

## **Oman's Arabian Oryx Sanctuary : first site ever to be deleted from UNESCO's World Heritage List**

Christchurch, New Zealand, 28 June - The World Heritage Committee on Thursday took the unprecedented decision of removing a site from UNESCO's World Heritage List. The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary (Oman), home to the rare antelope, today became the first site to be deleted since UNESCO's 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage entered into force.

The World Heritage Committee deleted the property because of Oman's decision to reduce the size of the protected area by 90%, in contravention of the Operational Guidelines of the Convention. This was seen by the Committee as destroying the outstanding universal value of the site which was inscribed in 1994.

In 1996, the population of the Arabian Oryx in the site, was at 450 but it has since dwindled to 65 with only about four breeding pairs making its future viability uncertain. This decline is due to poaching and habitat degradation.

After extensive consultation with the State Party, the Committee felt that the unilateral reduction in the size of the Sanctuary and plans to proceed with hydrocarbon prospection would destroy the value and integrity of the property, which is also home to other endangered species including, the Arabian Gazelle and houbara bustard.

The Committee expressed regret that the State Party failed to fulfill its obligations regarding the conservation of the Sanctuary as defined by the World Heritage Convention.

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