

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

For attention of the:
Ministry of Environment,
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email: kirjaamo.ym@gov.fi

Our Ref: TPP/GJ/21

Paris and Helsinki, 17 March 2023

Subject: Protection and development projects of the Government Palace and Quarter in Helsinki, Finland

The Heritage of the most important historic quarter in the history of the Republic of Finland is currently under immediate threat. The Government Palace, the principal administrative building situated in the heart of the nation's capital, Helsinki, is in danger of losing the diversity of its heritage values. 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.

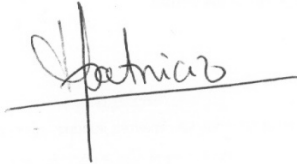
ICOMOS wishes to draw your attention to the diversity of values that the Government Palace Quarter and its courtyard exemplify and calls on you to ensure that:

- a. The stakeholders comply with the legal protection afforded to the Government Palace in 1988 and abide by the protection practices adopted since then – and that the decisions to change its legal protection and related town planning regulation are reconsidered;
- b. The current design and planning proposals for the Government Palace, that alter the heritage and do not respect the values on which its protection is based, are withdrawn;
- c. No exemptions to building permits are applied, nor granted, for the demolition of buildings, in order to avoid irretrievable loss of the existing heritage.
- d. The parameters for design and planning of the Palace Quarter are set so that they fulfil both the needs of protection and functional improvements, respecting the exceptional diversity of values that the place represents;
- e. A modified extension project is drawn up, that preserves and protects, in their full diversity, all of the historical, archaeological, urban, architectural and aesthetic values to which the Government Palace bears witness – on the premises that:
 - o The infill design for the courtyard includes the former printing works building;
 - o New uses meet with the qualities of the protected buildings and not vice versa;
 - o The overall volume of buildings is limited to the existing cubic metres and heights, so that the historic courtyard and roof landscape can be enjoyed by future generations.

Acknowledging that until now conservation/restoration work, proper maintenance and the design of alterations and extensions have benefitted of an exemplary continuum in these state-owned buildings over a period of centuries, ICOMOS asks the State and City authorities to reaffirm their role and long-standing commitments to heritage protection, maintenance and conservation practice.

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 are available to support you in exploring the design principles and protection mechanisms that are respectful of this exceptional Finnish heritage.

Yours sincerely,



Teresa Patricio
President of ICOMOS



Marianne Lehtimäki
President of ICOMOS Finland

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