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AT ANGKOR, WORLD MONUMENTS FUND HANDS FUTURE PRESERVATION OF THREE COMPLETED SITES TO LOCAL CAMBODIAN AUTHORITIES

The announcement coincides with the 35th anniversary of WMF's ongoing work at the archaeological park as the organization begins a new phase of conservation efforts at Phnom Bakheng

New York, NY – January 30, 2024 – [World Monuments Fund \(WMF\)](#) recently announced the full transfer of future preservation work at three longstanding project sites within [Angkor Archaeological Park](#), Cambodia, to the [Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor \(APSARA\)](#) where conservation work has been completed. The event marks a new chapter for Ta Som and Preah Khan Temples and the Churning of the Ocean of Milk Gallery in Angkor Wat as APSARA fully takes over maintenance of the sites. The news comes as WMF celebrates 35 years of ongoing conservation and capacity-building work at the park, assuring appropriate techniques and methodology are used for generations to come. WMF and APSARA will also enter a new phase of work at Phnom Bakheng and build on conservation efforts already underway.

“This transition is a historic moment for Angkor,” said **Bénédicte de Montlaur, President and CEO of World Monuments Fund**. “At the beginning of this project in 1989, international intervention was necessary to help redevelop the conservation skills of local technicians in order to carry out necessary work. Over the years, reliance on international expertise has declined significantly across WMF projects at Angkor, and we are delighted to see APSARA reclaim full responsibility for day-to-day maintenance and future conservation work at these three sites.”

Founded by the Khmer Empire, Angkor is considered by UNESCO to be one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia, having deep ties to the region's Hindu and Buddhist traditions. During French colonial rule in the early 1900s, revitalized interest resulted in a commission to restore the temples for tourism purposes. Efforts intensified after Cambodia's government transitioned to a limited constitutional monarchy. With the Cambodian Civil War in the 1970s, however, work halted, and many of those with training and experience at Angkor Archeological Park and other heritage sites perished or were forced to flee the country under Khmer Rouge rule.

WMF's involvement with Angkor began in 1989 with a field mission to evaluate the condition of the temples. At the behest of King Norodom Sihanouk, a partnership was formed to create a comprehensive conservation and training program, complementing the efforts of the newly reopened Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA). Angkor was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list three years later and flagged as being “in danger.” The establishment of APSARA in 1995 and subsequent improvement in site management contributed to Angkor's removal from the list of endangered heritage sites in 2004 and provided WMF with a dedicated local partner.

“Our impact has gone beyond physical conservation work conducted over 35 years,” said **de Montlaur** during a commemoration held at Preah Khan Temple on Friday, January 26, 2024. “Our capacity-building work has provided skills, income, and stability to the local team, which is now led by a majoritarian Cambodian leadership team. We also have developed tourism management strategies to enrich the visitor experience and prevent the harms of overtourism to the sites. WMF's work will continue at the Archaeological Park with the restoration of Phnom Bakheng and the creation of new education programs in cooperation with the Cambodian authorities.”

Since 1992, WMF has allocated \$14.6 million towards work in the Siem Reap area. With the high proportion of resident employment, the total local economic impact of WMF's activity is estimated to be in the region of \$20-\$25 million. Over the past 35 years, well over 100 full-time conservation technicians have been trained and employed, with many mentoring younger apprentices. As this community of professionals continues to grow, WMF is developing a formal certification to standardize training and support future employment.

At the commemoration held on January 26, local monks blessed the workers, followed by a performance of "Nokor Reach," the national anthem of Cambodia, and the national anthem of the United States. President and CEO of WMF Bénédicte de Montlaur, Project Coordinator of WMF Cambodia Phally Cheam, and Her Excellency Minister of Culture and Fine Arts Dr. Phoeurng Sackona all gave speeches highlighting Cambodia's notable cultural heritage and progress in protecting it for the future. A plaque featuring a hammer that symbolizes the restoration work was given to APSARA, and commemorative pins were given to the local conservation staff. Attendees celebrated the event with a traditional Khmer feast held in Prasat Kravan and dance and musical performances from the Sacred Dancers of Angkor.

World Monuments Fund's work at Angkor Archaeological Park has been made possible, in part, by support from the U.S. Department of State; the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) and U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh; The Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust; The Ralph E. Ogden Foundation; The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc.; The Brown Foundation, Inc. of Houston; American Express; The DM Foundation; The Estate of Margo Leavin; The Starr Foundation; International Music and Art Foundation; Mrs. Betty Wold Johnson and Mr. Douglas Bushnell; Wendy and Robert Brandow; Eleanor Briggs; Christopher and Priscilla Brewer; Samuel C. Miller and Rosetta A. Miller; The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation; Denise Gwyn Ferguson; Carnegie Corporation of New York; Isambard Kingdom Brunel Society of North America/Mr. and Mrs. Peter Norton; Donald I. Perry; Peter W. Davidson and Drew McGhee; Selma Ertegin; Tianaderrah Foundation / Nellie and Robert Gipson; Virginia James; The Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts; The Estate of John Dennis; Pamela and David B. Ford; Gillian Fuller; Nora McNeely Hurley and Manitou Fund; Samuel H. Kress Foundation; Peter Spry-Leverton; and anonymous donors.

World Monuments Fund's work at Ta Som Temple has been made possible, in part, by Christopher and Priscilla Brewer and Tianaderrah Foundation / Nellie and Robert Gipson.

World Monuments Fund's work at Preah Khan Temple has been made possible, in part, by The Ralph E. Ogden Foundation; Wendy and Robert Brandow; Carnegie Corporation of New York; Mrs. Betty Wold Johnson and Mr. Douglas Bushnell; The Estate of John Dennis; Pamela and David B. Ford; Gillian Fuller; and Peter Spry-Leverton.

World Monuments Fund's work at the Churning of the Ocean of Milk Gallery has been made possible, in part, by The Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust; International Music and Art Foundation; The Ralph E. Ogden Foundation; and The Pierre and Tana Matisse Foundation.

World Monuments Fund's work at Phnom Bakheng has been made possible, in part, by the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP), the U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh, the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation, The Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust, the Estate of Margo Leavin, Denise Gwyn Ferguson, Nora McNeely Hurley and Manitou Fund, and anonymous donors.

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About World Monuments Fund:

World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to safeguarding the world's most treasured places to enrich lives and build mutual understanding. For more than 55 years, working at more than 700 sites in 112 countries, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to the preservation of important architectural and cultural heritage sites around the globe. Through the World Monuments Watch—a biennial, nomination-based program—WMF uses cultural

heritage conservation to empower communities and improve human well-being. In partnership with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF seeks to inspire an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations. Headquartered in New York City, the organization has offices and affiliates worldwide.

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Media Contact

Keaton Ramjit, Media Relations Manager

kramjit@wmf.org