
ESMA Museum and Site of Memory (Argentina) No 1681

1 Basic information

Official name as proposed by the State Party

ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination

Location

Autonomous City of Buenos Aires

Brief description

The nominated ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination is located in the former Officers' Quarters within the complex of the Former Navy School of Mechanics in Buenos Aires. During the civil-military dictatorship (1976-1983), the Officers' Quarters building at ESMA (*Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada*) was the Argentine Navy's principal secret detention centre for holding captive, interrogating, torturing and eventually killing, armed and non-armed opponents who had been abducted in Buenos Aires, of a national strategy to destroy the armed and nonviolent opposition to the military regime.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

Included in the Tentative List

25 April 2017

Background

This nomination dossier has been submitted in January 2022. Further to the World Heritage Committee decision 42 COM 8B.24 (2018) that launched a reflection on *"whether and how sites associated with recent conflicts and other negative and divisive memories might relate to the purpose and scope of the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines"*, the evaluation of this nomination did not start.

An open-ended Working Group was established upon decision 44 COM 8 of the World Heritage Committee (2021); the group elaborated *"Guiding Principles for the preparation of nominations concerning sites of memory associated with recent conflicts"* (*Guiding Principles*), which have been adopted by the Committee at its 18th Extraordinary Session (2023). In line with decision 18 EXT.COM 4, the Committee also lifted *"the moratorium on the evaluation of sites of memory associated with recent conflicts"*.

Decision: 18 EXT. COM. 4

The World Heritage Committee, [...]

8. Decides to lift the moratorium on the evaluation of sites of memory associated with recent conflicts and also decides that the nominations of such sites for inscription on the World Heritage List may be evaluated on a case-by-case basis;

9. Further decides that nominations of sites of memory associated with recent conflicts, submitted by 1 February 2022 and considered complete, will be processed under the procedures and criteria applicable at the time of their submission.

The State Party sent a letter to the World Heritage Centre on 24 January 2023 requesting that ICOMOS resume the evaluation of this nomination in view of its presentation at the extended 45th World Heritage Committee session.

Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 27 February to 2 March 2023.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 16 February 2023 requesting further information about the historic development of the nominated property, protection, community involvement and interpretation.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 20 March 2023.

A second letter was sent to the State Party on 17 May 2023 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the second letter including: buffer zone, and long-term involvement.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 12 June 2023.

All additional information received has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

5 May 2023

2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report only briefly summarizes the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

The nominated ESMA Museum and Site of Memory – Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination is located in the former Officers' Quarters within the complex of the Former Navy School of Mechanics (1928-2004) in Buenos Aires. It is a free-

standing building, with basements, ground, first and second floors and two levels of attics under roofs. It is surrounded by green areas crossed by pedestrian paths and delimited by internal vehicular streets, with principal access on the main façade and service access through the rear courtyards.

During the civil-military dictatorship (1976-1983), the Officers' Quarters building at ESMA (*Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada*) was the Argentine Navy's principal secret detention centre for holding captive disappeared persons who had been abducted in Buenos Aires. As part of a national strategy to destroy the armed and nonviolent opposition to the military regime, suspects were abducted at home, at work or in the street, and taken hooded to the Officers' Quarters of the ESMA. The captives were tortured and interrogated to reveal the whereabouts of their comrades in order to dismantle the guerrilla organisations and the left-leaning opposition groups. Some detainees were eventually released or forced into exile, but most of them were assassinated and their bodies disappeared. The Navy's most notorious killing method consisted of throwing sedated captives from cargo planes during so-called death flights.

The building, however, also maintained its institutional functions: the first and second floors continued to be used as accommodation for high-ranking officers, not only those involved in the clandestine activity, while the rest of the building, basement, ground floor and upper floors, were used for illegal operations.

The distribution of the building and the way in which the spaces of the premises were used both for institutional and clandestine uses turned certain areas of the building used both for illegal and legal activities. In the Hall Room and in the main staircase, military officers living and using the premise walked through these spaces when prisoners were moved from the basement to the imprisonment rooms (known as *Capucha*).

Abducted persons were forced to enter the building from a rear entrance, walked through a staircase, demolished in 1979, or used a lift, also demolished in 1979, and were brought to the basement where they were interrogated and tortured. Then they were brought to the upper mezzanine, where they were kept handcuffed, hooded and obliged to lie down on mattresses in small cubicles (2 m long, 1 m high and 60-70 cm wide). The prisoner's name was replaced by a number. On the fourth floor was another imprisonment space – known as *Capuchita* – where prisoners lived in worsened conditions and where imprisonment and torture areas co-existed. The premise included a room where pregnant women were detained until they gave birth under precarious conditions; newborns were stolen from their mothers, who were assassinated, and handed over to families of members of the repressive forces or their relatives.

Some prisoners were forced to work in a space known as Fishtank Room, where they were obliged to translate and

analyse data, create propaganda material, and essentially forced into a 'recovery process' from their values.

Stolen goods from the prisoners were collected in a storeroom and used for repressive activities or for the benefit of the repressors. The former *Salón Dorado* (Golden Hall Room), used as a ceremonial hall until 1976, was turned into an office where information extorted from prisoners was processed and kidnappings planned.

Methods to dispose of prisoners changed over time; however, the most infamous consisted of drugging the detainees and then throwing them into the Rio de La Plata River or into the ocean from helicopters. This was a purposely devised manner to eliminate opponents without risking judicial processes, as in the absence of a dead body no crime could be claimed. A Transfer Room in the ESMA Museum explains how this happened.

Spaces dedicated to legal activities were essentially located on the ground, first and second floors. The Museum's Historical Context Room once housed a recreational space for officers and continued to be used as such throughout the clandestine use of the building. The Room dedicated to the history of ESMA was once used as a dining hall for the Navy officers.

In the building is preserved also the residence of the Director of the Navy School of Mechanics, the Admiral's Home Room, further proving the coexistence of everyday life with criminal repression of political opponents.

