

Beirut, 27 May 2026

**To:**

**The President and Secretary General of ICOMOS International**

*For immediate transmission to UNESCO and all relevant international bodies*

**Re: Urgent Alert — Forced Displacement of the Tyre District, Ongoing Strikes on UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Sites Under Enhanced Protection, and the Systematic Destruction of Lebanon’s Living Heritage**

## **Preamble**

ICOMOS Lebanon, in its capacity as the National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, issues this urgent statement in response to events unfolding today, 27 May 2026, in the Tyre (Sour) District of South Lebanon, and in light of a sustained pattern of attacks on Lebanon’s cultural heritage that constitutes, in our considered assessment, a series of grave violations of international humanitarian law.

This statement is issued as an emergency alert to ICOMOS International, UNESCO, and all concerned international bodies. ICOMOS Lebanon requests that it be transmitted without delay to the relevant UNESCO Committees, the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict established under the 1954 Hague Convention, the United Nations Security Council, and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

## **Forced Displacement of the Tyre District: A Violation of International Humanitarian Law**

On 27 May 2026, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) issued a mass evacuation order to all residents of the city of Tyre and its surrounding districts, ordering them to move north of the Zahrani River. This is the latest in a series of such orders — nine evacuation notices were issued in the preceding 24 hours alone — covering an area that includes the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Tyre, and numerous sites under Enhanced Protection under the Second Protocol of the 1954 Hague Convention.

ICOMOS Lebanon categorically rejects the characterization of such orders as mere “warnings.” Under international humanitarian law, the issuance of a mass, district-wide order to a civilian population to abandon their homes and territories, under the threat of military strikes, constitutes forced displacement. The applicable legal framework is unambiguous:

- Article 49(1) of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 prohibits “individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not.” The prohibition is absolute in nature and recognized as a *jus cogens* norm of international law.

- Article 17 of Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions (1977) explicitly states that “the displacement of the civilian population shall not be ordered for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand.” The blanket evacuation of an entire district — including the UNESCO World Heritage city of Tyre, its resident population, and the thousands of internally displaced persons already sheltering there — cannot be justified on these grounds.
- Forced displacement is classified as a war crime under Article 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The mass displacement of the Tyre district is not an isolated military measure. It is part of a sustained campaign that has, since September 2024, displaced over one million persons across South Lebanon, emptied 90–100% of residents from border villages such as Kafr Kila, Houla, Aytoun, and Deir Mimas, etc., and destroyed the conditions for voluntary return. Ordering a civilian population that has not yet been displaced — or that has already returned — to abandon their homes for the second or third time within two years is not a protective measure. It is the deliberate severance of communities from their land, their memory, and their identity.

**ICOMOS Lebanon underscores that forced displacement is not only a violation of physical security. It is a direct attack on the living heritage of the affected communities: their relationship to their landscapes of memory, their agricultural and craft traditions, their oral heritage, and the intergenerational transmission chains that constitute the life of intangible cultural heritage as defined by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The communities of Tyre, of Bint Jbeil, of Nabatieh, of the border villages, lived for millennia in intimate relationship with their heritage. That relationship, once severed by forced displacement, cannot be administratively restored. The cultural loss is irreversible.**

## Strikes in the Immediate Vicinity of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Tyre

The ancient city of Tyre — inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1984 (Property No. 299) — is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, with significant Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, and medieval remains, including the Al-Bass archaeological site, the triumphal arch and colonnade, the hippodrome, the necropolis, and the aqueduct. It is of outstanding universal value to all humanity.

The applicable legal obligations are explicit. Under Article 6 of the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: “States Parties to this Convention recognize that such heritage constitutes a world heritage for whose protection it is the duty of the international community as a whole to co-operate” (Art. 6.1), and “each State Party to this Convention undertakes not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage referred to in Articles 1 and 2 situated on the territory of other States Parties” (Art. 6.3). Furthermore, Article 11(4) of the same Convention empowers the World Heritage Committee to inscribe threatened properties on the List of World Heritage in Danger, a mechanism explicitly foreseen for sites threatened by “the outbreak or the

threat of an armed conflict.” The current situation clearly and urgently meets this threshold. The World Heritage Committee’s most recent decisions on the Lebanese World Heritage properties — Decisions 47 COM 7B.173, 7B.174, and 7B.175 (2025), noting the provisional Enhanced Protection inscriptions for Anjar, Baalbek, and Tyre respectively — acknowledge the gravity of the threat.

Based on the above, ICOMOS Lebanon, and for the sake of their security and protection, urges the relevant authorities and concerned parties to work on the inscription of these sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

ICOMOS Lebanon confirms that today’s IDF strikes in the Tyre district have targeted areas in Al-Bass Palestinian refugee camp, an area which lies in the buffer zone, within meters of the ancient Tyre Al-Bass UNESCO World Heritage Site.

