



Khmer People Network for Cambodia (KPNC)

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Ms. Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO
UNESCO Headquarters
7, Place De Fontenoy,
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December 14th, 2020

Subject: Request that UNESCO:

1. Oppose the NagaCorp's Angkor "Lake of Wonder" Resort Project
2. Support the people's right to self-determination
3. Support the people's religious belief

Dear Director-General Azoulay:

We, the undersigned Civil Society Organizations, are writing to bring to your attention the recent developments concerning the protection and preservation of Cambodia's Angkor Wat Archaeological Park,¹ one of the world's most precious heritage.

Following a request in 2009, UNESCO had successfully ordered the Apsara National Authority of Cambodia and Sokimex, owned by Senator Sok Kong, to remove the lighting and heating equipment from Angkor Wat Temple, to stop their damaging effect on the stones.²

NagaCorp Ltd., a leisure and tourism company with casino operations in Phnom Penh, supported by the Apsara authorities, publicly announced that it received approval from the Hun Sen administration on May 12th, 2020, to build a touristic resort just 500 meters from the Angkor temple complex.^{3,4} It was granted a 50-year lease on 75 hectares of "prime piece of development land" to build and operate a resort called "Angkor Lake of Wonder" (ALLOW), about twice the size of California's Disneyland.⁵ Under the project agreement, the land is leased up to 50 years from 2020 to 2070, rent-free for the first seven to ten years.⁶ Over the 50 years, NagaCorp would pay a total of US \$21 million, or about US \$29 per square meter, which averages to a mere US \$420,000 a year. NagaCorp indicated that the initial phase would cost \$350 million to cover two five-star hotels, a water park, indoor hi-tech theme park, China-Town, an ancient Angkorian-style canal, a spa, and cultural gardens.

The public is not aware of any valid social and environmental impact study prior to the granting of the land for such an investment project to NagaCorp.

We are concerned that new constructions will have negative impacts on the environment, the architectural and structural integrity of the Angkor Temples and other monuments within the heritage site, because digging and compacting the ground to build the structure of the resort will cause the sand holding the Angkor Temples to move and make the temples collapse.⁷

¹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/1717> (UNESCO World Heritage Center, (1992))

² http://portal.unesco.org/en/files/46302/1251374233918th_TC_Recommandations-FR/18th%2BTC%2BRecommandations-FR (18th ICC Technical Session, General Recommendations, (2009))

³ <https://vodenglish.news/hun-sens-land-intervention-cleared-path-for-nagas-angkor-resort/> (Hun Sen's Land Intervention Cleared Path for Naga's Angkor Resort, VOD News, (2020))

⁴ <https://doc.irasia.com/listco/hk/nagacorp/announcement/a201115.pdf>

⁵ <https://vodenglish.news/nagacorp-plans-angkor-lake-of-wonder-theme-park-resort-in-siem-reap/> (NagaCorp Plans 'Angkor Lake of Wonder' Theme Park Resort in Siem Reap, (2020))

⁶ <https://www.rfa.org/khmer/news/social-economy/UNESCO-request-Cambodian-authority-to-share-detailed-Nagacorp-project-11252020234459.html>? (UNESCO request Cambodia to share details on NAGACORP investment project in Siem Reap, (2020))

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l3IW1kyD4g> (How to Construct Angkor Wat Part II)

In addition, the construction of the resort will require new roads, increase the population, traffic, water consumption which can overwhelm the environment, the water supply and the stability of the Temples.

Angkor temples rest on a very delicate balance between the irrigation system of the Barays, the moats, the water from the Tonle Sap, the water flowing from Phnom Kulen and the level of the water in the aquifer below. Loss of water in the aquifer affect the structural integrity of the Temples and will cause the temples to crumble as happened with Prasat Beung Mealea, Sambaur Prey Kuk, and Koh Ker.⁸ Thus, building and operating a wave pool, a large water park, and an ancient Angkorian-style canal will affect the communicating water system within the surroundings of the heritage site and could undermine the foundations and cause the temples to crumble.⁹

The University of Sidney LIDAR study has revealed that the original Angkor city might cover more than three times the current area of 401 km².^{10,11,12} There are archeological treasures yet to be discovered by the world and we are very concerned that they will be lost forever, buried by the new buildings, or dug away.

The natural beauty of the Angkor complex will be diminished by the new constructions because the area will become a modern entertainment zone rather than a cultural and natural heritage of the Khmer civilization.¹³

Angkor is a sacred religious site, protected by the international community and no country has ever endangered its own invaluable cultural heritage by constructing a theme park nearby, while there are alternative sites in other provinces. Building a Chinatown so close to a sacred site is sacrilegious.