The initial building, which later became the Officers' Quarters and today is the ESMA Site Museum, dates from 1939 and was owned by the Sociedad Cooperativa Ltda. It was built on land adjacent to that occupied at the time by the ESMA; it was designed and built as a Teachers' House, under the canons of the architecture of the modern movement.

In 1946, this building was annexed to the ESMA and remodelled to integrate it with the rest of the ESMA buildings. The façade finishes were changed with the addition of brick facings at the corners of the central volume. The geometry of the access porch, a semi-circular roof supported on cylindrical pillars (*pilotis*), was rectified, giving it its current appearance. Internally, the building was also adapted to the different uses of the Officers' Quarters contemplating hierarchical and representative functions (main access areas, anteroom and ceremonial hall - *Salón Dorado*); internal functions (offices, director's living quarters and officers' bedrooms) as well as service and maintenance functions (kitchen, basements and attics); roofs were added above the level of the upper flat terraces, supported on metal trusses, which generated covered spaces, today known as *Capucha* and *Capuchita*.

The modifications made to adapt the Officers' Casino to a Clandestine Centre were of different types and were carried out throughout the period of illegal repression. The basement was subdivided and compartmentalised to

create torture rooms, forced labour rooms, infirmary and support offices. The same happened to the Golden Hall Room where offices were installed to serve as a base of operations and logistical support, and to the third and fourth levels, to be used as confinement and forced labour rooms, a warehouse for stolen goods, known as the *Pañol*, and a clandestine maternity ward.

Around 1977, the attic of the fourth and last level, created during the remodelling of the 1940s, was also subdivided and compartmentalised in order to house the detention and torture rooms, today known as *Capuchita*.

Prior to the visit made by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, IACHR, between September 6 and 20 1979, the building underwent modifications to eliminate evidence of its use; such modifications affected notable features of the building:

- Elimination of the elevator. The pit was left empty on the first floor and shafts were closed in the basement and upper floors.
- Demolition of the flight of stairs that connected the main hall to the basement; the stairway void was covered with wooden cladding in order to conceal it.
- Elimination of the subdivisions and compartments of the intelligence offices in the Golden Hall Room.
- Enclosure of the north and south galleries.
- Dismantling of the closed-circuit television system.
- Elimination of the telephone booth on the first floor.
- Renovation of the third-floor restrooms.
- Elimination of *Capuchita's* subdivisions and compartments.

Between 1980 and 1982, parallel to the clandestine reforms, a series of formally and legally registered reforms were carried out, covering sanitary services and sanitary installations, fixed furniture, including divisions between cabins and gallery; bathrooms and gallery in the director's quarters; and electrical and thermo-mechanical installations.

Soon after the end of the dictatorship, the National Commission of the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) was created, and judging decrees of the military leaders responsible for the criminal repression and of the leaders of the armed revolutionary organisations were issued. An investigation scheme on the Armed Forces and on the armed revolutionary organisations was planned. CONADEP inspected ESMA in 1984.

National Decree No. 09/98 of January 6 1998, signed by then President Carlos Saúl Menem (1930-2021), ordered the relocation of ESMA and its demolition in order to build a green space and erect a "*symbol of national union*" there. On January 23, 1999, the suspension of the decree in question was ordered. On July 1, 2000, by means of Law No. 392, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires revoked the transfer it had made of the land to the Navy

in 1924 and determined that "*the buildings where the Navy School of Mechanics used to operate would be destined to the installation of the so-called 'Museum of Memory'*".

In 2003, by means of Judicial Resolution Case No. 14,217, the Navy Officers' Quarters was protected as judicial evidence in the so-called "ESMA Mega-Case", related to the events that took place in the Clandestine Detention, Torture and Extermination Centre between 1976 and 1983. Within the framework of this case, measures for the physical protection of the building were taken and an action protocol for the preservation of the building was issued.

On December 28, 2004, the Argentine Navy handed over the Officers' Casino; in 2006, an *ad hoc* commission was created, which unanimously agreed that the Officers' Casino would be a historic site to be preserved.

In 2008, the ESMA Officers' Quarters was declared a National Historic Monument by National Decree No. 1,333/2008.

The roof of the Officers' Quarters was restored in 2012, an inter- and multi-disciplinary team developed a museography proposal, which began to be implemented in 2014, following extensive discussions, to ensure the scrupulous respect of the building as it had been delivered by the Argentine Navy in December 2004. The core principle for creating the museum was guaranteeing the safeguarding of all the constructive strata that are evidence of the building's evolution and transformation and that are material evidence of the events that took place there, which today are judicial evidence.

During 2014 and 2015, works were carried out for the creation of the ESMA Site Museum, inaugurated on May 19, 2015.

The Officers' Quarters building now hosts the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory. The museography arrangements are kept to the minimum and have adopted a documentary character. Visitors learn how the different spaces in the building were used during its clandestine use.

The buffer zone covers the entire complex of the former Navy School of Mechanics, which is made up of free-standing pavilions covered in pitched roofs immersed in a green area. Nowadays, the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights operates there. Although the core of illegal operations was carried out at the former officers' Quarters, the complex was instrumental to the state terrorism apparatus. For this reason, it has been designated as the buffer zone of the nominated property.

The nominated property has an area of 0.907 ha and a buffer zone of 16.77 ha.

