

Recommendations of the fifth Regional Meeting on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage in Africa

From 22 to 24 January 2019, UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture of Senegal organized the fifth Regional Meeting on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage in Africa on the Island of Gorée (Senegal).

The meeting, which was attended by representatives from 10 African countries and international experts specialized in underwater cultural heritage, addressed current issues related to the creation of synergies for the training, protection and awareness-raising on underwater cultural heritage in Africa and to the potential for sustainable development of this submerged heritage. The following countries were present at the meeting: Benin, Cabo Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, as well as the UNESCO offices in Abidjan and Abuja.

This workshop took place in the framework of the awareness-raising work already undertaken and the recommendations of previous regional meetings (Dakar, Senegal in 2004; Brazzaville, Congo in 2012; Yenagoa, Nigeria in 2013; Malindi, Kenya in 2015; Maputo, Mozambique in 2016 and Grand-Bassam, Ivory Coast in 2017).

Recalling the action plans adopted at the Maputo (2016) and Grand-Bassam (2017) meetings, the participants decided to adopt the following recommendations.

We, the participants:

1. Ratification of the 2001 Convention

- a) Strongly reiterate the importance of ratifying the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, considering the urgent need for the protection at local level of the submerged heritage on the Atlantic coast of Africa;
- b) Recall that the ratification of the 2001 Convention provides a comprehensive framework to combat looting, commercial exploitation and illicit trafficking of underwater cultural heritage;
- c) emphasize that this submerged heritage can be a driver for sustainable socio-economic development and could be a catalyst for recovery, creativity and innovation for our communities. The ratification of the 2001 Convention therefore provides a tool to promote access to these benefits of underwater cultural heritage;
- d) Reiterate the call upon the countries that have ratified the Convention to take appropriate follow-up actions including the training of qualified experts, the inventory and documentation of underwater cultural heritage;

2. Legal Framework

- a) Stress the benefits of ratifying the 2001 Convention and recommend the follow-up of the ratification documents, emphasizing in particular the importance of adapting national legislation to the Convention; in this perspective, it is strongly recommended to create a synergy among the countries in the region for a joint approach related to the reform of national legislation;
- b) Recommend introducing in the national legislation an obligation for the disturber to finance preventive archaeology before any works are undertaken in maritime and inland waters;

- c) Stress the importance an appropriate legal framework for the prevention and prohibition of looting and commercial exploitation of underwater cultural heritage;
- d) Encourage setting up a competent authority responsible for the supervision and management of underwater cultural heritage (as provided for in Art. 22 of the Convention);
- e) Encourage establishment of short-term protection measures while envisaging measures for protection of these sites at the local level in the long-term;
- f) Consider setting up, in the short term, a training programme on the protection of underwater cultural heritage designed for defense and security forces of the region in cooperation with the Department of Underwater and Submarine Archaeological Research (DRASSM) of the Ministry of Culture in France;

3. Training for African experts specialized in underwater cultural heritage

- a) Stress the importance of training and scientific research, and encourage cooperation between higher education institutions in Africa and elsewhere in order to develop African expertise on underwater heritage;
- b) Consider the establishment of a framework to train qualified experts through a programme on underwater archaeology in an African university. In addition to the development of modules on underwater cultural heritage management in existing archaeology training programmes, through close collaboration with the UNITWIN network in underwater archaeology, the UNESCO specialized chairs and other international partners (as provided for in Art. 21 of the Convention);
- c) Encourage maintaining or developing exchanges with local stakeholders, such as representatives of UNESCO Offices in the various concerned countries, higher education institutions, and other regional institutions such as UEMOA, ECOWAS, the African World Heritage Fund,... as to support training activities;

4. Operational activities and cooperation at the regional and international levels

- a) Encourage cooperation between States to mobilize funds to support training in underwater archaeology and technical training on the protection of this heritage and to transfer, on agreed terms, technology relating to underwater cultural heritage.

5. The enhancement and awareness of the population on underwater cultural heritage

- a) Stress the need to raise the awareness of the general public, national and local authorities on underwater heritage and encourage the development of didactic documents and films for children, which can be used during extracurricular activities;
- b) Encourage the development of inventories on underwater cultural heritage, through the cooperation with local communities and local actors that are engaged in all areas related to the aquatic sector, including recreational diver centers, and taking into account the UNESCO Manual on the Annex of the 2001 Convention;
- c) Encourage the recognition of underwater cultural heritage properties related to African maritime history, in particular sites prior to European expansion in the Atlantic.

Signed, Island of Gorée, 24 January 2019:

The participants
(in alphabetical order)

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