Shakhrisabz: Reading World Heritage-in-Danger Decisions

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> *A historic city can remain a World Heritage property while the people responsible for it debate how to protect what remains. To understand the debate, read the dates, the precise decision verbs, and the boundary documents.*

A city, a monument, and a decision are not the same thing

Visitors to Shakhrisabz, also written Shakhrisyabz, may begin at the towering remains of Ak-Sarai (Ak Saray) Palace. The spectacle of masonry and tilework invites a simple travel caption: 'UNESCO World Heritage Site.' But the formal designation refers to the **Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz**, not merely to one surviving palace gateway. It also carries an unusual and significant status: UNESCO's World Heritage Centre says the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List in **2000**, and has been on the **List of World Heritage in Danger since 2016**. The latest Committee decision available for this guide, **48 COM 7A.26 (2026)**, explicitly retains it on the danger list. [1][2]

The words 'World Heritage in Danger' do not mean that an entry has been deleted from the World Heritage List. They also do not mean that the entire city is closed to visitors, that every building is ruined, or that an individual photograph proves a specific conservation failure. The designation is a formal Committee status, reflecting threats to the values and attributes for which the property was inscribed. Its evidence belongs in official decisions, monitoring records and heritage boundaries, rather than impressions alone.

This article is a source-reading toolkit. It shows how to trace changes from inscription to concern, intervention, debate and the current monitoring process. It includes a dated decision matrix and a boundary-checking worksheet. It does not pretend to be a professional conservation assessment or to replace residents' perspectives. Where the documents record relocation and changing neighborhoods, those human dimensions matter as much as famous monuments.

The exact object on the World Heritage List

UNESCO's property page identifies the Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz as World Heritage property **no. 885**, in Uzbekistan's **Kashkadarya Region**, inscribed for criteria **(iii)** and **(iv)**. The page lists a property area of **240 hectares** and a buffer zone of **82 hectares**. Those figures describe the published property entry and must not be casually turned into the current measured extent of every modern redevelopment scheme. Nor should a tour map's municipal boundary be mistaken for the World Heritage property boundary. [1]

In broad terms, criterion (iii) relates to the cultural testimony of significant monuments, especially from the Timurid period. Criterion (iv) concerns important examples of architecture with wider influence. UNESCO's description discusses Ak-Sarai Palace, Dorus Saodat, the Chor-su bazaar and other elements

of the urban fabric, including historic domestic buildings and neighborhoods. UNESCO's formal Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) description discusses not just monumental structures but the wider historic center and its setting. [1][3]

This matters because the title 'historic centre' signals more than a collection of monuments. Streets, houses, alignments, settings, urban texture, archaeological evidence and the relationships among buildings can help express significance. A landscaped open plaza may make a monument more visible to a visitor while simultaneously removing evidence of how a city was lived in. Whether that tradeoff affects a World Heritage property's OUV must be assessed with the actual historic attributes, plans and monitoring findings, not simply tourist preferences.

The UNESCO property page also contains an integrity and authenticity description written in the language of the entry's OUV. Some of that descriptive text appears reassuring about the historic fabric. Do **not** lift it out of its documentary context to contradict later Committee concern. A property's OUV statement and a 2016 reactive monitoring finding have different purposes and reference periods. An honest guide reads them together and explains that later decisions document damage and unresolved conservation questions. [1][4]

A decision is not a news headline

The World Heritage Committee uses numbered decisions. A reference such as **40 COM 7B.48** is a traceable identifier, not an invented rating. It ties a decision to a session and agenda item. A later decision may recall several earlier decisions, welcome some progress, express concern about other matters, set a reporting date and preserve a danger-list status—all in the same document.

When reading a decision, look at its **verbs**. 'Notes' acknowledges information. 'Welcomes' recognizes a reported step. 'Requests' or 'urges' calls for action. 'Decides' records a formal Committee outcome. These are reading aids, not claims that every verb has a single legal effect in every UNESCO document. The most serious mistake is to convert 'welcomes an intention' into 'approves a completed change', or 'allows preparation of a boundary proposal' into 'adopts the new boundary'.