The nomination dossier gives an account of the politics in Argentina since the early 20th century and of the role the Army endowed itself as 'protector of the Nation' against possible threats, such as the rise of communist ideas and political forces in the country and Latin America, which were seen as subversive and needed to be contained and suppressed. This developed into the doctrine of National Security on which military cadres from Argentina and other countries from Latin America were trained at the School of the Americas, in Panama, run by the US Army. Whilst unconventional warfare was taught by French Army based on their experience in Indochina and Algeria, the need for fighting an omnipresent Marxist, internal subversive enemy led to justifying constant repression and persecution of real or assumed opponents. The spreading of this doctrine throughout Latin America also explains the dictatorships that followed one another between the 1960s and the early 1990s. These dictatorships, backed up by the US and CIA between 1975-1977, established transboundary and transnational collaborations in sharing intelligence information and in the repression of armed and non-armed opponents through a clandestine transnational plan which came to be known as Operation Condor. Argentina had a leading role in this Plan, and ESMA also worked as an occasional training centre for the military groups from other countries in the region involved in clandestine repression operations.

ICOMOS found that the historic political context of Argentina within its regional and global context was not adequately presented by the nomination dossier, particularly the years immediately preceding the 1976 coup d'état, nor was it explained who the victims of the criminal state repression were. As ICOMOS requested additional information on the above in February 2023, the State Party provided in March 2023 a concise account of the political climate and events that immediately preceded the establishment of the civic-military dictatorship in 1976. In 1966, a coup d'état had taken place by *Revolución Argentina*. The period was fraught with growing instabilities, dire political contrasts among political factions and within the same movements, opposition by sectors of society (workers, students, intellectuals), and violence perpetrated by armed groups of extremists and by State's disproportionate response. Despite great expectations, political turmoil, fueled also by the economic crisis, continued, and even escalated with Juan Peron's return to power in 1973, so that authoritarian repression began during his mandate. Increasing political instability and armed actions by revolutionary extremist organisations, within the global context of the Cold War, instilled in society the idea that Argentina was threatened by Marxism and extreme-left Peronism. Militarisation of the State worsened under Peron's wife's presidency. The State gave a free hand to the Armed Forces to repress guerrillas and soon after the military carried out a coup d'état in March 1976. With the establishment of the civic-military dictatorship, there was a leap in illegal repression the aim of which became not only dismantling armed organisations but also preventing opposition to the regime. Although not explicitly stated, it can be inferred

from the information provided that the first target of the illegal repression system of the dictatorship were the members of the armed organisations of opponents who conducted attacks and armed actions as a form of fight against the State and continued underground their activity during the dictatorship. However, it is also understood that the scope of the dictatorship's clandestine illegal repression system widened to suspected and potential opponents and dissidents.

In Argentina, the clandestine centres of detention, documented through scientific and judicial investigations, were more than 700, spread throughout the country. Their number continues to grow as judicial enquiries proceed and archival documents are progressively declassified.

In Argentina, the first trial against those responsible for the criminal repression machinery implemented during the dictatorship occurred in 1985 and was known as the Trial of the Military Juntas. The process of seeking justice was stopped during the period from 1987 until 1998 when an attempt to have the Officers' Building at ESMA demolished was stopped by the judiciary power, followed in 2001 by the federal declaration that the impunity laws passed under Menem's presidency were unconstitutional, then declared invalid by Congress in 2003. Since then, judicial trials have resumed, with 592 cases conducted as of 2020; the efforts to ascertain facts, responsibility and of justice continue.

State of conservation

According to the nomination dossier, given the status of the nominated property as a historic-heritage building and judicial evidence, four determining factors concur with its current state of conservation: age of the building and natural wear of its construction materials; evidence of historical layers that have left their traces over time, mainly visible in architectural surfaces; judicial evidence status that requires requesting the corresponding authorizations from the judge to remove or add material elements; polysemic readings of the building that prevail over its aesthetic presentation.

These factors may reveal small maladjustments, detachments, missing parts or breakages that are not considered damages and are not considered for repair or replacement; likewise, they do not affect the current use as a Memorial Site Museum and, on the contrary, contribute to its full understanding and authenticity.

Minor deficiencies were identified and assessed between 2017 and 2019; corresponding mitigation work is expected to resume after the COVID-19 pandemic emergency has been overcome.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the general state of conservation of the nominated property is good and there are active measures and conservation protocols that include preventive conservation actions and programs, as well as maintenance works.

Factors affecting the nominated property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are fire, potential vandalism and possible increase of visitors to unsustainable thresholds.

At present, building development does not seem to be a preeminent affecting factor, thanks to urban planning regulations and arrangements; however, vigilance should be maintained on possible future modifications of the planning provisions to avoid inappropriate development in the immediate setting of the nominated property, particularly on the north-western side, where the buffer zone is rather tight.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is overall good and that factors affecting the nominated property are fire, potential vandalism and excessive tourism. Vigilance is needed on any potential future change in planning provisions that might lead to inappropriate development around the nominated property.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- ESMA Museum and Site of Memory is a testimony and a symbol of state terrorism based on the enforced disappearance of ascertained or alleged political opponents as well as of the value of persuasiveness and social consensus to achieve justice;
- The ESMA building represents a tangible witness of state-led criminal repression, based on kidnapping, torture, rape, stealing of newborns, stealing of properties, forced labour, and assassination. Given the scale, complexity and magnitude of the operations carried out at the premise, and the wider geopolitical context of the fight against communism in the American continent and Southern Cone subcontinent, the nominated property transcends national borders and has become an international symbol illustrating enforced disappearance of persons.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis has been developed on the grounds of the following parameters: being a place where state criminal repression secretly took place during oppressive regimes, being places turned into sites of memory, being prominent for the organisation, complexity and scale of the crimes perpetrated, having acquired particular social importance in promoting human rights. It has examined properties within the country, subregion, region or throughout the world inscribed on the World Heritage List, included in the Tentative Lists of States

Parties as well as other properties. For the global comparison, only sites that are members of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience were selected for comparison. Out of more than 700 secret detention, torture and extermination centres in Argentina, only forty-six were transformed into associations called “Spaces for Memory” and registered at the National Directorate of Sites of Memory. From these, only eight have been selected for the comparison, based on the parameters indicated above. The comparison concludes that the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Detention, Torture and Extermination Centre can be seen as the most representative among several other similar centres due to the scale, and magnitude of the crimes committed there, the significance of the events occurred, and the central role played by ESMA to build social consensus that made it possible to seek justice through civil judicial trials. ESMA also complies with the requirements for integrity and authenticity better than other sites in Argentina.

