



CLIMATE CHANGE, RAPID URBANIZATION ARE TOP THREATS TO HERITAGE SITES, WORLD MONUMENTS FUND WARNS

*Data emerges from studies for 2025 World Monuments Watch,
to be announced in mid-January*

World-class jury to convene this week to make the final selection



*Past World Monuments Watch sites, right to left: Angkor Archaeological Park, Cambodia;
Teotihuacán, Mexico; and Ani Cathedral, Türkiye.*

New York—September 12, 2024: [World Monuments Fund \(WMF\)](#) has found a host of specific human factors such as war, overdevelopment, lapse in oversight and rising temperatures to be the major factors threatening over 200 heritage sites under review for its 2025 World Monuments Watch.

The data classifying such threats was collected in the course of determining which global landmarks will appear on the latest iteration of the Watch list, which will mark WMF's first since 2022 and be released mid-January 2025.

“Since its inception in 1996, the World Monuments Watch has been a crucial tool for WMF to understand the evolving needs of heritage sites and the communities that rely on them,” said **Bénédicte de Montlaur, CEO of World Monuments Fund**. “Our data-driven approach has deepened our insights, enabling us to craft more effective strategies and take meaningful action where needed most. In the face of these issues, the 2025 Watch will demonstrate the potential for heritage preservation to help communities adapt and thrive within our dynamic world.”

Called the "cultural version of an endangered-species list... intended to raise awareness of artworks and structures in immediate peril" by *The New York Times*, the Watch has established itself as a leading voice in the heritage field. Throughout its thirty years, the Watch has evolved

into an advocacy program collaborating with nominators to make sure local communities are heard and involved with their site's preservation.

The 2025 Watch will emerge from WMF's extensive review of 211 nominations from heritage professionals, local partners and the general public in 69 countries. Though the Watch deliberation process is still underway, the nomination process quantifies details on the nature of the threats at the cultural heritage sites under discussion. This allows WMF to consider solutions or to innovate based on the organization's past responses to similar threats, and to sound the alarm by sharing this data while the Watch is prepared.

Per the language used in the nomination data, the principal factors facing monuments across the planet today include **conflict & crises**, **irresponsible tourism**, **rapid urbanization**, **climate change**, **limited community engagement**, and **insufficient funding & lack of recognition**.

More details on these threats, the primary regions affected by them and some of WMF's past responses, can be found below:

- **Conflict and crises:** As armed conflicts and natural disasters proliferate, they disrupt lives and destroy heritage places. WMF seeks to preserve the culture in such regions as soon as it is safe to do so, stabilizing Ukrainian sites in areas no longer affected by the war, and revitalizing Iraq's Mosul Cultural Museum to showcase the positive ways heritage can be used as a foundation for rebuilding communities and fostering peace. Nominators from the **Middle East and North Africa** both significantly cited human conflict and crises as a common theme from nominated sites.
- **Rapid urbanization:** Unchecked urban development threatens the demolition of valued heritage spaces due to biases toward newer structures at the expense of historic buildings and neighborhoods. Promoting sustainable cities that integrate heritage preservation can create more livable environments for residents, and greater long-term value for cities. The largest share of nominated sites from **Asia and the Pacific** cited urbanization and re-development as an ongoing struggle.
- **Overtourism:** Lack of visitor management and infrastructure, and overcrowding at cultural landmarks can lead to their degradation. Encouraging tourism that respects heritage sites and involves local communities can help protect these places while still welcoming visitors. Sites such as Bears Ears National Monument and Teotihuacán were expanded into projects by WMF to help create sustainable management plans that prioritized the needs of the area's communities. Sites from **Latin America & the Caribbean** constantly cited sustainable tourism as their prevalent issue, mentioned at a starkly higher rate than nominators of other regions. Tourism as a significant economic driver in these regions makes the problem much harder to amend.
- **Climate change:** Threats linked to a changing climate, like extreme weather, rising sea levels, and increasingly severe and frequent natural disasters, were commonly cited by nominations as a challenge. To address this pressing matter, WMF launched the Climate Heritage Initiative in January 2024 to help protect heritage sites and provide communities with solutions to cope. Previous Watch sites, such as Nepal's *hitis* of Kathmandu Valley

and Peru's Yanacancha-Huaquis Cultural Landscape were adopted as projects under this initiative. While climate change continues to be an issue globally, a majority of nominations from **Sub-Saharan Africa** cited this theme as a challenge for their heritage sites.

- **Limited community engagement:** Lack of training threatens the preservation and maintenance of certain heritage sites. Strengthening community engagement and local expertise can ensure these heritage places remain relevant and protected for future generations. WMF has provided training for local communities around the globe, including in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward following Hurricane Katrina's devastation in 2005. A large portion of nominations from the **Middle East and North Africa** cited lack of training as the main challenge for their heritage sites.
- **Insufficient funding and lack of recognition:** The value of many heritage sites is underappreciated, and its potential remains largely unrecognized. Highlighting the economic benefits of heritage —such as job creation, entrepreneurship, and tourism that supports local communities— can demonstrate how preserving these sites can improve local economies and livelihoods. A significant number of nominated sites from **Europe and North America** cited underfunding as their primary obstacle.

During the data analysis, specific themes emerged as predominant challenges across regions. In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, **74%** of nominated sites highlighted climate hazards and impacts as a critical issue. In **Asia & the Pacific**, **51%** of the sites pointed to rapid urbanization and development pressures. **Europe & North America** faced significant financial challenges, with **58%** of the sites citing insufficient funding and resources. In **Latin America & the Caribbean**, **43%** of the sites were concerned with overuse and tourism. The **Middle East & North Africa** region identified two key challenges: **40%** of the sites reported issues related to human conflict and crises, while another **40%** highlighted limited local expertise and capacities. These percentages underscore the diverse and pressing challenges that heritage sites face globally.

