

ICOMOS

international council on monuments and sites

Heritage Alert: Government Palace and Quarter in Helsinki, Finland

Press Release

20 March 2023

ICOMOS, together with its Finnish National Committee, is issuing a Heritage Alert, to stop planned demolitions in the courtyard of the Government Palace in the heart of Helsinki's historic center and to prevent the implementation of current design and planning proposals that do not respect its heritage values and legal protection.

An already drafted design for a sizeable extension of office space threatens its integrity as it would necessitate the demolition of part of the Palace Quarter, namely the old printing works building, and denatures the courtyard that has until today preserved its original Empire style spatial characteristics.

Since its construction over two centuries ago, the Finnish state has added to, maintained and conserved the Government Palace with careful and respectful consideration for its profusion of historical, urban and architectural values. However, the realization of the proposed extension would irretrievably disrupt this timeline, breaking the exceptional historical continuum the Palace Quarter represents by removing historical layers in its courtyard, destroying the balance of volumes and disfiguring the historical roofscape. This would also waste the potential that these historical structures, which are still in use, possess.

It is disappointing to note that the State and City authorities, who in the most exemplary and admirable ways have been at the forefront of the identification, protection and cherishing of the built heritage, now seem to have abandoned their long-term commitment to providing a role for heritage across a multitude of environments, from everyday heritage to the most emblematic places in the country's history.

By opening the possibility for protected cultural properties to have their protection removed and be demolished on the basis of short-term and unsustainable grounds, the present proposals represent a serious threat to the ability of current legislation to protect built heritage and put into question its credibility in general.

ICOMOS is convinced that good design and conservation can be combined to meet both the needs of efficient administration and heritage protection. ICOMOS Finland's experts have offered their support in exploring the design principles and protection mechanisms that are respectful of this exceptional Finnish heritage.

[Read the full letter to the Finnish State and Helsinki City Authorities](#)

This letter was sent to:

- Ministry of Environment, Ympäristöministeriö
- Centre for Economic, Development, Transport and the Environment of Uusimaa, Uudenmaan ELY-keskus
- Urban Environment Division of the City of Helsinki, Helsingin kaupunkiympäristö -toimiala
- Senate Properties, Senaatti-kiinteistöt,
- Finnish Government, Valtioneuvoston kanslia,

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is a unique non-governmental, not-for-profit international organisation committed to furthering the conservation, protection, use and enhancement of the world's cultural heritage. ICOMOS is dedicated to the development of common doctrines, the evolution and dissemination of knowledge, the creation of improved conservation techniques, and the promotion of cultural heritage significance. It has built a solid philosophical, doctrinal and managerial framework for the sustainable conservation of heritage around the world. As an official advisory body to the World Heritage Committee for the implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS evaluates nominations and advises on the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS Finland, the National Committee of ICOMOS in Finland, has over 149 members, of which 18 are expert members.

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