

YEMEN

Yemen's Cultural Heritage at Risk due to Armed Conflicts

ICOMOS Statement on Safeguarding Yemen's Cultural Heritage during the On-going Armed Conflict, April 23, 2015

In the face of the escalating armed conflict and military intervention in Yemen and the ensuing growing humanitarian emergency, ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, expresses its continuing deep concern for the protection of cultural property in Yemen at risk from the hostilities.

The cultural heritage of Yemen is a unique and irreplaceable witness of its rich and diverse history. Damage to it represents an irretrievable loss to the cultural heritage of all peoples in the world.

Yemen as one of the ancient centres of civilization of the Middle East and North Africa is home to some very significant ancient and Islamic sites.

Yemen has three cultural and one natural site on the UNESCO World Heritage List and ten other cultural and natural properties are included on its Tentative List.

Yemen's Cultural World Heritage Sites are:

- Historic Town of Zabid
- Old city of Sana'a
- Old Walled City of Shibam

In addition to its World Heritage properties, many other places such as the old town of Mukallah, the cities of Tarim, Shibam Co-coban, and Rada'a, the archaeological site of Ma'in and the cultural landscape of Wadi Do'an are of great cultural importance.

The museums and collections of Yemen, particularly the National Museum of Yemen in Sana'a, are repositories of ancient, Islamic and folkloric artefacts and documents, as well as the manuscript libraries in Tarim, Sana'a and Zabid.

ICOMOS supports and reiterates the call already launched by UNESCO on 27 March, to protect Yemen's cultural heritage, and urges all parties involved in this armed conflict, including State and non-State actors and the members of the regional coalition engaging in military operations in Yemen, to respect and protect cultural properties and refrain from any attack or act of hostility directed against movable or immovable cultural properties, by shelling or by air strikes, or by using cultural heritage sites and buildings and their immediate surroundings for military purposes.

By recalling the international humanitarian law, and in particular the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions; and customary international law, ICOMOS calls on all armed forces and countries who are fighting

on the ground or leading airstrikes to spare all types of cultural property, including but not limited to those on the UNESCO World Heritage and Tentative lists.

ICOMOS expresses its solidarity with Yemeni cultural heritage organizations and professionals, and supports their appeal for the protection and safeguarding of cultural properties during and after the end of the current armed conflict.

Blue Shield Statement on Yemen, June 3, 2015

The Blue Shield offers its unequivocal support for the United Nations Secretary General's statements (26 May 2015). We agree that the only durable resolution to the current crisis in Yemen is an inclusive, Yemeni-led, peaceful transition process towards a negotiated political settlement. We share his aspiration that a long and lasting peace can be achieved as quickly as possible so as to alleviate the current intolerable humanitarian situation.

We also offer our total support for UNESCO's Director General's calls on all parties to protect Yemen's unique cultural heritage.

Over the last few days and weeks there have been extremely worrying reports of destruction of cultural property including the bombing of the World Heritage Site of the Old City of Sana'a and the old city of Sa'adah, which is included on Yemen's World Heritage Tentative List; the bombing of the Dhamar Museum; the reported damage to the archaeological site of the pre-Islamic walled city of Baraqish; and the reported targeting and destruction of the 1,200 year old mosque of Imam al-Hadi, located in the city of Saada; or the reported damage to the 10th century BC historic castle of Al-Cairo (Al-Kahira or Al Qahira), overlooking the city of Taiz; and the destruction of the Marib Dam.

We urge all parties, and in particular Yemen and Saudi Arabia, which are both States Parties to the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to abide by the terms of the 1954 Convention. We ask that they not use cultural property for military purposes, to refrain from any targeting of cultural property, and to avoid wherever possible any collateral damage to cultural property.

The world needs to take humanitarian action to help protect those who have been most harmed by this conflict and to help to protect the remains of their, and our, common past.

The Director-General of UNESCO Condemns the Destruction of Historic Buildings in the Old City of Sana'a

In the early hours of 12 June 2015, the Old City of Sana'a, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was hit by a bombing raid. Several houses and historic buildings were destroyed, causing human casualties. Among the buildings destroyed was the magnificent

complex of traditional houses in the Al-Qasimi neighborhood, bordering an urban garden (Miqshama), near the Sailah water channel.

“I am profoundly distressed by the loss of human lives as well as by the damage inflicted on one of the world’s oldest jewels of Islamic urban landscape. I am shocked by the images of these magnificent many-storeyed tower-houses and serene gardens reduced to rubble. This destruction will only exacerbate the humanitarian situation and I reiterate my call to all parties to respect and protect cultural heritage in Yemen. This heritage bears the soul of the Yemeni people, it is a symbol of a millennial history of knowledge and it belongs to all humankind” declared the Director-General.

Sana’a has been inhabited for more than 2,500 years and bears witness to the wealth and beauty of the Islamic civilization. By the

first century AD, it emerged as a centre of the inland trade route and its houses and public buildings are an outstanding example of a traditional, Islamic human settlement. Sana’s dense rammed earth and burnt brick towers, strikingly decorated, are famous around the world and are an integral part of Yemen’s identity and pride.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Yemen, several houses within the heritage city of Sana’a have suffered damage and collapses as a consequence of shelling and explosions. On 9 June, the Ottoman era Al-Owrdhi historical compound, located just outside the walls of the Old City, were severely damaged. Historic residential buildings, monuments, museums, archaeological sites and places of worship have not been spared. The historic value and memories enshrined in these sites have been irreparably damaged or destroyed.

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