



The 5th International NGO Forum on World Heritage at Risk

Ramada City Center Hotel, Manama, 22 - 23 June 2018

We, the Civil Society Organizations who have attended the 5th International NGO Forum on World Heritage at Risk organized by World Heritage Watch on 22-23 June 2018 in Bahrain, coming from 24 countries in 6 continents, as active and concerned citizens dealing with Natural and Cultural World Heritage properties at different places, would like to bring the following to the attention of the World Heritage Committee:

Resolution

On the World Heritage (WH) Site of the Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape (C1488)

During the armed conflict between the Turkish government and Kurdish insurgents the World Heritage site in Diyarbakir experienced serious damage in the winter 2015/16. The fortress, part of the World Heritage property, has been used by Turkish military for its operations and experienced some damage. However, the main physical destruction occurred in Sur, the old fortified city, after the official end of state operations on March 10, 2016. In the blockaded areas of East Sur, teams of the Ministry for Environment and Urban Planning started to destroy systematically buildings, including monuments, by using heavy equipment. All these actions have violated international and Turkish laws and regulations.

This systematic deliberate destruction spread to the Southwest of Sur in spring 2017 where no armed clashes happened. After months of protests by the inhabitants and significant representatives of civil society, with heavy police presence the houses of up to 6000 people have been demolished.

Satellite images from May 2016, August 2016 and July 2017 show the progressive destruction of buildings in Sur. While in East Sur the number of completely destroyed and subsequently erased buildings was 832 (10.7 hectares destroyed) in May 2016, this rose to 3569 (46.3 hectares) in July 2017. If we add 806 destroyed buildings from Southwest Sur, there are in total 4376 destroyed buildings on 58 hectares which represents almost half of the inhabited old city area and home to approx. 23.000 people. According to the satellite photo dated on July 2017, 89 monuments of civil and public value have been destroyed completely and 40 partially; 41 monuments have been damaged.

In 2017 construction of new housing projects started in the erased East Sur and in Southwest Sur. They have been built using reinforced concrete, without typical courtyards and spatially separated from each other in violation of the historical old city fabric and traditional Diyarbakir houses. The revised and extremely weakened Urban Conservation Plan opens the door for such new construction.

The Ministry for Environment and Urban Planning has put in action the "Tigris Valley Project"

which had been cancelled during the UNESCO application process in 2015. Since spring 2017 the government has started with the construction of buildings in the buffer zone areas of the Tigris Valley and foresees widespread commercial buildings and activities, in violation of the Site Management Plan submitted to the WH Committee. It has also started to canalize the bed of the river which destroys the rich natural habitat of the wetlands. Even the Hevsel Gardens, part of the World Heritage property, is seriously threatened by these works.

In August 2017 the Turkish government decided to declare neighborhoods (Feritköşk and Dicle) with 9000 inhabitants as “risky areas for housing” situated in the buffer zone of the Tigris Valley. The inhabitants have not been consulted in any way. As this area is of interest for investments, the planned new buildings will be expensive and unaffordable for the former poor inhabitants who will not return. These plans violate the Management Plan.

In summary, in half of Sur buildings have been destroyed and original street fabric and the insular-parcel integrity have been irreparably lost. Physical destruction as well as the forced exodus of the population and ensuing expropriation decisions have caused a change of property ownership, eradication of life and trade style, and loss of urban memory that had developed over thousands of years. This situation has interrupted the cultural continuity of the place and changed the demographic structure. The “Tigris Valley Project” seriously threatens the World Heritage site Diyarbakir, outside of the fortress. It is faced with the loss of its core values and unique character.

In this regard it is requested that:

- 1) The UNESCO World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies should send immediately a reactive monitoring mission to Diyarbakir without waiting for an invitation by the Turkish State Party. This mission should meet also displaced and nondisplaced people from Sur and all civil society organizations working on Sur.
- 2) The Turkish government and the municipalities of Diyarbakir stop immediately all actions in the World Heritage site, including in its buffer zone, specifically the destruction of buildings and other structures, removal of debris, expropriation and displacement of local inhabitants, construction of new housing projects and the “Tigris Valley Project”.
- 3) The decision to expropriate 82% of Sur, dated on March 21, 2016, and the revision of the Urban Conservation Plan, dated on December 2016, should be cancelled.
- 4) All further assessments, documentation and urban design planning should be done with the participation of affected people, broad civil society (chamber of architects/engineers, unions, human rights organizations, cultural associations etc.) and independent scientists from different fields in an open and participative process. The UNESCO World Heritage Centre should be consulted directly in this process.
- 5) The destroyed parts of Sur should be reconstructed according to the former Urban Conservation Plan (approved in 2012) and the World Heritage Site Management Plan (2014) with strong participation by civil society and inhabitants of Sur, including the displaced ones. The latter should return to their former neighborhoods without financial penalty.
- 6) Considering the destruction that has already happened and the plans of the Turkish government, the World Heritage Committee should consider placing Diyarbakir on the World Heritage List in Danger.
- 7) If the Turkish government rejects the above mentioned points, the World Heritage Committee should call the UN Security Council, using the precedent of the UN Security

Council resolution 2347 (March 2017) on destruction of cultural heritage.

Manama, 23 June 2018