

## SRI LANKA

Shortly before this *Heritage at Risk* publication was printed we received first news from the areas affected by the great tsunami disaster of 26 December 2004, especially from Sri Lanka concerning the World Heritage site of Galle. The Fort itself is intact. The water went inside and damaged some of the buildings superficially, such as the doors being ripped off the hinges. The 16th-century sewer lines along the roads have given way in some places. Most of the old buildings in Galle town but outside the Fort have been reduced to debris. A historic church in Matara has suffered, too. The talking point is that all along the coastal belt no Buddhist statue or Stupa has been damaged. In some areas the statues stand amongst piles of debris.

Three days after the disaster ICOMOS Sri Lanka sent the following statement:

### 26/12: Reconstruction, conservation and the preservation of memory

*Three days after the great tsunami disaster of 26 December the Sri Lanka National Committee of ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) met and issued a statement which 'mourned the death of thousands of fellow Sri Lankans and peoples of neighbouring countries as well as visitors from far off lands'. ICOMOS SL commiserated with the hundreds of thousands who are bereaved, displaced, whose lives have been disrupted and homes and work places destroyed. Although in various ways ICOMOS SL members in their individual capacities were involved in assisting the bereaved and the dislocated, and discussed how to*

*systematize or concentrate efforts, the meeting mainly focussed on the little discussed socio-psychological and socio-cultural dimensions of the situation.*

*The human scale of this disaster was one of unprecedented magnitude. Within minutes, hundreds of thousands were killed, injured or displaced, lives disrupted, homes and work places destroyed. Clearly the pressing need of the hour was the burial of the dead, the search for the missing, the consolation of the bereaved and continuing and intensified assistance to all those who have been made homeless or otherwise adversely affected by the tragedy. But it was also necessary to look to the future — to the aftermath of the tragedy, the continuing effects of it on the lives of millions, where people and local communities have to rebuild their lives, restore their living and working environments and undertake the million tasks of reconstruction.*

### *Human tragedy and physical environment*

*There are, first of all, the human costs of the tragedy which need to be confronted: death and bereavement, the nightmare of the missing, trauma, injury, the possibility of disease, the longer term effects on individual health, the emerging economic consequences on occupations, employment, loss of property, living conditions ...the list is long and endless. And there is not only the rebuilding of lives but also the reconstruction of the physical environment.*

*It is this latter task which the planning sector of government has already begun to think about. ICOMOS SL draws attention to the deepest implications of this work. As the forward planning for reconstruction begins, it is also vital that the preservationist*

Without the unauthorized buildings dotting the coastline outside the historic fort, the Zwartz bastion of the Galle Fort is now clearly visible. The lower terrace is the Portuguese section from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.





Church in pt. Pedro that has survived the tsunami

*dimension is built into the national vision that is being formulated and the national tasks that are envisaged.*

- *It is important therefore that the preservation or restoration of heritage buildings and other cultural monuments, environments and landscapes are incorporated as an important aspect of the rebuilding plans.*
- *From an economic point of view, conserving and restoring an old building or buildings is often more cost effective than tearing it down and building anew, however much clearing and new construction may seem to be the easier option – although exercising that option would need a conservationist perspective, skills and experience.*
- *In catastrophes of this nature, there is an important socio-psychological and socio-cultural need for local communities and individuals to see and feel that the familiar environments with*

*which they identify are not totally wiped out.*

- *Conservation and restoration is a very special contribution towards preserving and carrying the memory of the past into the rebuilding of the future.*
- *'Maintaining the familiar' is one of the most valuable components of the entire restorative process, helping to 'keep one's moorings', to retain identity, to engender and strengthen a psychology of survival and recovery in the face of great destruction.*
- *In another sense, a country's coastline is part of its fundamental memory – the palaeoclimatic and archaeological remains found here are a vital and subtle source of information about its relations with the world beyond its shores in geological and historical time.*
- *Preserving, conserving and restoring the remains that have survived this disaster is a fitting monument to those affected by the tragedy.*

### **Coast conservation and damage assessment**

*No doubt in some instances entire urban centres and rural and suburban settlements have been entirely wiped out, but in others enough is left for conservation or restoration. It is precisely for this reason that it is important a program should begin at once to assess the damage and plan the protection and preservation of heritage buildings and environments as an integral part of the reconstruction master plan. In order to do this the University Departments of Archaeology, Architecture, and Historical and Cultural Studies are being invited by ICOMOS SL to establish small teams to undertake a rapid survey program of the coastal region. The survey will be based on the Protected Sites and Monuments scheduled under the Antiquities Ordinance and also the Report on the Inventory of Places of Religious and Cultural Significance and Areas of Scenic and Recreationnal Value within the Coastal Zone of Sri Lanka (P.L. Prematilleke, 1989) published by the Coast Conservation Department (1989). The preliminary situation survey is positioned to commence in the second week of January and will be completed before the end of the month.*

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The 17<sup>th</sup>-century fish market of Galle town was totally destroyed on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004



Just outside Galle some historic houses have escaped with minor damages