Due to the different ways in which the democratisation process took place in other countries of Latin America, sites commemorating state terrorism perpetrated during post-World War II dictatorships exhibit different characteristics and significantly different degrees of material evidence, according to the comparison proposed in the nomination dossier. Six sites in Latin America are examined and the analysis concludes that ESMA Museum and Site of Memory remains fundamental evidence for judicial investigations and trials against the perpetrators of the crimes committed there. It also embodies a reference space for scientific research and an expression of the active participation of society in seeking truth and justice on what happened during the dictatorship, that came to be fully supported by the State administration. All this sets ESMA Museum apart from other sites of memory in Latin America.

Eight sites have been selected throughout the world for the global comparison, of which three are already on the World Heritage List, whilst the others are either on States Parties’ Tentative Lists or Sites of Conscience. The analysis concludes that the nominated property provides different and complementary evidence of the darkest side of humanity as well as of the strength and capacity of societies to overcome these tragedies. ESMA Museum and Site of Memory represents an exceptional testimony of the characteristics and complexity of enforced disappearances as part of a systematic plan of illegal, secret repression of armed political opponents as well as non-violent dissenters to obtain and maintain political power and control over society.

ICOMOS considers that the comparison carried out at the national and subregional levels appears more rigorous than the global analysis. However, the comparative exercise demonstrates that there is room on the World Heritage List for the nominated property as the best illustration of state-led criminal persecution and extermination of political opponents in the Latin American political historical context as a specific reflection of the

Cold War and the fight against communism. The nominated property is also testimony to the consistent and painstaking Argentinian society's effort to seek truth and justice for the perpetrated crimes through national ordinary courts, trials and judicial proceedings which came to be known as the "ESMA Mega-Case" and which is still ongoing.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii) and (vi).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination is a unique testimony of the enforced disappearance of persons and what it entails. The State Party considers this an illustration of a cultural tradition based on violence and the use of force to obtain and retain political power. The structure and the attributes of the building prove that the clandestine operations were carried out in parallel with legal activities and reveal that violence and prevarication were deeply engrained in the Army's attitude.

Although culture is a notion that does not cover only the positive aspects of how human beings stay in the world and relate to each other but is more general in nature, ICOMOS does not consider it possible to celebrate or commemorate organised criminal repression, violence, prevarication as an exceptional testimony of a cultural tradition or a civilisation.

ICOMOS does not consider that the way in which the criterion was phrased in the *Operational Guidelines* for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention accommodates the interpretation of the notion of cultural tradition put forward by the State Party. However, the material and judicial evidence obtained by the examination of the tangible traces of the nominated property represents evidence of the events that occurred in the nominated building and could reinforce the justification of criterion (vi).

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property is the most prominent symbol of illegal political repression carried out and coordinated by the dictatorships of Latin America and revolving around

the enforced disappearance of persons, which is today considered a crime against humanity. The international scope of the events is represented by the existence of a transnational plan, known as Operation Condor, an agreement for cooperation among dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Chile to arrest or assassinate political opponents who escaped from any of these countries and found refuge in one of the countries taking part of the operation. The Plan was supported by the US State Department and the CIA in 1975- 1977. What happened at the ESMA former Officers' Quarters came to be infamous thanks to complaints from survivors and Human Rights organisations and led to the definition at the international level of the crime of enforced disappearance of persons, the creation of a Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances at the United Nations and then to the designation of the systematic enforced disappearance of persons as a crime against humanity.

Based on the "*Guiding Principles*", which suggest how to assess the relevance of criterion (vi) for this type of property, ICOMOS has verified that the events with which the nominated property is associated can be seen of outstanding significance. Although carried out in Argentina, the criminal systematic repression machinery implemented by the military juntas was part of a larger chain of similar events and of a concerted transnational plan that was implemented in Latin America under the influence of the global historic-political setting of the Cold War and the struggle for geopolitical influence between two opposing sets of values and worldviews on the world's order. The events that occurred in Argentina had global resonance and could be seen as exceptionally representative of the events of similar nature that occurred in Latin America in the same period, for their systematicity, complexity, and planning.

The denunciations of those who survived the forceful disappearance and torture and of the associations of the victims' families also led to the recognition that the widespread and systematic practice of enforced disappearance of people is a crime against humanity and is enshrined in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006.

As it is well explained by the nomination dossier, the nominated property is directly and tangibly associated with those events and is treated as judicial evidence in the trials against those responsible for state-led systematic atrocities to repress violent and non-violent opposition and dissent.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criterion (vi), but that criterion (iii) has not been demonstrated.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

According to the nomination dossier, the nominated property is physically complete and includes all attributes that reflect the proposed justification for inscription. The building is protected as judicial evidence since 1998. From then on, any kind of modification was prohibited. Despite the building being handed over by the Navy empty, the traces of the passage of time, the overall configuration of the structure, its layout and constructive features sufficed to demonstrate its transformations since it was built and during the period of operations as secret detention, torture and extermination centre. Sufficient attributes of the function played during the dictatorship survive, were used as judicial evidence, and continue to be protected and preserved for this reason. Hence, no changes can be carried out to the building, and the museum arrangements had to be completely reversible and detached from any element of the building. The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory is inseparable from its buffer zone, the complex of the former Navy School of Mechanics, which is today the Space for Memory and for the promotion and Defence of Human Rights.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory has been demonstrated.

Authenticity

The nomination dossier explains that the attributes supporting the authenticity of the nominated property include the building's structure, its spatial configuration, its coatings, the signs of the alterations and of the uses that all allow an understanding of its history and subsequent modifications. The fact that the tangible features of the building are held as material legal evidence in the trials against the responsible for the crimes committed in the building confirms its authenticity. Conservation measures are today carried out on the basis of guidelines that consider its double nature as judicial and documentary evidence.

ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the nominated property has been demonstrated. The Officers' Casino, despite some changes carried out during its operation as clandestine detention and torture centre implemented in 1978-79 to conceal its use to international observers, represents the primary source of information for understanding the significance of the place and maintains the status as judicial evidence for ongoing trials against the perpetrators of the crimes committed at ESMA during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. Location, layout, traces of uses, material fabric and even the modifications to the building implemented during the dictatorship represent attributes conveying in a credible manner the proposed justification for inscription. The wealth of documentary evidence that emerged from the trials is also of crucial importance in documenting the authenticity of the nominated property.

ICOMOS, however, notes that indicators should be conceived to make a distinction between the elements in

the building that pertain to museography arrangements and the authentic fabric related to the history of the building and its use as a clandestine detention centre, for the visitors (i.e., through colour code for museum-related additions).

Boundaries

The boundaries of the nominated property are clearly set. The proposed boundaries include the immediate configuration of the nominated property. The nominated area includes important views, both internal and external. All attributes that can express the proposed Outstanding Universal Value are included within the boundaries of the nominated property and encompasses all areas that, in light of future research possibilities, have the potential to contribute to and enhance the holistic understanding of the nominated property.

The nominated area coincides with the existing protected areas; in 2003, by means of Judicial Resolution Case No. 14,217, the Navy Officers' Quarters was protected as judicial evidence in the ESMA Mega-Case, related to the events that took place in the Clandestine Detention, Torture and Extermination Centre between 1976 and 1983.

The buffer zone covers the entirety of the ESMA ensemble which is protected as National Historic Site.

In May 2023, ICOMOS shared its views to the State Party as regards the area adjacent to the north-western side of the nominated property, comprised of the Raggio Technical School and its Sports field, considering that it should be included in the buffer zone to strengthen the protection of the nominated property, because, on that side, the buffer zone boundary is very close to the nominated property boundary. ICOMOS also suggested the inclusion within the buffer zone of sections of Del Libertador Avenue and Commodore Martin Rivadavia Avenue.

The State Party replied in June 2023 that there is no need to enlarge the buffer zone because protection provisions in place for the areas suggested for inclusion in the buffer zone guarantee an adequate layer of protection to the nominated property's attributes.

ICOMOS still considers that expanding the buffer zone on the north-western side of the nominated property would be necessary, even though ICOMOS does not consider that the protection measures to be put in place should be the same as those established for the ESMA ensemble. The protection measures for the plots of land located on the north-western side of the nominated property should guarantee that the immediate setting of the Officers' Casino maintains features that support the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. For instance, no high-rise building should be erected there, and the current density and overall layout should be retained.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination has been nominated for inscription on the

World Heritage List as a symbol of state-led terrorism based on the enforced disappearance of armed and non-violent opponents and, at the same time, of the value of seeking justice for these crimes. The scale, complexities and transnational and coordinated nature of the events that took place in the nominated property, the influence of the global historic and geopolitical setting on events happening in countries of the American Southern Cone along with the resonance of these events globally make those events of outstanding universal significance, according to the nominating State Party.

The comparative analysis, despite some weaknesses and difficulties to carry out a comparison with other properties that appear difficult to compare, has succeeded in demonstrating that there is room on the World Heritage List for the nominated property.

Two criteria have been used to justify the consideration of the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory for the World Heritage List: criteria (iii) and (vi). ICOMOS considers the way in which criterion (iii) has been argued – the nominated property would be an outstanding witness of a cultural tradition based on systematic violence and prevarication to seize and maintain power – does not fit the wording and the spirit of the World Heritage Convention when such criterion was proposed. ICOMOS does not consider that systematic cruelty, abjection, and physical and psychological violence, although indeed part of human nature, can be seen as an expression of a cultural tradition or civilisation and can be celebrated or commemorated as such. On the other hand, ICOMOS has found criterion (vi) relevant to the nominated property and justified: the nominated property is strongly tangibly and directly associated with events of outstanding universal significance, for their direct connection and integration in a transnational plan operating at the sub-continent level – the Condor Plan – and deeply influenced by the global tensions of opposing world views and struggle to prevail in the world's order.

Furthermore, the nominated property is also an exceptional example of the systematic and painstaking search for justice and truth through the rule of law and judicial trials as the necessary basis for reconciliation. These trials have been and are being carried out nationally but received a strong international echo. Although this process cannot be seen as part of the justification for inscription, it offers a crucially important message and lesson in coherence with the peace-building mission of UNESCO and with the aim of the World Heritage Convention.

The conditions of integrity and authenticity of the attributes supporting the proposed justification for inscription are met, although an expansion of the buffer zone towards the north-western side of the nominated property through a minor boundary modification request or, at least, through the establishment of ad-hoc protection mechanisms, would be needed to guarantee adequate protection from potential inappropriate development, such as high rise buildings too close to the nominated property. The state of conservation of the nominated property is good and conservation measures are in place following protocols that guarantee that judicial evidence is not altered. Factors potentially affecting the

property include fire, vandalism, increase in visitor numbers. Whilst building development is currently under control through planning provisions, vigilance on possible future changes in the regulations is highly advisable to prevent potential inappropriate urban development.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Documentation

The nominated property and its buffer zone are extensively documented and inventoried, particularly by virtue of their protection as judicial evidence since 2003 and then as a National Historic Monument since 2008. Documentation and inventories began to take place from the moment the Navy vacated the building in 2004; the process has been conducted in a meticulous and rigorous manner, it continues today and will continue in the following years.

Whilst ICOMOS acknowledges the careful documentation work done so far, it recommends that copies of the related documents be safely stored in multiple locations to avoid the loss of such documentation in case of disasters hitting the premises where originals are preserved.