A decision also has a date. An official link updated in 2026 may quote a 2025 decision; the two dates are not interchangeable. Check the decision code, session year, actual paragraphs and, when relevant, the separate state-of-conservation report. If one document merely mentions another, follow the original. [2][5]

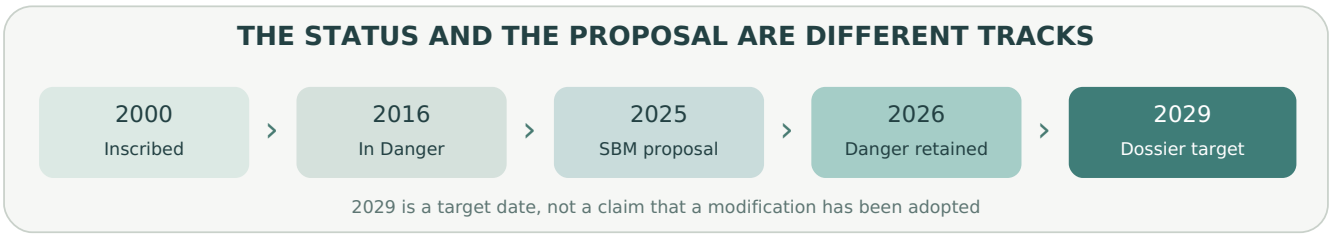


Figure 1. Source-based chronology for readers; diagram is original, not an official UNESCO chart.

What the dated records actually say

In 2000: inscription

The Committee's **24 COM X.C.1 (2000)** decision inscribed the Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz on the World Heritage List under criteria (iii) and (iv). It describes the significance of Timurid monuments and their architectural influence. This is an **inscription decision**, not evidence about the condition of a building decades later. [3]

In 2016: acute concern and the danger listing

Decision **40 COM 7B.48 (2016)** records the Committee's concern over major reconstruction and demolition works and the lack of sufficient prior documentation and impact assessment. It references a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission and describes large changes to the historic center's appearance, its monuments' setting and the historic town-planning structure. The formal UNESCO property record dates danger listing from **2016**. [1][4]

The 2016 finding should not be paraphrased into an allegation about a particular current resident, shopkeeper or worker. It concerns documented interventions and management systems. It is serious precisely because it addresses collective heritage values and the integrity and authenticity of the urban fabric.

In 2017: damage to lived neighborhoods

Decision **41 COM 7A.57 (2017)** takes the discussion beyond the visible palace. It references severe and irreversible harm to historic town planning and traditional dwellings and notes the relocation of approximately **2,000 residents**. The number is the **Committee's description of what its mission had found**, not a new 2026 population estimate or an independently conducted census for this article. The decision also identifies conservation interventions that used materials or methods considered damaging to authenticity. [6]

For readers, the important lesson is that a historic urban landscape includes people and inhabited structures. A visitor's view of a cleaned-up square cannot establish whether the changes protected or erased the features for which a historic city was inscribed. Nor does acknowledging this damage mean assigning blame to everyone connected with the site today.

In 2023–2025: examining options, not declaring success

Decisions in **2023**, **2024**, and **2025** discuss the possibility of significantly modifying the World Heritage property's boundary or developing a new nomination approach. The **2025 decision 47 COM 7A.20** references a draft outline focusing on a selection of four monuments, with the remaining historic urban areas potentially playing a buffer or setting role. Crucially, the Committee treats this as a line of work requiring research, comparative analysis and conservation planning—not as evidence that the boundary has already changed. [5][7][8]

The 2025 decision permitted time to prepare a **significant boundary modification (SBM)** dossier, with a submission target of **1 February 2029**. It did not announce that the original World Heritage property had been delisted, nor that a new property had already replaced it. Do not draw a new four-monument World Heritage boundary on a reader map from this provisional discussion. [5]

