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Convention concerning the Protection of the
World Cultural and Natural Heritage

NOMINATION TO THE
WORLD HERITAGE LIST
SUBMITTED BY THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

Old Havana and its Fortifications

1. Specific location

a) Country

Republic of Cuba

b) State, Province or Region

The Province of Ciudad de La Habana

c) Name of property

Old Havana and its fortifications

d) Exact location on map and indication of geographical co-ordinates

Latitude 23°08' N.

Longitude 82°21' W.

2. Juridical data

a) Owner

Public property, but partly owned by private individuals and legal entities.

b) Legal status

The historic city centre of Havana is protected by the following laws:

- Law N° 1 of the National Assembly of People's Power, Law on the Protection of the Cultural Heritage, of 4 August 1977;
- Law N° 2 of the National Assembly of People's Power, Law on National and Local Monuments, of 4 August 1977;
- Resolution N° 3 of the National Commission for Monuments, of 10 October 1978, which declared the historic centre of the old town of San Cristobal de La Habana, municipality of Old Havana, Province of Ciudad de La Habana, a National Monument.

c) Responsible administration

Provincial Assembly of People's Power of Ciudad de La Habana,
Avenida de las Misiones N° 25 e/Pena Pobre y Carcel,
Municipality of Old Havana,
Province of Ciudad de La Habana.

3. Identification

a) Description and inventory

The historic centre of Old Havana includes the whole of the built-up area bounded by the lines of the old city walls (now Monserrate and Egido streets) and the Bay of La Habana, covering an area of 142.5 hectares and with a population of approximately 70,000 people.

b) Maps and/or plans

Plan showing the historical development of Havana

Plan showing the different architectural periods within the historic centre of Havana.

(See Annex.)

c) Photographic and/or cinematographic documentation

View of the City of Havana and its Bay

General aerial view of the historic centre

Aerial view of the Plaza de Armas and surrounding area

Aerial view of the Plaza de la Catedral and surrounding area

Aerial view of the Plaza de San Francisco and surrounding area

(See Annex.)

d) History

After the discovery of Cuba by Christopher Columbus in 1492, some years elapsed before the island was colonised. It was only from 1510 onwards that the process of subjugating the local population and occupying the whole territory of the island really got under way.

Havana, the last of all the towns to be founded, possessed considerable natural advantages, including its fine port and its excellent position facing the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico, which very soon made it the most important city in the country: this situation was confirmed in 1550, when the Governor transferred his headquarters from Santiago de Cuba to this, the most westerly of the Cuban cities.

Over a period, Havana gradually increased in importance. In 1678 the Artillery Depot and School was sited there, with a view to controlling and watching the Florida Peninsula. In the eighteenth century it was also responsible for protecting Louisiana. By 1740 it had become the Naval Station for the Spanish Fleet and was also the main Spanish dockyard in the New World. From the mid-eighteenth century on, it was regarded as the wealthiest port in the American continent.

By 1820, urban development had spread beyond the walled city, which was now densely populated.

By 1895 the city consisted of two parts of equal size inside and outside the walls, with identical administrative systems.

"Greater Havana" was already a reality, and since then the inhabitants of the city have referred to the area formerly surrounded by walls as Old Havana.

e) Bibliography

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4. State of preservation/conservation

a) Diagnosis

The whole area is densely populated and is also the scene of many social, commercial, administrative and cultural activities. Certain areas are in an advanced state of urban decay owing to the age of the buildings and to the improper uses to which they have been put. Some buildings have been demolished, but the area as a whole still possesses considerable unity of character, while the most outstanding buildings from the cultural point of view have already been, or are in the process of being, restored. Within the framework of the General Plan for the whole city there exists a detailed plan for urban renewal and restoration. However, considerable practical obstacles still stand in the way of its implementation.

b) Agent responsible for preservation/conservation

National Commission for Monuments, Ministry of Culture.
Provincial Commission for Monuments, Ciudad de La Habana.

c) History of preservation/conservation

Resolution N° 12 of the National Commission for Monuments of 3 December 1980:

Establishment of a national Working Group with Responsibility for the Historic Centre of Old Havana and its Fortifications.

Resolution N° 14 of the National Commission for Monuments, of 3 December 1980:

Measures to define the limits of the historic centre and to protect its buildings, by halting demolition and planning reinforcement work.

d) Means for preservation/conservation

Use of the historic centre is subject to various regulations, such as those covering construction, which prohibit any undesirable alterations to important buildings and monuments, those covering transport, which limit the volume of vehicular traffic, and those covering the use of buildings, which restrict and aim to prevent such harmful practices as converting them into warehouses or large department stores.

Restoration work on the monuments and buildings within this area is carried out by specially qualified workers and is paid for out of a permanent fund set up for this purpose.

e) Management plans

The Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural (Cultural Heritage Department) of the Ministry of Culture has already drawn up the Preliminary General Plan for the Restoration of the Historic Centre and is now working on plans for specific areas, some of which are already under way. These include the Plaza de la Catedral, the Plaza de Armas and the Plaza Vieja. Work has already begun on the restoration of the Ancient Convent of Santa Clara, where the Centro Nacional de Restauración, Conservación y Museología (National Centre for Restoration, Conservation and Museum Science) will be housed. This will provide extremely useful technical and material assistance in the task of restoring Old Havana.

In addition, the users of buildings, whether these are state property or privately owned, are being encouraged to participate in their conservation, and state enterprises are urged to subsidise restoration work.

5. Justification for inclusion in the World Heritage List

a) Cultural property

In spite of the modern growth of the city, and despite the almost total demolition of the walls in the nineteenth century, the historic centre of Havana has maintained up to the present day a remarkable unity of character resulting from the superimposition of different periods in its history, which has been achieved in a harmonious yet expressive manner through adherence to the original urban layout and underlying pattern of the city as a whole.

Within the old walled city there are many buildings of outstanding architectural merit, especially those surrounding the Plaza de Armas, the Plaza de la Catedral, the Plaza de San Francisco and the Plaza Vieja. These are set off by houses and residential buildings in a more popular or traditional style, which may be regarded individually as having less architectural merit, but which, when considered as a whole, provide an overall sense of architectural, historical and environmental continuity which makes Old Havana the most impressive historic city centre in the Caribbean and one of the most notable in the American Continent as a whole.

Transmitted under cover of letter
signed by:
Dra. Vicentina Antuña Tavío,
Chairman,
Cuban National Commission for Unesco