Conservation measures

Based on the nomination dossier and the outcomes of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that conservation measures are appropriate to preserve the value, authenticity and integrity of the nominated property and fit with the established approach to safeguard the judicial evidence. A monthly fund is allocated by the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights for maintenance and preventive conservation, which is determined through the Budget Law, approved by the Congress. Ordinary interventions are defined and carried out by professionals with an adequate level of competence and skills, included within the team of the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory.

Cleaning, maintenance and ordinary conservation measures must comply with the guidelines contained in the Museographic Protocol Handbook in order to guarantee that judicial evidence in the building is not altered or erased by interventions.

Monitoring

The monitoring system revolves around five main objectives and related actions aiming to guarantee the persistence and good conditions of the attributes supporting the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. Monitoring activity is coordinated by the Executive Directorate. The nomination dossier provides information on the outcomes of previous monitoring exercises.

ICOMOS considers that documentation and conservation measures are systematic, coherent and regularly implemented. ICOMOS also considers that the monitoring system is functional and clear; outcomes of previous cycles of monitoring attest to the effectiveness of the monitoring system.

ICOMOS considers that it would be advisable that copies of the documents produced in the documentation process be stored at different locations to avoid inadvertent losses in case of disasters.

5 Protection and management

Legal protection

The nominated property is protected by multiple layers of different protection designations: by a sentence (13 February 2001) of the Supreme Court of Justice, by a decision of the National Court on the Federal Criminal and Correctional (2003) as judicial evidence, as well as a National Historic Monument since 2008. It is further protected by Law n. 26.691/2011 on the Preservation, signage and promotion of Sites of Memory on State Terrorism. Decree 1.133/2015 also protects the nominated property and its use as a Museum and Site of Memory. Protection is also granted to both the nominated property and the buffer zone – the entire ESMA premise – by Law 6.099/18 Urban Planning Code of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA), which establishes that the property located in the plots covering the nominated property and its buffer zone are earmarked for Special Equipment EE2 – Space for memory and for the promotion and Defence of Human Rights.

The archives related to events that occurred in Argentina and ESMA in 1976-1983 have been included on the Register of the World's Memory in 2007.

In 2016, the nominated property has also been put under the protection of the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

Management system

The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory is a decentralised body of the Secretariat of Human Rights of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, created by Decree n. 1.133 in 2015. An Executive Directorate and two Area Directorates (in International Relations and Museographic Projects and Audiovisual Content) act as the management structure. A Steering Committee made up of five internal and external members meets quarterly to assess compliance with the plan, identifies potential issues, and recommends adjustments. An Advisory Council supports the Executive and Area Directorates and is formed by members of the Public Entity Space for Memory and Promotion and Defence of Human Rights. Decisions by the Advisory Council are not binding. Management policies and activities are grounded on the vision and mission of the museum. Yearly management documents are produced – the Annual Report and the Annual Planning – which form the Strategic Management Plan, in existence since 2015. The Strategic Management Plan for this period is valid from 2020 through 2025. This is articulated in programmes, subprogrammes and projects.

Not much is explained with regard to risk management apart from mentioning an evacuation plan in case of fire,

explosion, risk of explosion, and periodical monitoring of the detention installations. Risks related to civil unrest and other risks are said to be the responsibility of the Entity Space for Memory and Human Rights.

Visitor management and interpretation

The maximum capacity of the number of visitors has been established in 2015 in order to avoid risks of damage to the building as judicial evidence. Visitors only access rooms that are part of the circuit. A set of rules and recommendations for visitors applies to ensure that visits occur in respect for the memorial nature of the place.

A plan for the expansion of the Museum and Site of Memory to the entire Officers' Casino building exists and is mentioned in the management plan.

ICOMOS observes that the current overlapping of functions and flows of people within the nominated property does not seem appropriate for the nature of the place and these are likely to increase in case of inscription on the World Heritage List. The Officers' Casino building, being the site where imprisonment and torture were carried out, should be kept only as a place for education, remembrance and reflection.

Community involvement

The nomination dossier reports that the project for the museum was prepared and presented to a range of actors, namely survivors and family members of the disappeared, human rights organisations, state representatives from the executive, legislative and judiciary branches, educators and academics and the general public. Feedback was gathered and this influenced the final museography arrangements. The nomination process was also presented in different occasions to inform the communities built around the nominated property.

Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

In summary, ICOMOS considers that legal protection, protection measures and management arrangements and plans are overall adequate to guarantee that the nominated property continues to convey its value and sustain its attributes. However, ICOMOS has identified areas where improvement in terms of protection policy, management and interpretation should be sought.

With regard to protection, ICOMOS recommends that an assessment be made for all buildings and structures located in the buffer zone, on the basis of a detailed and systematic documentation exercise, about the level of protection and conservation policy which would be adequate for each of them in relation to their ability to support the proposed justification for inscription.

In ICOMOS' view, a systematic review of all risk management measures in place should be carried out to ascertain whether there are gaps and needs for establishing or strengthening communication and coordination for response. The Strategic Management Plan should be completed with a chapter on risk management arrangements and responsible actors to address and respond to specific risks. ICOMOS also

considers that, when the concept of the expansion of the museum will be more developed, it should be sent to the World Heritage Centre as per paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. ICOMOS further recommends that the visitor-related services should be moved out of the ESMA Museum premise, as the building is a place of memory and should remain a place for education, reflection and recollection.

ICOMOS further considers that the interpretation at the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory must include expanded information on the Argentinian historic-political context that prepared the advent of the civic-military dictatorship in 1976-1983 and on the background of those imprisoned and tortured at ESMA. Only by fully understanding the history of the country and analysing events in all their historical, political and social complexity will it be possible to achieve a broad awareness of society and its capacity for resilience to ensure that the motto “*Nunca Mas*” remains a reality.