This follows a pattern that has been documented since March 2026:

- On 6 March 2026, an Israeli airstrike struck the entrance of the Al-Bass Archaeological Site, within the buffer zone of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, killing at least one person and causing damage to the perimeter of the ancient Roman-era complex near the hippodrome. An expert from ICOMOS Lebanon confirmed that the strike landed within the buffer zone of the World Heritage property, with the area near the hippodrome very likely sustaining reverberant damage from the strike.
- On 28 April 2026, Lebanese authorities reported further strikes in the Tyre ruins district. The Directorate General of Antiquities submitted formal complaints to UNESCO.
- On 27 May 2026, the evacuation order for the entire Tyre district was issued hours before strikes were confirmed in the area, placing the World Heritage Site in direct jeopardy for the third time in three months.

A full damage assessment at the site is currently impossible due to active hostilities. ICOMOS Lebanon commits to assist in any systematic on-site assessment as soon as conditions permit, in coordination with the Directorate General of Antiquities and UNESCO Beirut.

## **Deliberate Targeting of Sites Under Enhanced Protection: A Confirmed War Crime**

Lebanon currently has 73 cultural sites inscribed on the Enhanced Protection List under Protocol II of the 1954 Hague Convention, following grants of enhanced protection in November 2024 (34 sites) and April 2026 (39 additional sites). Enhanced protection represents the highest level of legal safeguarding available under international humanitarian law. Under Article 12 of the Second Protocol, States Parties must refrain from making such property the object of attack, and must refrain from any use of such property or its immediate vicinity in support of military action.

Under Article 15 of the Second Protocol, the following act of making a cultural property under enhanced protection the object of attack, knowing that it is not used, as well as its immediate surroundings in support of military action, constitute a ‘serious violation’ for which individual criminal responsibility applies.

These violations are further criminalized under Article 8(2)(b)(ix) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as war crimes. They are also directly addressed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017) — the first UN Security Council resolution dedicated exclusively to the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict, adopted unanimously on 24 March 2017. That Resolution formally determined, under Article 39 of the UN Charter, that the “unlawful destruction of cultural heritage” constitutes a “threat to international peace and security,” thereby authorizing the Security Council to take binding measures in response.

***ICOMOS Lebanon calls upon all members of the Security Council to invoke this determination and act accordingly.***

ICOMOS Lebanon documents the following confirmed violations of the Enhanced Protection regime, in sites verified to have been free of any military use:

**1. The Citadel of Chamaa (Qal’at Shama’a) — Tyre District**

Granted Enhanced Protection in November 2024. This medieval citadel, housing the Maqam Shamoun al-Safa — a shrine venerated by both Christians and Muslims — was systematically demolished by Israeli military bulldozers in April–May 2026. The General Directorate of Antiquities has filed an urgent complaint with UNESCO. The demolition was carried out using precision explosives and military equipment inside a protected religious and archaeological site. ICOMOS Lebanon have stated that this constitutes a war crime under international humanitarian law. The community of Chamaa, was also displaced by force.

**2. Beaufort Castle (Qal’at al-Shaqif / Qal’at Arnoun) — Nabatieh Governorate**

Granted Enhanced Protection in November 2024. This 12th-century Crusader citadel, has been struck today 27 May 2026. The surrounding villages of Arnoun and the wider area have been subjected to intense IDF bombardment. Previous reports from The National (8 May 2026) confirm direct strikes in the immediate vicinity.

**3. The Al-Bass Archaeological Site, Tyre — UNESCO World Heritage Site and Enhanced Protection**

The Al-Bass site within the Tyre World Heritage property is listed under both the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and the Enhanced Protection regime. Strikes confirmed on 6 March 2026 impacted the buffer zone. Today’s evacuation order and subsequent strikes place it under direct and continuing threat.

**ICOMOS Lebanon formally states: the intentional targeting of sites under Enhanced Protection, in the absence of any verified military use of those sites, constitutes a serious violation of Article 15 of the Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention and a war crime under Article 8(2)(b)(ix) of the Rome Statute of the ICC. We call upon the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, through ICOMOS International, to open an urgent investigation into these acts.**

## **The Destruction of Living Heritage and the Severing of Community-Heritage Bonds**

ICOMOS Lebanon wishes to emphasize a dimension of this crisis that transcends the destruction of monuments and physical structures. The sustained military campaign against South Lebanon — through bombardment, targeted destruction, occupation, and now the forced displacement of Tyre — constitutes a systematic attack on living heritage: on the ecosystem of relationships between communities, their land, their practices, their memory, and their identity.

The communities of Tyre and the Tyre district are not merely inhabitants of a heritage city. They are the living bearers of traditions inscribed in or closely connected to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage framework: Al-Zajal (recited or sung poetry, inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List in 2014), the knowledge and practices of olive cultivation, the traditions of communal food production, and a millennia-long culture of multi-religious coexistence expressed in shared sacred spaces, shared landscapes, and shared expressions.

Forced displacement does not merely remove people from buildings. It severs:

- The intergenerational transmission of oral traditions, craft practices, and agricultural knowledge — traditions that require proximity, community, and place to survive;
- The bond between practitioners and the memory-places — the lieux de mémoire — that give living heritage its context, its meaning, and its social function;
- The dignity of communities who maintained their cultural identity and self-sufficiency under decades of conflict, and who are now forced, for the third or fourth time in a generation, to abandon everything that defines them.

