



CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL  
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**Report on Mission to Evaluate  
the State of Conservation of  
THE CHURCH OF SAN AGUSTÍN, INTRAMUROS  
(The Philippines)  
26–30 October 2000**

*Ashley de Vos*

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**THE CHURCH OF SAN AGUSTÍN, INTRAMUROS**  
**(The Philippines)**

**1 BACKGROUND TO THE MISSION**

It was reported to the World Heritage Centre of UNESCO that the owner of the Church of San Agustín Intramuros in Manila (The Philippines) was proposing to construct a new building for the priests' residence at this World Heritage Monument. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee requested ICOMOS to carry out a reactive state of conservation mission to this property before the Extraordinary Meeting of the Bureau on 23–24 November 2000. The mission took place on 26–30 October 2000.

The mission was requested to examine the following:

- a Whether the proposed new addition will cause negative impact to the integrity and authenticity of the San Agustín site;
- b Whether the Philippines authorities wish to delete this property from the World Heritage site of "Baroque Churches of the Philippines."

**2 HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION**

The Church of San Agustín in Manila, designed by the architect Juan de Macías and built in 1587–1607, is the premier ecclesiastical complex in The Philippines. The monastery complex is linked to the church by a series of cloisters, arcades, courtyards, and gardens, and the totality of the original layout is clearly visible in the 1928 site plan.

The memory of the complex as it existed up to its destruction in the 1945 Liberation of Manila is very fresh, and is recorded in many available photographs and drawings. It had originally been intended to raise funds from private donations for the reconstruction of the monastery buildings destroyed in 1945. However, this effort has had only a limited success.

In the years since then the community has needed accommodation, and so in 1962 a new building was constructed to house some of the activities of the Augustinian Order. In its location this new building visually separates the original forecourt of the church from the garden behind the monastery. The original open space, though separated by a low wall, should have been retained, since it relieves and visually extends the corner entrance of the church in relation to the narrow street junction.

A Presidential Decree in 1979 created the Intramuros Administration as the regulatory agency for the Intramuros Preservation District within the City of Manila. Its remit is to preserve, develop, maintain, and administer the Intramuros district. In December 1993 San Agustín Intramuros was inscribed on the World Heritage List with other Baroque churches in The Philippines under cultural criteria ii and iv.

### 3 INTRAMUROS AND THE MONASTERY OF SAN AGUSTÍN

In its description of the various lots, the legislation prepared by the Intramuros Administration designated the partly demolished monastery as a ruin. This was a surprise to everyone involved, and should be considered to have been a mistake. Given that the destruction was very recent and considerable documentation was available, this was a case where the arguments deployed in the rebuilding of Warsaw might have prevailed, reinforcing the concept of living memory. Delays in rebuilding the monastery, as proposed in 1945 but lacking funds, have led to the subsequent collapse of many of the unsupported walls.

**It is the view of this mission that the community should be permitted to redevelop the monastery in its original form on the original layout, using the available documentation.**

### 3 THE MONASTERY OF SAN AGUSTÍN

Of all the churches built by Juan de Macías, only one, the Church of San Agustín (originally the Church of San Pablo) survived World War II. The monastery immediately adjoining the church was renovated in order to house the community. With eight of the nine churches in Intramuros destroyed, there was a need to collect and protect as much of the surviving ecclesiastical art for public viewing. The Intramuros Administration Ecclesiastical Museum in which these collections are housed is located on the second floor of the San Agustín Monastery. The extensive collections of the Augustinian Order are also housed in the building, and the museum has spread into and occupies much of the monastery. As a result the members of the community are forced to find alternative accommodation.

Even though the museum is supposed to be self-sufficient, this is unfortunately not the case, as with many museums. It has to be heavily subsidized by the Augustinian community. **The museum is fulfilling a national service and it should therefore be eligible for a government grant. This is a matter that the Administration should take up with the relevant government authorities.**

### 4 THE 1998 MISSION

A state of conservation mission to San Agustín in 1998 had recommended that the proposed ossuary should not be built. This recommendation was accepted and the space to the rear was converted into a garden. However, care should be taken to ensure that water does not collect in the area between the monastery wall and the raised path and finally its way into the building, causing extensive dampness. Some recommendations are shown in Annex 1.