In this regard, engaging all sectors of Argentinian society in the process of understanding, presenting and interpreting the events that occurred at the building now housing the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory, the complex factors that led to dictatorship and the responsibilities of different parties, should continue and be strengthened so as memory is nurtured by history and can become a shared inheritance for all Argentinians first, and then for all people of the world.

6 Conclusion

The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination has been nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List as the most prominent symbol of state-led terrorism based on the enforced disappearance of armed and non-violent opponents and, at the same time, of the value of ascertaining the facts and seeking justice for these crimes as a basis to build a shared understanding of the abyss reached during the dictatorships in Argentina and the Southern Cone of America and a memory of the victims.

The State Party of Argentina should be praised for bringing forward this nomination but much more for the exceptional and painstaking process of ascertaining the truth of the facts, and the responsibilities and seeking justice for crimes committed during the dictatorship against armed and non-armed opponents and dissidents, a process which continues today.

The nomination dossier has proved that, for the scale, complexity, and transnational and coordinated nature of the events that took place at the nominated property, the influence of the global historic and geopolitical setting on the events happening in Argentina and in the American Southern Cone along with the global resonance of these events make them of outstanding universal significance and that the nominated property is directly and tangibly associated with these events, to the point that it is protected as judicial evidence in the trials against the crimes

committed there. Out of the two criteria proposed – (iii) and (vi) – only criterion (vi) is relevant and justified for the nominated property.

The nominated property is also an exceptional example of the systematic and painstaking search for justice and truth through the rule of law and judicial trials as the necessary basis for reconciliation. These trials have been and are being carried out nationally but received a strong international echo. Although this process cannot be seen as part of the justification for inscription, it offers a crucially important message and lesson in coherence with the peace-building mission of UNESCO and with the aim of the World Heritage Convention.

The conditions of integrity and authenticity of the attributes supporting the proposed justification for inscription are met, although an expansion of the buffer zone towards the north-western side of the nominated property or, at least the establishment of ad-hoc protection mechanisms, would be needed to guarantee adequate protection from potential inappropriate development.

The state of conservation of the nominated property is good and conservation measures are in place following protocols that guarantee that judicial evidence is not altered.

The legal protection system and management arrangements and plans are overall adequate to guarantee that the nominated property continues to convey its value and sustain its attributes. However, ICOMOS has identified areas where improvement in terms of protection policy, management and interpretation should be sought.

In particular, ICOMOS considers that the interpretation at the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory must include expanded information on the Argentinian historic-political context that prepared the advent of the civic-military dictatorship in 1976-1983 and on the background of those imprisoned and tortured at ESMA. Only by fully understanding the history of the country and analysing events in all their historical, political and social complexity will it be possible to achieve a broad awareness of society and its capacity for resilience to ensure that the motto “*Nunca Mas*” remains a reality.

In this regard, engaging all sectors of Argentinian society in the process of understanding, presenting and interpreting the events that occurred at the building now housing the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory, the complex factors that led to dictatorship, should continue and be strengthened so as memory is nurtured by history and can become a shared inheritance for all Argentinians first, and then for all people of the world.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination, Argentina, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criterion (vi)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination is located on the grounds of what was once the Officers' Quarters of the Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA), in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In the Clandestine Centre installed at the ESMA Officers' Quarters, officers and subordinates belonging to the Argentine Navy kidnapped, tortured, and murdered more than 5,000 people, carried forward a plan to steal babies born in captivity, exercised sexual and gender violence, subjected groups of detained-disappeared persons to forced labour of various kinds, and organised the spoliation of movable and immovable assets of the victims. The systematic and organised exercise of secretly carried out violence by the dictatorship took place as part of a transnational plan of cooperation among dictatorships in the American Southern Cone to fight political left- and communist-oriented armed and non-armed opposition. Due to the transnational implications of these events, in a context of global geo-political tensions between opposing worldviews and socio-political values, the building and operational magnitude, its location in the heart of the city, the coexistence of naval officers and detained-disappeared persons and the variety and complexity of the crimes committed, ESMA Clandestine Centre transcended its political and geographical borders to turn into an international and emblematic symbol representing the characteristics of the enforced disappearance of persons, considered today as a crime against humanity by the United Nations.

Criterion (vi): The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination is closely and tangibly associated with, and highly representative of, the illegal repression of armed and non-armed opponents and dissenters carried out and coordinated by the dictatorships of Latin America in the 1970s-1980s on the grounds of the enforced disappearance of persons, in a climate of global geopolitical tensions between opposing worldviews about the world's socio-political order.

Integrity

The property contains all the strata which clearly explain its historical-constructive evolution, necessary to understand its Outstanding Universal Value. The building has been protected as judicial evidence since 1998 owing to the crimes against humanity committed there during the

operations of the Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination. From then on, any kind of modification was prohibited. The Argentine Navy vacated and handed down the building in 2004. Until 2014, only maintenance and deterioration arrest works were performed. From 2014 to 2015, the works to create and open the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory were carried out with scrupulous respect for the preservation of the state of the building, as it was at the time of its decommissioning, and its status as judicial evidence. At present, different marks and vestiges denoting the stay of the detained-disappeared at the place are preserved. The building today displays the inalterability conditions necessary to continue with studies which may allow access to new judicial evidence. Furthermore, it represents a documentary source for the historical reconstruction of the events which took place there.

Authenticity

The property's structure, spatial configuration, coatings, and marks of the various constructive alterations and uses over time allow to understand its own history and evolution and convey in a credible manner the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The validation of the building as judicial evidence in the trials for crimes against humanity committed there is based upon the recognition of the authenticity of the facilities and the veracity of the testimonies referring to such events and confirms the property's tangible and close association with those events. The conservation and restoration protocols applied for the installation of ESMA Museum and Site of Memory were jointly endorsed by experts in such matters, by an Advisory Council made up of representatives of Human Rights organisations and by the judicial body. Nowadays, all the conservation and restoration measures of the building are based upon scientific studies carried forward in order to preserve it by virtue of its dual nature of judicial evidence and documentary source.

