

ICOMOS



International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage

The Prime Minister of Norway,

Ms Erna Solberg,

P.O.Box 8001 Dep, NO-0030

Oslo, Norway

1 June 2015

PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE ALERT regarding the Possible Demolition of Y-block, Government Quarter in Oslo, Norway, damaged in bombing 22 July 2011.

By email: postmottak@smk.dep.no

Dear Ms Solberg

As the president of the International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), I write to advise of our intention to release an International Heritage Alert regarding the threatened demolition of the Y-block of the Government Quarters in Oslo, Norway.

The National Committee of ICOMOS Norway has drawn our attention to the current studies and zoning plans being prepared by the Norwegian Government which may threaten the integrity and heritage value of this important building complex. An international sub-committee of ISC20C with representatives from Australia, Sweden, Mexico, South Africa and USA has examined the documentation provided about the proposed demolition and the heritage values of the site. An International Heritage Alert has been prepared for issue, which is attached, and we seek your urgent re-consideration of the proposed demolition in the light of this analysis and international concerns about the potential loss of an important component of the historic Government Quarter.

We note that the architectural and artistic merit of the Y-block, as well as its historical significance, is uncontested, and its listing was proposed by the Directorate for Cultural Heritage in Norway before the 22.07.2011 bomb attack. The architect Erling Viksjø conceived the high-rise H-block and the lower Y-block as a whole, clearly connecting this concept to similar contemporary head-quarters buildings for democratic purposes such as the United Nations building in New York and the UNESCO building in Paris. The Oslo Government Quarter's high-rise component, erected in 1958, featured pioneering treatment of the natural concrete and integrated works by merited modernist artists, including contributions by Pablo Picasso, an artist of recognized international standing. In 1969 the Government Quarter was completed with the addition of the sculptural Y-block. Its three curved wings define three urban spaces of individual character. Picasso's "Fishermen" in one of its facades is an epitome of public art integrated within a public building.

President: 78 George Street Redfern, NSW AUSTRALIA 2016 isc20c@icomos-isc20c.org



We understand with concern that in May 2014 The Norwegian Government decided to co-locate almost all the various ministries on the site of the Government Quarter, a decision based on concerns for security and efficiency. Implicit in that decision and the future planning process was preservation of the damaged H-block and demolition of the Y-block, which is also reflected in the new governmental zoning plan for the precinct and the six parallel feasibility studies for the new Government Quarter. The underlying hypothesis for this decision is that grouping all offices on one site would represent a smaller security risk and higher efficiency. We urgently seek your reconsideration of the proposal to demolish the Y-block, as it is an integral component of the Viksjø Government Quarter, and to conserve the heritage values of this place to the people of Norway and to international modern heritage.

ICOMOS Norway has been advised by several of national experts in the fields of culture, arts and architecture, who state that by this decision, essential cultural values will be disregarded for reasons of security and optimal exploitation of the site. They contend that demolition is not the only means to attain a secure and functional workplace. Indeed, we understand that preliminary reports from consultants assert that both structures may be usefully integrated in the envisaged new layouts – if the Norwegian government is willing.

The ICOMOS ISC20C believes that a strong case has been made for the architectural, artistic and historical values of the Government Quarter as a whole, with the Y-block equally meeting the criteria for heritage listing, within a Special Protected Zone. The political decision for demolition is contrary to acknowledged national heritage values, and we urge you to seek alternatives for preservation, which we believe have not been fully considered. We recommend the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan for the precinct, including a thorough examination of re-use options for the entire complex, as international best practice to inform any decision maker on the future development of the site. We draw your attention to the recently published *Approaches for the Conservation of the Twentieth Century Architectural Heritage* (the Madrid Document) which represents international best practice in the management of modern heritage places such as the Government Quarter. We attach a copy of this important document, which is also readily available on line <http://icomos-isc20c.org/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/madriddocumentforpublication2012with2011copyright.pdf>.

The ICOMOS ISC20C has recently been involved in a similar proposal to demolish part of a government office precinct in Hong Kong, where the demolition of the West Wing of the Central Government Office complex was threatened. After the issue of an International Heritage Alert by the ISC20C and considerable media attention and public pressure, the SAR government of Hong Kong reconsidered its position, and has now heritage listed the whole CGO complex, and the west wing building is now being refurbished for ongoing government use. We draw your attention to that Heritage Alert at <http://icomos-isc20c.org/id3.html> and to the video presented to the Antiquities Board hearing by ISC20C: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIS3Wx3-xQI&feature=youtu.be>

Beside the architectural and heritage loss for Oslo, Norway and the international community, the demolition of the Y-block of the Government Quarter would be seen as a sign of departure from the widely acknowledged commitment of Norway to the protection and long-term conservation of its cultural heritage and historic sites of all periods, not least the 20th Century heritage, of which it is an acknowledged international contributor.



The ISC20C therefore joins ICOMOS Norway to urge the Norwegian Government to suspend the current proposal and to engage in a process to ensure that the heritage significance of the Government Quarter as a whole, including the Y-block, is retained as one of Oslo's and Norway's landmarks of 20th Century architecture.

We would hope that further consideration of the international significance of this building complex and the additional studies, will enable the Norwegian Government to reach a conservation decision to retain and conserve the Y-block as an integral component of the Government quarters and avoid the launch of an International Heritage Alert. We are ready to assist in any way possible and would be happy to discuss the matter. Spokesperson contacts are provided below. We will await your advice regarding the International Heritage Alert.

Kind regards

Sheridan Burke
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Attachments:

Approaches for the Conservation of the Twentieth Century Architectural Heritage ICOMOS ISC20C, 2014

INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE ALERT Proposed Demolition Y-block, Government Quarter in Oslo, Norway

Copies to:

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