A permanent solution to the disposal of rainwater in the courtyard is long overdue. It should be dealt with immediately, because the main structure is being threatened by the excessive collection of water. If nothing is done, there will be further deterioration and possibly collapse.

It should be noted that the World Heritage Committee mentioned by Hon. Rosario G Manelo in 1998 has not functioned at all; the different agencies involved still operate without any coordination. **It is imperative that the different agencies involved in the decision-making process collaborate in monitoring the World Heritage monument.**

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 *The site*

It is essential that the community of the Augustinian Order should stay in its original home.

The original layout or "footprint" of the monastery is distinct and consists of two courtyards meeting along the diagonal axis of the site. The location of the courtyards on the diagonal axis may have been for reasons of cross-ventilation. It allows a wider visual entry to the church. The adjacent garden may have acted as a parking place for some of the transport systems used in the past; this would have freed the narrow street and restricted junction for other road users.

### 5.2 *Studies required prior to any further development of the site*

Before any further interventions on the site, the following actions should be undertaken:

1. The formulation of a master plan for the site;
2. A detailed engineering study of the site;
3. A detailed archaeological survey of the site

The formulation of the *master plan* will involve a study of the uses of the existing building in relation to future development needs, a land-use study of the surrounding buildings on the street, and proposals for the ideal development of the site. The plan should address the following proposals (the mission was informed that the funds needed to undertake the necessary studies were available from the National Committee):

- i. The possibility of redeveloping the collapsed monastery and courtyard (subject to Intramuros permission). This should include the possibility of mixed use for the rooms facing the street or conversion to specialized shops., which should generate sufficient income for the upkeep of the future needs of the complex. Using the upper floors for residences and other activities of the community would separate the museum and the community into two distinct areas (see Annex 2).
- ii. Study of the possibility of compacting the activities of the museum into a more restricted area, so as to allow the community to return to the accommodation it previously enjoyed around the courtyard adjacent to the church. This will require a study of the present museum layouts and preparation of proposals for the more efficient display of the collections. This would be the most cost-effective solution and should be given serious consideration.
- iii. It is unfortunate that the 1962 building which encloses and visually divides the entrance of the church from the residential garden was constructed; every avenue should have been explored to develop the second courtyard. It radically changed the original layout of the complex. The proposed extension, even though it is not intrusive and it is sympathetic to the 1962 construction, will further enclose and consolidate the street corner and junction.

The ideal solution for the future of the San Agustín complex would be to complete the second courtyard, demolish the 1962 building, and return to the original plan of the complex. This option should be given serious consideration, since the funds being allocated for the present proposal could be put to better use in developing a wing or part of the original complex. The

outcome of the master plan and the urgently needed engineering study, so as to provide a permanent solution to the drainage of the site, should be a primary concern. This should lead in the right direction to a permanent solution to the day-to-day requirements of the community.

### ***5.3 Possible deletion from the World Heritage List***

The National Committee has no intention of deleting San Agustín from the World Heritage List. However, the community feels that, since this is a living monument, they should have a say in the management and continued use by the Order of its original home.

## **6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am grateful to the following for their help during the mission:

Fr. Eduardo Perez	Acting Vicar, Vicariate of the Orient
Arch. Augusto F Villalon	A Villalon Associates, Architects
Ms Esperanza B Gatbonton	Chairperson, National Committee for Culture and Arts
Arch. Manuel T Manosa jr.	Principal, Planning Resources and Operations Systems
Ms Jeannette D Tuason	Deputy Executive Director, UNESCO National Commission for the Philippines
Arch. Augusto Rustia	Chief Architect/Conservator, Intramuros Administration
Arch. Rebecca R Banan	Intramuros Urban Planning Division
Eng. Jai Altillero	Intramuros Cultural Property and Conservation Division

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November 2000