

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

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Ministry of Culture of Lebanon
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Subject: Heritage Alert – Beirut Grain Silos

Your Excellency, Dear Sir,

ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, is the preeminent organization representing professionals involved in conserving cultural heritage worldwide. With a membership of over 11 000 members over 125 countries, ICOMOS advocates for the preservation and protection of cultural heritage places and is an advisory body to the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

ICOMOS supports the expression of concern issued among others by ICOMOS Lebanon, as representatives of the heritage community in their country, with regards to the latest decision by the Lebanese government ordering the demolition of the Beirut Grain Silos, a remarkable modern heritage monument and engineering work, but also a significant place in the collective memory of the population of Lebanon and Beirut in particular.

On 4 August 2020, one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions in history took place in Beirut harbour, generating a blast wave which ripped through the capital. The explosion killed more than 220 persons, leaving a further 6,000 injured and 300,000 homeless. In the news coverage, the crumbling grain silos that had absorbed the blast were to become the emblematic image of an event that shook not only Lebanon but the entire world. Today, their possible demolition reveals a society torn between amnesia and the need to preserve this landmark, as a symbol of this tragedy which has left an indelible mark in the nation's psyche. The silos, and all the heritage buildings that were affected by the blast, are the visual representatives of this collective memory, that is now a part of the Lebanese nation's history. Demolishing the silos, removing this landmark, and creating a physical void, will give the impression of an absence of space and only serve to enhance psychological amnesia. The significance of this structure lies in what it symbolizes through its history.

ICOMOS believes that the demolition of this prominent architectural landmark on Beirut's waterfront, a symbol of modernist architecture in the city, and now a place of memory and heritage, and forcing development works in the port area to proceed without sufficient public access to the site, not allowing the general public to come to meditate, get information or simply stroll and assess the importance of this heritage site, is of serious concern in terms of the national government's policy for the protection of cultural heritage. It will undoubtedly constitute a most regrettable precedent at both the national and international level.

ICOMOS calls for an immediate reversal of the decision to demolish the Beirut Grain Silos and for them to be officially legally registered as a protected national historic building, including the designation of a surrounding buffer zone.

ICOMOS also calls upon the concerned ministries, agencies and local governmental institutions and their sections in Lebanon to make the utmost efforts to ensure the preservation of this heritage site of both national and international significance and value, and offers the authorities the full scope of its expertise to support them in doing so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Teresa Patricio', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Teresa Patricio
President

Copy to:

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