

CHINA

Hong Kong: West Wing of Central Government Offices Threatened with Demolition

Hong Kong's 170-year-old Government Hill is currently under threat by a government plan to redevelop a large part of the area for commercial development. The site slated for demolition and redevelopment is a 20th century heritage – the Central Government Offices West Wing – which was built in the 1950s with the East and Central Wings to provide centralized accommodation for all government departments. It is a fine example of 1950s Modernist architecture in Hong Kong.

Government Hill has a history as long as Hong Kong's colonial history. In 1841, not long after the British landed in Hong



Hong Kong, view of the Central Government Offices' west wing (photo: Chong Fat)

Kong, the colonial government designated an area in Central District as its political, administrative and religious centre with the Governor's residence, government offices and the cathedral in close proximity. Local historians have remarked that this is probably the last remaining heritage precinct in Hong Kong. A conservation consultant report commissioned by the Hong Kong Government recommends establishing a Special Protected Zone to conserve this entire unique low-rise, wooded historic area.

With the completion of a new government headquarters in 2011, the government plans to take forward a redevelopment scheme and demolish the West Wing. The site will be excavated to make way for a huge underground facility and a 32-storey office tower which will overwhelm the surviving East and Central Wings and other 19th century historic buildings in the area, thus significantly compromising the landscape setting of the Government Hill as a whole. The redevelopment will commercialize a site which has historically been the seat of Government in Hong Kong. The excavation will destroy historic World War II air-raid tunnels underneath Government Hill which are also 20th century heritage.

The disposition of the three existing wings in the CGO complex is the result of excellent site planning with the three building blocks well positioned in relationship to each other, to the Government House and to the natural landscape around them. Removal of the West Wing and building a new office tower on the site is like amputating an arm from an otherwise healthy and integral body and attaching an oversized prosthetic arm to the disintegrated body.

We are calling for immediate international action to stop this destruction and save this important 20th century heritage of Hong Kong.

Excerpt taken from the *Proposal for Heritage Alert Action* of June 2012 compiled by ICOMOS' International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage (ISC 20C)