In 2026: continued danger status, specific future tasks

The most recent verified decision in this guide is **48 COM 7A.26**, taken at the 2026 48th Committee session. It welcomes progress toward preparation of an SBM dossier with the working title **'Ak Sarai and the Timurid Monuments of Shakhrisyabz'**, expected for submission by **1 February 2029**. It notes commitments to inventories, archaeological surveys, research and improved management tools; it addresses groundwater and humidity measures, treatment choices at Ak-Sarai, and work on a restoration plan. The Committee asks for a new state-of-conservation report by **1 February 2027** and expressly **retains** the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. [2]

These dates are deadlines or target submissions—not proof that an SBM dossier was submitted or approved. Likewise, 2026 acknowledgement of work undertaken at Ak-Sarai in 2025 does not mean the Committee accepted all methods or considered the conservation problem solved. In the same decision it requests an overall restoration approach for ICOMOS review before further relevant work.

One specific distinction deserves care. The 2026 decision welcomes the State Party's decision **not** to implement a proposed silicone treatment on the walls of the Ak-Sarai complex. That is not a general claim that silicone is always inappropriate for every heritage building. It is a site-specific concern discussed with reference to fragile masonry, moisture and seismic behavior, and an invitation for expert review. Keep the scope of the evidence exact. [2]

Decision matrix: track the chain rather than cherry-picking

The table is a reader-facing source index. It summarizes official UNESCO decisions without replacing their precise text. Always open the linked primary document when citing a conclusion.

Year	Primary record	What is documented	What it does not establish
2000	24 COM X.C.1	Inscription under criteria (iii) and (iv)	That later changes were acceptable
2016	40 COM 7B.48 and property record	Concern about intervention; danger listing from 2016	That the property had been deleted
2017	41 COM 7A.57	Findings on urban fabric, traditional dwellings and relocation	An independently verified count of people in 2026
2023	45 COM 7A.54	Continued consideration of possible options	A finalized alternative nomination
2024	46 COM 7A.40	Continued oversight and conservation planning requirements	Removal from danger status
2025	47 COM 7A.20	Draft four-monument approach and a 2029 dossier timetable	Final approval of an SBM
2026	48 COM 7A.26	New monitoring and restoration requests; retain on danger list	Removal from danger status or adoption of new boundaries

The matrix is also a reading exercise: circle one verb that authorizes preparation and a different verb that makes a formal status decision. Check the distinction against the full primary text. A researcher should also check whether any newer decision has appeared since this guide was last updated; Committee status is not static forever.

Reading the boundaries without drawing fictional lines

Every World Heritage property has a spatial extent, but not every appealing online map displays that extent correctly. UNESCO's property page identifies the official property, its area and buffer zone, and links to maps and documents. For Shakhrisyabz, the page currently gives **240 hectares** for the property and **82 hectares** for the buffer zone. These are **published official entry values**, not estimates derived from a casual satellite screenshot. [1]

A city boundary is not necessarily a World Heritage boundary. A single monument's courtyard is not automatically the entire protected area. A proposed future boundary cannot be treated as current merely because it appears in an official discussion. Before asserting that a photograph or construction site lies **inside** the World Heritage property, you need a sufficiently precise official map, the image's verified camera location and a clear understanding of the map's date and scale.

The UNESCO property documentation includes a map entry dated **1998** called 'The Schematic Plan of City Shakhrisybs'. Its date and description are signals to inspect the actual file rather than assume it provides a modern GPS boundary. The property page and decisions record an ongoing consideration of a significant modification. A researcher must distinguish **inscribed boundary**, **current buffer zone**, **proposed modification** and **municipal territory**. [1][9]

If you make a walking route or photo caption, use a cautious label such as 'Ak-Sarai monument area in Shakhrisabz' unless you have verified the precise property coordinates and site-boundary layer. You can supply a general Google Maps place search for Shakhrisabz for navigation. This is a search link, not an authoritative World Heritage boundary map.

