

ICOMOS Statement on Gaza and the West Bank

30 September, 2025

ICOMOS calls for an immediate stop to the targeted destruction of cultural heritage and extreme violation of human rights in Gaza, as well as the attacks on villages, forced displacement, and appropriation of archaeological sites in the West Bank that are endangering millennia-old tangible and intangible heritage.

The 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its protocols, the 1972 World Heritage Convention, along with the solemn commitments of all UN member states to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should set the standard.

UN endorsed reports and global press testify to widespread hunger and destruction as tools to oppress cultural heritage and memory, and the fundamental right to life with dignity.

As the conflict continues to take lives, destroy futures, and destabilize the region and our world, we insist on respect for the protection granted to civilians and to cultural heritage under international humanitarian law.

Intense bombardment has caused destruction to archaeological and cultural heritage sites in Gaza, alongside the tragic loss of life and mass displacement of civilians, with severe consequences for intangible cultural heritage. Ongoing military action further endangers remaining heritage sites, including the World Heritage Site of Saint Hilarion/Tell Umm Amer and historic churches, such as the Greek Orthodox Church of St. Porphyrius and St. Philip's Anglican Church, which also places the custodians of these places in imminent danger.

Forced displacement and attacks on historic villages, their communities and traditional landscapes in the West Bank risks erasure of millennia-old agricultural practices and village life. In the West Bank and Jerusalem, territorial fragmentation, targeted attacks and the renaming of archaeological sites and of other cultural places undermines longstanding Palestinian historical narratives and connections to the land.

Noting the previous ICOMOS Appeal on the situation in Gaza and Israel (16 October 2023);

Guided by our mission to promote the conservation, protection, use and enhancement of monuments, built environments, and cultural heritage places, and our values and Ethical Principles; ICOMOS:

- Appeals for peace in Gaza, the West Bank and the region and reaffirms the fundamental right of all to live with dignity, free from violence and displacement.
- Urges full respect and dignity for the cultural, historical, and religious identities of communities in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem.
- Calls for international support for a transparent restoration and recovery of the cultural heritage of Gaza.
- Advocates for a human rights-based approach to restoration and future cultural heritage protection, an approach which empowers Palestinian civil society, local professionals, stakeholders and rights-holders to access and protect and preserve their cultural heritage. This includes the right to remember, to honor cultural traditions, and to maintain social and cultural connections.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is a non-governmental, not for profit international organisation, committed to furthering the conservation, protection, use and enhancement of the world's cultural heritage. With over 12,000 members, 100+ National Committees, 31 International Scientific Committees and several Working Groups, ICOMOS has built a solid philosophical, doctrinal and managerial framework for the sustainable conservation of heritage around the world. As an official Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee for the implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS evaluates nominations and advises on the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List.

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