



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للترربية والعلم والثقافة



World Heritage Convention

اتفاقية التراث العالمي

MISSION TO CAIRO
9-12 December 2007

MISSION REPORT

Following an urgent request from the Supreme Council of Antiquities asking for complementary expertise concerning the new scheme for the business complex adjacent to Salaheddine Citadel, a mission was organised to assess the evolution of the project and make further recommendations to mitigate its impact on the historic urban landscape.

The mission that took place from 9 to 12 December 2007 consisted of Ms Veronique Dauge from the World Heritage Centre and Mr. Jad Tabet, architect, former World Heritage Committee member, accompanied by Mr Wolfgang Mayer, ICOMOS representative in Cairo. The mission wishes to express its gratitude to the Egyptian authorities, and in particular the Supreme Council of Antiquities, for their warm welcome, great availability and commitment.

1. Background information:

During a previous mission of the World Heritage Centre to Luxor in July 2006, the mission members had the opportunity of paying a flying visit to the Cairo Financial Centre project site and subsequently commented as follows: "The granting to the developer of a permit for construction has to be considered very unfortunate given the location and size of the project, which will have serious adverse impacts, both physically and visually, on the existing heritage values". Considering that "a point of no return has been passed", the mission suggested that, in order to "mitigate impacts and not to jeopardize the Outstanding Universal Value of the Citadel, the project should take several strict rules into consideration to minimize visual disturbance". This included height, design, materials, etc...¹

¹. World Heritage Centre, Draft Reactive Monitoring Report on the UNESCO mission to Ancient Thebes with its Necropolis, Egypt, 2-6 July 2006, by Dr. Christopher Young and Dr. Ron Van Oers, 5 July 2006.

After the submission by the developer of a revised design, the World Heritage Centre carried out, at the request of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, a project-specific mission to assess the new scheme and offer recommendations regarding project continuation. The mission, which took place from 29 April to 4 May 2007, found out that the new project “did not prove satisfactory as to its height, its design and impact”.² The maximum building height of the complex rose up to level 59, 5 m (i.e. some 51 m above the Salah Salem road running along the Citadel wall), and its architectural language “did not take into account the particular historic context of the site, its landscape and environmental conditions”. Thus, the mission concluded that “from information provided thus far, the project would have a significant adverse impact on the visual integrity of the Citadel and its setting” and requested the submission of scale drawings and a scale model of the area in order to assess thoroughly the impact of the scheme on historic urban landscape.

On its 31st Session in Christchurch, New Zealand (June 2007), the World Heritage Committee decided the following³:

- “ Urges the State Party to put an immediate halt to the construction works of the Cairo Financial Center close to the Citadel and to revise the project, once the plans and model have been provided for a thorough assessment;
- Requests the State Party, considering the historic value of the project area, to envisage an international consultation to define an alternative to the existing project, notably by limiting its height to the level of the highway, so as to mitigate its impact on the urban landscape”.

Following the decision of the Committee, the developer prepared a new scheme that was presented to the current mission for assessment and evaluation.

Further to several reminder letters, a set of drawing was sent to the World Heritage Centre on 29 August 2007. Given the urgency, the Centre addressed a letter to the Secretary General of the SCA indicating that the maximum height should not go beyond 31, 55 m.

² . World Heritage Centre, Mission to Egypt on World Heritage Sites of Ancient Cairo and Thebes with its Necropolis, by Cezary Bednarski and Veronique Dauge, 29 April to 4 May 2007.

³ . Decision 31COM 7B.56, paragraphs 5 & 6.

2. Mission findings and recommendations:

The documents presented to the mission by the developer consist of a set of AutoCAD drawings (Ref. Permit drawings, December 2007) and a general model of the area.

The overall concept of the previous scheme is kept unchanged, but some amendments are introduced, which concern mainly:

- The reduction of the maximum building height from 59, 50 m to 31, 55 m (i.e. the upper level of the enclosing wall of Salaheddine Citadel).
- The increase in the building floors areas in order to compensate for height reduction, thus increasing the massive character of the complex and reducing the proportion of open spaces.

Despite the reduction of maximum building heights, the mission considered that the new scheme would still have a significant adverse impact on the visual integrity of the Citadel and its setting. While reiterating UNESCO previous recommendation to develop an entire different use for the area in order for it to constitute an effective buffer zone of the World Heritage Site, the mission further expressed its regrets for not following the request of the World Heritage Committee to “put an immediate halt to the construction works” and to “envisage an international consultation to define an alternative to the existing project”.

Following the previous missions reports, the mission considers however that a point of no return has been reached and that what could be done at this point is to introduce further modifications to the project in order to reduce the most serious threats to the visual integrity of the Citadel and the Historic Urban Landscape.

Hence, the following measures should be taken into consideration, as they constitute the minimum requirements in order not to jeopardize the Outstanding Universal Value of the Citadel:

1. The height of the complex should be further revised. Instead of reaching the maximum height of 31, 55 m in all the buildings, the project should rather be inscribed in an inclined height velum that rises progressively from 8, 5 m along the autostrad (i.e. the level of Salah Salem highway) to 31, 55 m in the eastern part of the site (i.e. at a distance of 500 m from the Citadel wall)⁴. This would reduce the visual impact of the new buildings on Salaheddine Citadel and on the stone passageway leading to Mohammed Ali Fort.

⁴. The 0, 00 reference point is taken at the level of the autostrad road as indicated in Permit drawings, December 2007.

2. As stated in previous reports, the volumetrics of the scheme, now appearing as a huge mass of high rise buildings, should be broken up into several parts which would better balance the quality and delicacy of the urban form and volumes of the Citadel.
3. As recommended in previous reports, the materialisation of building elevations, now projected as continuous homogeneous horizontal glass strips, should be revised in order to harmonise with the surroundings and minimise visual disturbance.
4. Considering the information collected by the mission about other projects being thought of in the vicinity of the Citadel, it becomes urgent to prepare a Master plan for the whole area, which would impose strict rules aiming at constituting an effective buffer zone of the World Heritage Site.



