

## **HONG KONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT OFFICES- WEST WING**

### **ICOMOS TWENTIETH CENTURY SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE HERITAGE ALERT PRESS RELEASE**

**18 December 2012**

In June 2012 the International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C) of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) released an international Heritage Alert regarding the threatened demolition of the West Wing of the Central Government Offices (CGO) in Hong Kong, China. ICOMOS is the global NGO dedicated to the conservation of the world's monuments and sites. The Heritage Alert was supported by Docomomo and the International Union of Architects.

Built in the late 1950s the Central Government Office is a significant architectural component of the Government Hill historic precinct and the ICOMOS ISC20C requested that the government of the Hong Kong SAR urgently reconsider the proposed commercial redevelopment of the site of the West Wing ..

The Heritage Alert process uses the ICOMOS ISC20C's international professional and public networks to investigate requests for international action where potentially significant heritage places are threatened, by using external experts to assess research and comparative values, in order to achieve a rigorous, independent assessment of the situation. The Heritage Alert review for the West Wing was undertaken by ISC20C members from Sweden, South Africa, the USA and Australia, who engaged with local citizens and reviewed the documentary evidence and written to the Office of the Chief Executive and to the Antiquities Authority..

In cases such as the CGO, where the heritage values of all three buildings are well-proven, the Heritage Alert and subsequent correspondence has drawn international attention to the threat to Hong Kong's heritage and promoted the development of good conservation solutions.

Ms Sheridan Burke, President of the ICOMOS Twentieth Century Heritage Committee today addressed the Antiquities Board by video link. She indicated that she was personally familiar with the CGO site, and had visited it again in May this year to specifically consider the issues raised by the recent redevelopment proposal and associated grading debate.

"Expert members of the ICOMOS Twentieth Century Committee have also carefully reviewed the documentation available about the CGO complex, in particular the assessment reports prepared for the HK government about the West Wing and we must respectfully disagree with the conclusions that were presented" said Ms Burke.

"Our analysis of the relevant documentation and research which has been undertaken since the assessment reports were prepared, confirms that the West Wing of the CGO is an integral part of the whole CGO complex. Designed as one entity, the CGO is a demonstration of the post war concept of providing centralised government services and administration in a single accessible location".

Ms Burke congratulated the government of Hong Kong on its recent decision to retain the West Wing in government use as offices for the Department of Justice, so that it can continue to functionally serve the people of Hong Kong, just as it has historically for more than half a century. However, she urged the Antiquities Board to consider three

important issues impacting the long term management and protection of this important building and the Government Hill heritage precinct.

Ms Burke stated that “The Twentieth Century Committee’s review of the documentation and site analysis indicates that historically and functionally, the West Wing building is a fully integrated part of the CGO concept in terms of its design, location and fabric.

Together, all three wings demonstrate their heritage values in their progressive architectural form and period building fabric and also in more intangible ways. The West Wing- being very cleverly located and designed to unify the steep site levels- is also a symbol of the interface of government and society.”

She asked that the Board consider grading all three CGO wings as grade 1 fully and permanently recognising their shared heritage values and enhancing public understanding of the cultural value and meaning of the layers of heritage that together contribute to the outstanding qualities of Hong Kong’s Government Hill precinct.

Ms Burke noted that the ICOMOS Twentieth Century Heritage Committee also asked that the Board also consider recommending that the CGO meets the threshold for declaration as a monument under the Antiquities Act.

She advocated the preparation of a Conservation Management Plan as a guiding framework for the proposed adaptive reuse of the various CGO buildings and hoped that the Government Hill precinct would then follow international benchmark standards.

Thirdly MS Burke commended to the Board and Authority the use of the recently developed ICOMOS international guideline on “Approaches for the Conservation of Twentieth-Century Architectural Heritage” known as the Madrid Document , which provides essential principles and advice needed to inform the conservation and development work ahead on the CGO, an important site of Hong Kong’s Twentieth Century heritage. A Chinese translation of the Madrid Document has been provided.

Ms Burke welcomed the opportunity that this adaptive re-use opportunity provides to the government of Hong Kong, to lead by example in promoting the awareness of and concern for the conservation of Hong Kong’s heritage.

She noted that it would be a great pleasure to be able to report on the ICOMOS Twentieth Century Heritage Committee website a positive outcome- just as soon as an appropriate grading and future conservation management framework for the CGO and the Government Hill precinct is in place. At that point the international Heritage Alert could be withdrawn and an exemplary heritage process and decision by the Hong Kong government could be applauded.

She indicated that the ICOMOS Twentieth Century Heritage Committee had offered to continue the professional dialogue with the Antiquities Advisory Board and Authority about the conservation of this important site of Hong Kong’s Twentieth Century heritage.

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**Gunny Harboe, Chicago Chair, ICOMOS ISC20C Heritage Alerts sub-committee**

**Sheridan Burke, Australia, President ICOMOS ISC20C**

