

The 4th International NGO Forum on World Heritage at Risk

Villa Decius, Krakow, 30 June - 1 July 2017

Resolution

Concerning the Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape

Diyarbakir has for over 4,000 years been home to numerous civilizations of the East and West as well as functioning as a regional capital or centre owing to its geopolitical importance. With its multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-layered character, the city on the River Tigris has nearly 600 registered cultural properties in an urban archaeological site.

As the result of a strong civil society in Diyarbakir, which pressured local Kurdish and central Turkish politicians to show the necessary efforts, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee approved the "Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape" as a World Heritage Site in 2015.

After the end of the 2.5-years ceasefire between the Turkish government and the Kurds struggling for collective rights, the civil war has also been fought in the Kurdish cities. In Diyarbakir the clashes of Turkish police/army with Kurdish rebels erupted in the old walled fortress city of "Suriçi" in September 2015 where 57,000 people were then living. Twenty-four-hour curfews have been declared by the Turkish government following its armed operations conducted over months. During the armed conflict, which ended officially on March 10, 2016, some hundreds of people have lost their lives, and the integrity of Suriçi and the authenticity of the streets and numerous historical buildings and monuments have experienced serious damage and destruction.

The fortress has been used by the Turkish military for its operations and has incurred some damage from that use. Poles have been put into the walls and towers creating metre-long holes; toilets have been installed on the fortress for soldiers and police which have contaminated the walls significantly with waste water; and military equipment has been put on the towers in order to shoot into Suriçi.

The large-scale destruction of Suriçi has happened after the official end of the state operations on March 10, 2016. Under continuing blockade, the east part of Suriçi has been mostly destroyed in a systematic way by Turkish governmental bodies. Satellite images from May and August 2016 and air photos from April 2017 show that at least 2,500 buildings formerly with no or only light damage have been erased completely and that approximately 30-35% of Suriçi – 45-50 hectares – has been completely destroyed. In total, 170 architecturally registered and protected buildings and structures have been destroyed or damaged. In doing so the Turkish government showed no serious effort to rescue any authentic elements of historical buildings and monuments from the debris which has been excavated quickly and roughly.

With the armed conflict in Suriçi the government has ceased contact with the World Heritage (WH) Site Management which was based at the Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality (until its liquidation by the government in September 2016). Due to the assessments done by the WH Site Management, ICOMOS intervened and via the WH Committee requested a report from the Turkish Ministry for Culture.

Aside from the physical destruction, the continuity of authentic, community and private life has been interrupted. The production based on handicraft and trade has been terminated, and almost 20,000 people from five destroyed neighbourhoods have been displaced which has brought a lifestyle with a past of thousands of years to an end.

Parallel to the ongoing destruction, the Turkish government took grave steps on Suriçi. An expropriation order has been issued by the Cabinet of Ministers on March 21, 2016. The order, which includes mosques and churches, aims for the transference of the whole of Suriçi to the Turkish government. To date, the expropriation has been started for a major part of the destroyed eastern part of Suriçi. For people in rented accommodation the government has offered almost nothing.

Since May 2017 the Turkish government has begun plans to displace hundreds of families from the western part of Suriçi. In the affected two neighborhoods Lalebey and Fatihpaşa no clashes have occurred and thus there is no destruction. A functioning housing area with strong social relations is to be evacuated forcibly without any consultation with the population. With this step the government continues to depopulate and commercialize the neighborhoods of Suriçi. However, the people have not left their houses and continue to resist, although the government cut their water and electricity.

In this regard our requests are as follows:

- The case of the WH site in Diyarbakir should be publicly discussed at the 41th Session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Krakow.
- The Turkish government should be asked immediately to:
 - cancel the curfew and all blockades in "Suriçi";
 - cease all activities of destruction;
 - reverse expropriation so far undertaken;
 - rescind the revision of the Urban Conservation Plan (done in Dec. 2016) and act in accordance with the original Urban Conservation Plan from 2012;
 - cease the construction of all new housing projects which are not constructed in line with the architecture of Suriçi;
 - cover all costs for the reconstruction of housing for all of the displaced 20,000 people (the displaced people must be included in the design and implementation); and
 - ensure the production of a new site management plan with the active and equal inclusion of the civil society.
- The Turkish government should be asked to stop all new constructions in the Heysel Garden and in the surrounding buffer zone of the Tigris Valley.
- The UNESCO World Heritage Committee should request that the Turkish government immediately halts the displacement of people from the western neighborhoods of Suriçi.
- The UNESCO World Heritage Committee should ask why, after the end of military operations on March 10, 2016, at least 45 hectares in Suriçi have been destroyed completely. Aerial photos and satellite images are clear evidence of this destruction.

- The UNESCO World Heritage Committee and Centre should continue to urge the Turkish State Party to invite an immediate reactive mission to Diyarbakir. In connection with that, an assessment and documentation, such as the Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) for urban design projects, and a Master Plan for the World Heritage Site should be carried out. This work should be based on high standards of conservation via a commission with the participation of independent scientists from different fields, broad civil society (architects, engineers, unions, human rights organizations, cultural associations) and all related municipalities.
- In case the Turkish State Party should not invite a Reactive Monitoring Mission within the shortest possible time, we request that UNESCO make a move to bring the case to the attention of the UN Security Council, with a view to investigate the case with urgency and take action under its Responsibility to Protect.

Krakow, 1 July 2017