



United States Mission Sierra Leone
Public Affairs Office

Press Release

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Launch of a two-year project to preserve the unique heritage of Bunce Island.

The Government of Sierra Leone and the United States of America have joined forces to support the preservation and promotion of the landmark historical site of Bunce Island.

Bunce Island, which is located in the Sierra Leone River in Locomassama Chiefdom, Port Loko District, is a unique cultural monument to Africa's intersection with the United States and the wider Atlantic World. During its 140 years of operation, the traders on Bunce Island exiled thousands of enslaved Africans to North America and the West Indies. It bears witness to this dark period in history.

Today the official launch of the project was announced.

"Bunce Island's history is inextricably linked to America's history [...]. This connection make me as the U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone—and the whole of the U.S. Mission in Sierra Leone—gratified to award this grant to help preserve this sacred place with so much history," said Maria E. Brewer, the U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone.

The goal of the project is to carry out urgent preservation at the site to arrest decay that is threatening stability of the ruins, mitigate the effects of coastal erosion, which is exacerbated by climate change and sea-level rise, and develop the site's visitor infrastructure.

When cultural heritage is integrated into a coherent development strategy it can become a significant resource for the community's socio-economic development, an engine for local sustainable development and an essential condition for a balanced human development.

Preservation at Bunce Island is an opportunity to help alter perceptions of Sierra Leone and contribute to the country's economic revival, and it will ensure the survival of one of the most important heritage sites in West African with strong cultural and historical links to the United States.

The project will be implemented by World Monuments Fund (WMF) working in partnership with the Monuments and Relics Commission of Sierra Leone with funding provided by the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation through the U.S. Embassy in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

“Diversifying the economy of Sierra Leone through heritage tourism remains the biggest challenge facing the government. The launch of a project to preserve Bunce Island will undoubtedly boost the economy and promote cultural tourism at local and international level,” remarked the Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Sidie Yahya Tunis.

Madam Isatu Smith Chairperson of the Monuments and Relics Commission said that “it is very gratifying that Bunce Island is finally being given the attention it deserves during the tenure of my Commission. Since the 1970s several agencies have made attempts to secure the funds needed to preserve Bunce Island and develop it into a National Historic Park and it is very historical that this is finally happening.”

The World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to saving the world’s most treasured places. For over 45 years, working in more than 90 countries, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to preserve important architectural and cultural heritage sites around the globe. Through partnerships with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF inspires an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations. Headquartered in New York, WMF has offices and affiliates worldwide.

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The Monuments and Relics Commission (MRC) is the government agency charged with the responsibility of preserving ancient, historical and natural monuments, relics and other objects of archaeological, ethnographical, historical or other scientific interest. The Commission has the responsibility of ensuring the preservation, protection and promotion of Sierra Leone’s cultural heritage assets. The Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs is its line ministry.

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