Boundary-checking card

- **Claim to test:** 'The pictured works occurred inside the inscribed World Heritage boundary.'
- **Official property identifier:** 885, Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz.
- **Map source, version and date:** _____
- **Is the polygon property, buffer zone, tentative proposal or municipality?** _____
- **Photo or work-site location evidence:** _____
- **Coordinate reference or mapping method:** _____
- **Uncertainty at the boundary edge:** _____
- **Can the location claim presently be made?** yes / no / unclear; reason: _____

If 'unclear', do not trace a confident boundary on the published photograph. Explain the uncertainty. A property-management or conservation claim is weakened, not strengthened, by an attractive but unverified map.

The human stakes of an urban heritage decision

A site can be described by monuments and still be lived in through neighborhoods, homes, commerce, worship and daily routines. The 2017 Committee decision's concern about traditional houses and resident relocation is therefore central, not incidental. It reminds a reader to ask what happens to a historic district when monuments are isolated from their urban relationships. [6]

A good heritage guide should not replace that concern with nostalgia about a supposedly perfect past, or presume that every modern intervention is harmful. Safety, sanitation, accessibility, public space and livelihoods are real needs. The difficult heritage question is how to address them while retaining the particular historical attributes that justified the site's World Heritage inscription. That is why the latest decisions call for appropriate management, research, documentation and consultation, rather than judging a city from an aerial picture alone.

Equally, an account of change should avoid inventing resident quotations, livelihoods, ethnic labels or consent. The 2017 decision contains a documented relocation figure; it does not provide permission to narrate the private life of a named household. If you plan to include interviews, obtain informed permission and record who actually said what. If you cannot interview, report the institutional document accurately and leave personal stories out.

Conservation findings are not automatic diagnoses

The UNESCO decisions discuss several technical subjects: rising groundwater and moisture, appropriate treatment of fragile masonry, the relationship between historic canals and drainage, restoration methods and the cumulative effect of earlier interventions. The fact that a decision identifies a concern does not let a lay reader diagnose a crack visible in a smartphone photo. A crack's cause may require engineering, material science, structural history and site measurements. [2][5]

For example, the 2025 Committee decision expressed concern about a proposed silicone treatment and asked for the issue of groundwater to be considered on a city-wide scale. In 2026 the Committee welcomed the decision not to proceed with that treatment and requested more research and consultation on water ingress, while keeping the property's danger status. This is a documented development between decisions. It is not proof that groundwater has been solved, that every monument is stable, or that any particular piece of restoration work is approved. [2][5]

The same applies to the draft boundary change. If a future dossier seeks to emphasize a selection of Timurid monuments, the research must still explain their value, settings, integrity and comparative significance. The 2026 decision notes the process, not its ultimate outcome. Residents, archaeologists, conservators and public authorities have different perspectives and responsibilities; an honest reader should avoid pretending there is only one simple interest at stake.

Three exercises in responsible source reading

Exercise 1 — correct the headline

Headline: 'UNESCO removed Shakhrisabz from its World Heritage List in 2026.'

Correction: UNESCO's 2026 decision **48 COM 7A.26** retains the Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz on the **List of World Heritage in Danger**. A proposal to prepare a significant boundary modification is being developed; the decision does not approve a new property or delete the existing one. Use the exact formal lists and dates in the correction. [2]

Exercise 2 — check what a proposal means

Headline: ‘The historic city has already been reduced to four monuments.’

Correction: The 2025 decision discussed a draft approach focusing on four monuments and allowed preparation of a dossier; the 2026 decision welcomed progress and cited a target of 1 February 2029. A proposal does not equal an adopted new boundary. An accompanying map must remain labeled **proposed** unless a later official decision says otherwise. [2][5]

Exercise 3 — put a finding in its own year

Headline: ‘UNESCO says 2,000 residents were newly removed this year.’

Correction: A **2017** Committee decision referred to the relocation of approximately 2,000 residents in connection with prior works. That is a finding in its historical context, not a 2026 event or present-day population count. Cite the correct year and do not turn an old statement into new breaking news. [6]

These are examples of **rewriting ungrounded headlines**, not reproductions of verified news headlines or evidence that such headlines were actually published.