Cambodia, as a State party to the World Heritage Convention, has agreed to uphold the agreements for the protection, conservation, preservation, and not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the “Cultural Heritage and Natural Heritage” as stipulated in Article 6 paragraph 2 and 3 of the Convention.¹⁴ Granting NagaCorp permits and a 50-year lease to a huge investment resort without getting an comprehensive, transparent environmental impact study done, constitute an action that is inconsistent with Article 6 paragraph 3 of the Convention.

For the above cited reasons, and by virtue of the people’s rights to freely pursue religious practices and self-determination and to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources¹⁵, we strongly oppose the NagaCorp’s Angkor Resort Project.

We respectfully request that UNESCO:

1. Oppose NagaCorp’s Angkor Resort development, (ALOW), and/or any similar projects.
2. Install boundary markers on the ground for the Angkor World Heritage site.
3. Perform a comprehensive study of the negative impacts on the whole region affecting the hydrology, the architectural and structural integrity of the temples, unexplored archeological treasures, the inhabitants and the environment.
4. Recommend drastic limitations on the daily volume of visitors, to reduce the wear and tear on the monuments.
5. Increase the boundaries of the Angkor Archeological Park and its surrounding natural and cultural heritage, and add Phnom Kulen, to fit the recent findings of the University of Sidney LIDAR studies.
6. Keep us informed of UNESCO findings, recommendations, and final decisions regarding NagaCorp’s “Angkor Lake of Wonder” Resort.

Please be informed that expressions of public concerns and petitions are in progress.

⁸ <https://www.tourismcambodia.com/attractions/angkor/beng-mealea.htm> (Prasat Beng Mealea-Lotus Pond-Angkor Archeological Park)

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gISEEOmabFQ> (How is Angkor Wat Still Standing Today?)

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/JtC-pedC2D4> Angkor Wat LiDAR Presentation by Prof. Damian Evans Part 1

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iORueK0KNzg> Angkor Wat LiDAR Presentation by Prof. Damian Evans Part 2

¹² <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/cambodia-temple-discovery/index.html> Inside Cambodia’s stunning new temple discoveries

¹³ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/park-11232020180413.html> (Planned Theme Park Poses Risks to Cambodia’s Angkor Wat, Culture: Resident, NGOs, (2020)

¹⁴ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/> (Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Art. 6 (2) & (3), (1972)

¹⁵ [OHCHR | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) Article 1.1, 1.2, 18 (1948)

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We sincerely appreciate that UNESCO has taken the initial steps to ask the Cambodian authorities to provide details on NagaCorp's Angkor Resort project.

We believe that UNESCO will continue to protect Angkor Wat Archeological Park, the world's Cultural and Natural Heritage for posterity.

Respectfully yours,



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CC:

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Ms Nao Hayashi, Program specialist, UNESCO, Asia
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Professor Rhona Smith, UN Special Rapporteur on Cambodia
Rep. Allen Lowenthal, Co-Chair, US Cambodian Caucus
Rep. Steve Chabot, Co-Chair, US Cambodian Caucus
Sec. Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State, US State Department
Professor Roland Fletcher, Program Director, Angkor Research Program, University of Sidney
Dr. Christophe Pottier, Director of Studies at the EFEO
Richard J. Rogers, International Human Rights Lawyer, Global Diligence LLP

Khmer Network Civil Society: (based in the USA except otherwise indicated).

1. Cambodia Border Institute (CBI)
2. Cambodia Women Health Organization (CWHO)
3. Cambodian Alliance for the Paris Peace Agreements on Cambodia-Global (CAPPAC-GLOBAL) (Australia)
4. Cambodian Americans for Human Rights and Democracy (CAHRAD)
5. Cambodian Americans for Human Rights and Democracy League Activist (CAHRADLA)
6. Cambodian Association of Victoria (CAV)- (Australia)
7. Cambodian Australian Federation (CAF)-(Australia)
8. Committee for Paris Peace Accords on Cambodia-Minnesota (CPPAC-MN)
9. Foundation of Khmer Samaki (FKS)
10. Kampuchean Association of Olympia (KAO)
11. Khmer Alliance Foundation (KAF)
12. Khmer Association of Hampton Road Virginia (KAHRV)
13. Khmer People Network for Cambodia (KPNC)
14. Khmer Unity for Cambodia (KUC)
15. Khmer Veterans Freedom Fighters Association (KVFFA)
16. Me Boun Foundation (MF)
17. Our Mutual National Interests International (OMNI)
18. Overseas Khmer Summit (OKS)
19. Pro Démocratie pour le Cambodge du Canada (PDCC) (Canada)
20. Société Buddhiste Khmère (SBK) (Canada)