

Funerary and Memorial Sites  
of the First World War  
(Western Front)

Proposal for inscription on the World Heritage List  
presented by Belgium and France



Preface by Geneviève Darrieussecq,  
Secretary of State for the Ministry of the Armed Forces

The Nomination File for inscription of the “Funerary and Memorial Sites of the First World War (Western Front)”, submitted to UNESCO in the name of Belgium and France is more than symbolic: for both our countries, it is of profound historic and cultural importance. The aim is to ensure individual recognition of the combatants in perpetuity and to honour the memory of the almost four million men who came from all over the world to fight and die in this part of Europe. Today, more than four thousand cemeteries and memorials mark the contours of what used to be the Western Front of the Great War. It is a unique act in world history. Never had so many funerary sites been erected in such a short time and on such a narrow strip of land. The regular alignments of crosses and headstones in the north and east of our country are an incessant echo of the mass deaths characteristic of the 1914-1918 war. Large numbers of soldiers, parents, spouses, children and families demanded the respect due to their deceased comrade or loved one by burial and an individual grave. So, even before the end of the conflict and continuing after the end of the war, France faced a triple necessity - to construct and inaugurate necropoleis, to allow foreign States to bury their dead with dignity and to collect the bodies abandoned on the battlefield. A colossal funerary task was undertaken. Conventions granting perpetual use of the land were granted to many States, so that they could bury their dead and honour the memory of the missing. A century has passed. This conflict is now a part of human history. These funerary and memorial sites are the perpetuation of this history, but they also provide a tangible lesson of peace and multiculturalism. International recognition of these remembrance sites, through nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List, is both a homage and a guarantee that these places of reflection and education for peace, which are frequented by millions of pilgrims and visitors from all over the world, will be preserved in perpetuity. This Nomination File brings together the Belgian regions of Flanders and Wallonia and the thirteen French Départements situated on the Western Front and has been coordinated since 2011 by the association “Paysages et sites de Mémoire de la Grande Guerre” (Association of Landscapes and Memorials of the Great War). Rooted locally, this association brings together local authorities at every level, mobilizing and uniting their actions. In summary, this nomination is the fruit of the territories and populations profoundly attached to their shared history and memorial heritage. These sites materially embody the shared remembrance of one of the greatest European and worldwide tragedies. Through successive generations, following the example of Verdun, which has become a symbol of Franco-German reconciliation, these sites are now places of education and transmission of memory. For all these reasons, I attach particular importance to the nomination of these sites for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.