The tangible attributes of the property which reflect its Outstanding Universal Value are complemented and reinforced by the painstaking and early activated process to ascertain facts and seek justice in relation to the criminal events that took place during the dictatorships at the hands of the military led to the first Trial of the Military Juntas in 1985 by a civil court. This trial and the following mega-cases have produced overwhelming evidence of what happened at ESMA. The Officers' Quarter was protected as judicial evidence for the trials. The process of seeking truth and justice is still ongoing and shall form the basis of a robust reconciliation process.

Protection and management requirements

Various legal and institutional protection measures cover the property and its buffer zone for the preservation of its Outstanding Universal Value. Legally speaking, the building has been protected since 1998 under an injunction to maintain the status quo in its capacity as judicial evidence. Additionally, the Court continuously issues specific provisions on the topics concerning the entire building preservation. At the heritage level, in 2008, the

nominated property was listed as a National Historic Monument and its buffer zone, made up of the premises destined for the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (former ESMA), as a National Historic Site. From the institutional point of view, the national decree for the creation of the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory - Former Clandestine Centre of Detention, Torture and Extermination sets its administrative role as a decentralised body of the National Secretariat for Human Rights, whose mission is to inform and convey the events which took place in the Clandestine Centre, its precedents and its consequences.

The ESMA Museum and Site of Memory is managed by an executive directorate and has an Advisory Council composed of the same members coming from the Directory of Human Rights organisations belonging to the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights. The Museum and Site of Memory is located within the boundaries of the premises destined for the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (former ESMA), which nowadays houses public institutions and civil society associations with a local, national and regional reach. The Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (former ESMA) is administered by an Executive Body made up of representatives from the National Government, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and a Directory integrated by Human Rights organisations.

The long-term sustenance of the Outstanding Universal Value and of the mission of the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory to accompany Argentina to fulfil its aspiration that these events will not happen again need the continued commitment of all relevant institutions in presenting what happened during the dictatorship in all its complex precedents and consequences and guaranteeing that the property continues to be the inheritance of all Argentinians so as to become that of the world.

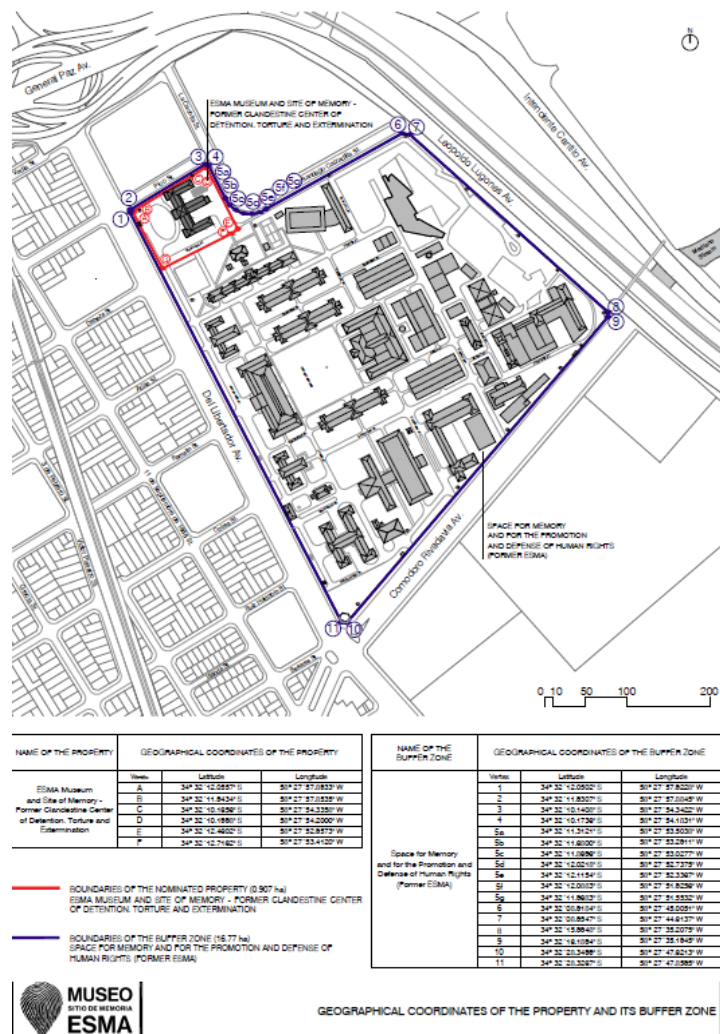
Additional Recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Expanding the buffer zone through a minor boundary modification request or establishing robust protection mechanisms for the plots corresponding to the Raggio Technical School and its Sports field,
- b) Exercising close vigilance on any change to planning provisions in the immediate and wider setting of the property that may lead to development incompatible with the sustenance of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property,
- c) Carrying out an assessment of all buildings and structures located in the buffer zone about the level of protection and conservation policy which would be adequate for each of them in relation to

their ability to support the Outstanding Universal Value,

- d) Carrying out a systematic review of all risk management measures in place to verify whether inter-agency communication and coordination need strengthening to tackle effectively disaster response,
- e) Completing the Strategic Management Plan with a chapter on risk management arrangements and responsible actors to address and respond to specific risks,
- f) Submitting for review by the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS the concept and the project for the expansion of the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory in line with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*,
- g) Ensuring that the interpretation at the Museum and Site of Memory includes expanded information on the Argentinian historic-political context that prepared the advent of the civic-military dictatorship in 1976 and on the background of those imprisoned and tortured at ESMA to ensure that full understanding is achieved that the repression methods used during the dictatorship were unjustifiable, abhorrent state-led crimes,
- h) Relocating all visitors-related services of the museum outside the Officers' Casino building at a different premise and keeping the property only as a place for education, remembrance and recollection;



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property