The nominations submitted reflect the current challenges faced by the heritage community at the local level, guiding World Monuments Fund's focus on urgent issues in the field. Each nomination undergoes extensive internal and external review. The evaluation criteria include the site's cultural significance, the urgency for intervention, and the feasibility of proposed solutions. Special consideration is given to sites where preservation efforts can significantly impact the livelihoods and well-being of local communities.

Including sites on the Watch has allowed significant preservation efforts led by WMF, such as restoration work at Ani Cathedral in Türkiye which was on the Watch four times consecutively from 1996 to 2002. On Rapa Nui, Orongo's inclusion on the Watch three times has led to several WMF initiatives, including building a visitor center to curb crowding by tourists and enhancing capacities for effective heritage management of Rapa Nui National Park by Ma'u Henua Indigenous Community.

Following these nominations, the 2025 World Monuments Watch selection is currently under review by a panel of world-class experts from all over the globe, ahead of its announcement in January.

These panelists include:

- **Lynn Meskell** (panel chair), professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania
- **Albino Jopela**, head of programs at the African World Heritage Fund
- **Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic**, secretary general of Europa Nostra
- **Nelly Robles García**, Vice President of the International Committee of Archaeological Heritage Management
- **Pasang Dolma Sherpa**, executive director of the Center of Indigenous Peoples' Research & Development (CIPRED)
- **Brinda Somaya**, Founder and Principal Architect of Somaya & Kalappa Consultants
- **LYU Zhou**, director and professor of the National Heritage Center at Tsinghua University

“The key challenges identified through WMF’s Watch nomination analysis—such as lack of community engagement and disasters linked to climate change—pose serious threats not only to our global heritage but to the communities that care for them,” said **Lynn Meskell, Professor of Anthropology and Historic Preservation the University of Pennsylvania and chair of the World Monuments Watch International Expert Panel**. “Protecting these sites is vital not only for preserving the past but protecting the communities that have social, economic, and spiritual ties to place.”

The classification of the problem facing heritage sites is a crucial step toward workshopping protection. The Potager du Roi, the kitchen gardens of the Palace of Versailles, benefited from inclusion in the 2018 Watch and is helping develop adaptations to climate change for historic gardens across the world through WMF's Climate Heritage Initiative.

The 2025 World Monuments Watch will be revealed mid-January 2025.

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. Since 1965, WMF has raised \$300 million to support more than 700 diverse cultural heritage sites across 112 countries. For more than 55 years, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to preserve 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.

Visit www.wmf.org for more information, or connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

About the panelists

Lynn Meskell is the Penn Integrates Knowledge Professor in Anthropology, Historic Preservation and at Penn Museum at the University of Pennsylvania and AD White Professor at Cornell University. Meskell is a renowned archaeologist and anthropologist and author of the

award-winning *A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace* (2018), among other works.

Dr. Albino Jopela is currently the Executive Director of the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF), an intergovernmental organization created in 2006 by the African Union and UNESCO to support the effective conservation and protection of cultural and natural heritage of Outstanding Universal Value in Africa. He is a Research Fellow at the University of Eduardo Mondlane (Mozambique) and the University of Cape Town (South Africa) and he has also served as Advisor to ICOMOS on World Heritage. His professional interests include heritage conservation and management systems, World Heritage, climate heritage, rock art, and liberation heritage in Africa.

Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic is the Secretary General of Europa Nostra, European Voice of civil society committed to cultural heritage, and a prominent advocate for cultural heritage in Europe. She is the initiator and Spokesperson of the European Heritage Alliance, and the Leader of the European Heritage Hub project, where she leads efforts to protect and celebrate Europe's cultural legacy. As the Regional Co-Chair of the Climate Heritage Network, Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic works to integrate cultural heritage into global climate action. Her leadership and advocacy have made her a key figure in shaping policies that safeguard Europe's heritage for future generations.

Nelly Robles García is the Vice President of the International Committee of Archaeological Heritage Management, and a leading archaeological and preservation expert. García previously served as the National Coordinator at Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) and Director of the Archaeological Zone of Monte Albán in Oaxaca. A recipient of the Society for American Archaeology's Presidential Award, Robles García is recognized for her contributions to Oaxacan archaeology and her dedication to fostering collaboration between North American and Mexican archaeologists.

Pasang Dolma Sherpa is the Executive Director of the Center for Indigenous Peoples' Research & Development (CIPRED) in Nepal and a dedicated advocate for indigenous rights and climate action. She has served as co-chairs for the Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IPFCC) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's Local Communities and Indigenous People's Platform Working Group. Sherpa's work focuses on integrating traditional knowledge with modern climate strategies, ensuring that indigenous voices are central to global environmental policies and sustainable development efforts.

Brinda Somaya is the Founder and Principal Architect at Somaya and Kalappa Consultants in Mumbai, India, and an acclaimed architect and urban conservationist. She has led the design and execution of over 200 projects, blending architecture with social equity and preservation. Somaya has served as the Chairperson of the Board of Governors at the School of Planning & Architecture (SPA) in Vijayawada, contributing significantly to architectural education in India. Her work is recognized for its commitment to preserving cultural heritage while addressing contemporary urban challenges.

LYU Zhou is the Director and Professor at the National Heritage Center, Tsinghua University, Beijing, and a leading expert in heritage conservation and preservation planning. He serves as Vice President of ICOMOS-China and President of the Architectural History Society of China. LYU has played a pivotal role in the conservation of numerous World Heritage sites and Silk

Road locations, earning international recognition for his work. His contributions have significantly shaped heritage preservation practices in China and beyond.