Reader worksheet: a claim that can survive a fact-check

Choose one specific claim—for instance, ‘the proposed property boundary was approved’—and fill out the ledger below using the primary UNESCO documents.

Document identity

- Claim under examination: _____
- Original speaker or publication: _____
- Exact decision code: _____ Committee session year: _____
- Original decision URL: _____ Date accessed: _____
- Decision paragraph number(s): _____
- Distinguish official decision, state party proposal, monitoring report, tourism description and your own interpretation: _____

Evidence and status

- Verbatim **short** operative verb, where necessary: _____
- What action does the document document? _____
- What is requested or proposed but **not** yet established? _____
- Is a deadline an intended submission, reporting request or completed event? _____
- Does the claim concern city, inscribed property, buffer zone or proposed boundary? _____
- Later official document checked? Code/date: _____
- Alternative or contradictory evidence to address: _____

Publication test

- My narrow, defensible sentence: _____
- Uncertainty or limitation: _____
- Source hyperlink and access date for reader: _____

- Rights for any accompanying photograph/map: _____
- Publication status: draft / fact-checked / independently reviewed / published (mark only what has actually occurred)

This worksheet is an original educational tool, not an official UNESCO form. Do not use it as a substitute for professional legal or heritage advice. Keeping the decision code and paragraph number with the claim makes later updates far easier.

A visitor’s two-minute decision check

If you have only a few minutes, look up the exact UNESCO property name and ID before writing about ‘Shakhrisabz UNESCO’. Find the **latest Committee decision**, not just an old search-result excerpt. Note the World Heritage and World Heritage-in-Danger statuses separately. Check whether the decision describes a **submitted proposal**, a **requested report**, **ongoing monitoring** or an **adopted outcome**. Finally, identify whether the claim concerns a monument, a living neighborhood, the full property or its possible new boundaries.

A city is more than a monument. A Committee decision is more than a headline. Shakhrisabz rewards the visitor who is willing to see both: a place of exceptional built heritage, and a careful public record of difficult questions about what safeguarding that heritage should mean.

Verified primary sources and editorial reading notes

All links below were checked against UNESCO World Heritage Centre pages on **3 November 2026**. The latest available Committee decision was **48 COM 7A.26 (2026)** at this check. A later Committee decision may change status; readers should recheck the official property document index when using this text at a future date. No interviews, map shapefiles or external photographs are claimed or reproduced.

1. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz — property 885. Official entry identifying year 2000, criteria (iii)(iv), Kashkadarya Region, property and buffer area, and 2016–present danger listing.
2. UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision 48 COM 7A.26 (2026). Latest verified decision: continued danger listing, research/management commitments, planned 2029 SBM dossier, reporting deadline 2027 and site-specific conservation concerns.
3. UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision 24 COM X.C.1 (2000). Original inscription basis for criteria (iii) and (iv).
4. UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision 40 COM 7B.48 (2016). Concerns about major interventions and reactive monitoring.
5. UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision 47 COM 7A.20 (2025). Draft four-monument approach and permission to prepare a significant-boundary-modification dossier, not final adoption.
6. UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision 41 COM 7A.57 (2017). Findings about historic urban fabric, traditional dwellings, relocation and conservation practice.
7. UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision 45 COM 7A.54 (2023). Continued exploration of alternative nomination/boundary approaches.
8. UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision 46 COM 7A.40 (2024). Ongoing conservation oversight and danger-list retention.

9. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz — documents and maps. Chronological entry list, including a 1998 schematic map; investigate the actual map and its legal/spatial status before publishing precise boundaries.

Illustration and rights note: No third-party photographs are reproduced. A future reader or site package must separately clear rights for a photograph and an authoritative mapped boundary, caption each with creation date and provenance, and ensure that proposed boundaries are not visually presented as already in force.