of the pilot phase of our work at Angkor Wat.”

“The Historic City of Angkor is one of the world’s cultural and architectural wonders,” said **U.S. Embassy Chargé d’Affaires Piper A. W. Campbell**. “Conserving its monuments, which are a crucial part of Cambodian history, is one way to promote peace and prosperity in the country. This grant is therefore a significant diplomatic gesture, and it is important to note that it was made possible by strong Congressional interest.”

“The APSARA National Authority highly appreciates the fruitful collaboration with the WMF,” said Bun Narith, the Director General of the APSARA National Authority, “and avails itself of this opportunity to renew our collaboration. We are really thrilled with these new commitments, and have no hesitation to endorse and support these projects. Needless to say, we are highly committed to a fruitful collaboration with WMF in implementing this work.”

## **Angkor**

The Angkor Archaeological Park, an immense Hindu-Buddhist temple complex, lies in the jungles of northwest Cambodia. The temples at Angkor represent the pinnacle of the Khmer civilization, which ruled most of the region between the ninth and 15th centuries AD. They are considered to be among the great architectural wonders of the world. Following its peak in the 12th century, Angkor began a long decline. By the end of the 16th century, only the temple of Angkor Wat was still in use. The jungle swallowed much of the ancient city and its temples were relatively unknown to the western world until French archaeologists “rediscovered” the complex in the late 1850s. The first Western conservators at Angkor, they made an effort throughout the next century to document and conserve portions of the temple complex. They were forced to flee during the civil war in 1972. Many of Angkor's caretakers died under the Khmer Rouge and Angkor went without maintenance for nearly 20 years.

## **WMF at Angkor**

In 1989, a WMF team arrived at Angkor to conduct one of the first international surveys of the damage wrought by decades of civil war and neglect. In 1991, WMF embarked on a comprehensive program of conservation and training at Preah Khan, which over time expanded to include the temples of Ta Som, Phnom Bakheng, and the *Churning of the Sea of Milk* Gallery at Angkor Wat, the famed temple

that is now Cambodia's most popular tourist destination. For nearly 20 years, WMF has been helping to conserve one of the most important monumental complexes in the world, training Cambodians in ongoing conservation and stewardship of their country's heritage, assisting APSARA build its management capacity, and enhancing visitors' appreciation of the religious monuments.

### **Phnom Bakheng**

Built in 907 AD, Phnom Bakheng is the oldest temple within the historic city of Angkor, built by the Khmer king Yasyovarman I, who established Angkor as his capital. Phnom Bakheng is an early and impressive example of the mountain-temple style, designed to represent Mount Mehru, the mythical home of the Hindu gods. Situated on the highest point of the Angkor alluvial plain, the temple offers a stunning view of the entire archaeological park below.

During the period of civil strife in Cambodia in the 1970s, Khmer Rouge soldiers occupied Phnom Bakheng, scarring its sacred history with landmines and weapon caches. Still recovering from the violence of war, the temple faces a new threat: the thousands of tourists who scramble over its ancient walls as they climb to its peak every evening to view the sunset over Angkor.

Phnom Bakheng is further threatened by erosion caused by heavy monsoon rains, compounding the already substantial man-made damage to its historical fabric. Recognizing the urgent need to preserve the temple, WMF has assembled a team of Cambodian architects, archaeologists, and conservators who, together with international experts, are implementing temporary structural stabilization measures and are constantly monitoring structural conditions.

### ***Churning of the Sea of Milk* Gallery, Angkor Wat**

The monumental bas-relief known as the *Churning of the Sea of Milk* adorns the east gallery of the magnificent Angkor Wat temple. A masterpiece of Khmer art commissioned by King Suryavarman II in the early 12th century, the 49-meter-long relief recounts the creation myth, depicting *devas* (gods) and *asuras* (demons) joining forces in churning the primordial ocean, in order to release *amrita*, the elixir of immortality.

Beyond the threats of time and exposure to the elements, the gallery is suffering from the effects of water and harmful salts penetrating through the roofing system of the galleries, and damaging the surface of the fragile friezes, which cover the wall surfaces of the stately galleries that surround the temple of Angkor Wat. WMF expects that its conservation work will provide a prototype for repairing several kilometers of roofs that cover the galleries. Through detailed examination, the WMF team has discovered that the Khmer roof stones include an ingenious passive drainage system, giving rainwater many channels to drain from the building. This system has lost its functionality over time, according to Glenn Boornazian, an architectural conservator who heads Integrated Conservation Resources, Inc., a

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New York-based firm specialized in documenting conservation problems and devising solutions. WMF's team is working to dismantle the roof stones, desalinate the masonry blocks, stabilize surfaces, and restore the original drainage system, adding a thin sheet of lead to eliminate any possibility of future water penetration.

The conservators are using an innovative field-oriented GIS database to analyze and prioritize the active decay patterns. They have conducted surveys and probes, along with in-situ and laboratory testing to identify the composition of the materials, treatments, and alterations over time. They have documented the extent of subsurface decay, using non-destructive testing methods of evaluation, and have designed a gantry crane that allows for non-destructive methods of disassembly and reassembly of the very large stone units that make up the gallery roof. They have established a detailed method of documentation that follows each stone from disassembly to conservation treatments to final reassembly. The stones are undergoing conservation treatments in a workshop built specifically for this purpose right behind the gallery.

### **World Monuments Fund**

The World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to saving the world's great places where civilization has left its mark. For over 40 years, working in more than 90 countries, our highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to preserve our treasured places. 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. For more information, please visit [www.wmf.org](http://www.wmf.org).

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