

## **United States Withdrawal from UNESCO Implications for the Man and the Biosphere program**

### **Background**

The Secretary of State has made the decision to withdraw from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and to seek to establish a permanent observer mission to the organization. As a non-member observer, we can participate in UNESCO-related activities and bodies that align with U.S. interests and where UNESCO membership is not required. We can also continue to work with many allies, friends, and like-minded states to lobby UNESCO to depoliticize, strengthen its governance, and not to exceed its mandate, without seeing our arrears continue to increase in the meantime.

The decision to withdraw took into account ongoing concerns over the increasing politicization of the agency, the need for fundamental reform in the organization, and continuing anti-Israel bias at UNESCO and the mounting arrears at UNESCO, which will amount to approximately \$550 million next year. The U.S. withdrew from UNESCO in 1985 and had observer status until its return in 2003.

### **How does the US withdrawal from full membership in UNESCO affect US participation in the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program?**

When the withdrawal becomes effective at the end of 2018, the US will become a non-member observer and intends to continue to participate in several UNESCO programs such as the World Heritage Convention and Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program which do not require membership in UNESCO. During the last period of non-membership in UNESCO from 1984-2002, the US continued to be actively involved in the MAB program.

### **Does withdrawal from UNESCO affect current US MAB sites?**

No. The US will continue to uphold its responsibilities to preserve and promote these sites as living laboratories for research, biodiversity, education and sustainable development.

### **Can the US nominate its sites for Biosphere designation?**

Yes, the US can nominate sites. The first priority will be to bring the existing sites into compliance with zonation, local governance and community participation.

### **What are the next steps?**

U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO does not alter the U.S. policy of supporting international cooperation in educational, scientific, cultural, communication and information activities where there are technical, economic or political benefits to the United States. With this in mind, we are preparing to seek approval from the UNESCO Executive Board to establish a permanent observer mission to UNESCO. When it is in the U.S. interest, the United States will continue to participate in UNESCO and UNESCO-related activities that do not require membership in the Organization. Under UNESCO's constitution, the U.S. withdrawal will take effect at the end of the calendar year following transmission of the U.S. notice of withdrawal. Therefore, the United States will remain a full member of UNESCO through December 31, 2018.