As ICOMOS International has stated in its successive alerts on Lebanon: the damage to living heritage must be understood not merely as physical loss, but also as disruption to practices, shared reference systems and cultural anchors, including through loss of access, use and presence. The forced evacuation of Tyre — a living city, inhabited since the Bronze Age, whose residents have sustained its heritage for millennia — is an assault on humanity's common memory.

## **Pattern of Violation — ICOMOS Lebanon's Documentation**

Today's events are not isolated. ICOMOS Lebanon has documented, alerted, and reported a sustained and escalating pattern of violations since October 2023, including:

- Over 20 documented heritage sites damaged or destroyed in the Sep–Nov 2024 period, 9 of which were entirely demolished, per the Directorate General of Antiquities;
- The destruction of the Ottoman souq of Nabatieh, the Church of St George in Derdghaya (with 8 civilians killed inside), the mosque and church of Yaroun, and the systematic demolition of the Holy Savior Christian School in Yaroun by Israeli bulldozers in May 2026 — described by the Vatican's L'Osservatore Romano as "mechanical shovels — instruments of destruction — operating within a ghost village";

- The destruction of over 60,000 olive trees, 814 hectares of olive groves, 16 olive presses, and the complete collapse of the tobacco farming sector — with production falling 64%, severing communities from millennial agricultural heritage and livelihood (FAO, LARI, RLTT, 2024–2025);
- 38% of all buildings in the South Lebanon region damaged or destroyed; 99,000 homes damaged or destroyed in the Oct 2023 – Nov 2024 phase alone (Le Monde, UNDP);
- More than 1 million persons displaced at peak; over 2,700 killed and 8,400 wounded since March 2026 alone (Lebanese Ministry of Public Health);
- Continuous documentation published on the ICOMOS Lebanon website (lebanon.icomos.org – News section) and on our social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn).

Despite the inscription of 73 Lebanese sites under Enhanced Protection — the highest level of legal safeguarding in international law — and despite repeated UNESCO statements, letters, and requests for intervention, the targeting continues. The legal architecture exists. The will to enforce it must now be summoned.

## **Urgent Appeals to the International Community**

ICOMOS Lebanon urgently calls upon:

### **UNESCO**

- To act immediately under its mandate established by Article 11(4) of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, in concertation with the Lebanese relevant authorities, and inscribe the World Heritage Site of Tyre — and all Lebanese World Heritage properties under active threat — on the List of World Heritage in Danger. This mechanism exists precisely for sites threatened by the outbreak of armed conflict, and the threshold has been unambiguously met.
- To convene an extraordinary emergency session of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, in light of the continued violations of the Enhanced Protection regime;
- To issue an immediate, unambiguous public statement — not a letter, not a private diplomatic exchange, but a public declaration — condemning the forced displacement of the Tyre district, the targeting of the World Heritage Site and its buffer zone, and the demolition of sites under Enhanced Protection, and naming these acts for what they are under international law;
- To deploy, without further delay, an emergency UNESCO mission to Lebanon to document damage and coordinate protective measures with the Directorate General of Antiquities and ICOMOS Lebanon.

### **The International Criminal Court (ICC)**

- To urgently investigate the deliberate and systematic targeting of cultural property under Enhanced Protection as war crimes under Article 8(2)(b)(ix) of the Rome Statute;

- To investigate the mass forced displacement of the Tyre district, and the broader pattern of district-wide displacement orders throughout South Lebanon, as potential war crimes under Article 8(2)(a)(vii) of the Rome Statute.

## **The United Nations Security Council**

- To invoke UN Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017), which determined that the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage in armed conflict constitutes a threat to international peace and security under Article 39 of the UN Charter, and to activate the binding measures available to it under Chapter VII of the Charter in response to the documented violations occurring in Lebanon;
- To pass an emergency resolution demanding the immediate cessation of hostilities in the vicinity of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Enhanced Protection sites in Lebanon, and mandating an independent international monitoring mission to document and report on heritage destruction;
- To direct the Secretary-General to submit an urgent report on the implementation of Resolution 2347 as it pertains to Lebanon, as foreseen by that resolution's own reporting mechanism.

## **ICOMOS International**

- To issue an immediate public statement condemning the forced displacement of the Tyre district and the ongoing targeting of Enhanced Protection sites;
- To formally transmit this statement to all member states, UNESCO, the ICC, and the UN Security Council;
- To activate the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness (ICORP) and all relevant International Scientific Committees for emergency coordination.

## **The International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH)**

- To provide immediate emergency funding for the documentation, stabilization, and protection of threatened heritage sites in Lebanon;

## **Council of Europe, Arab League, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and all Member States of the 1954 Hague Convention**

- To exercise all available diplomatic, legal, and political means to demand compliance with the 1954 Hague Convention and its Second Protocol, the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention, and the Fourth Geneva Convention;
- To initiate, individually and collectively, proceedings before international legal bodies against parties responsible for the confirmed violations documented in this statement.

## ***In Fine ... Heritage Cannot Wait***

The ancient city of Tyre has survived empires, invasions, and centuries of conflict. Its stones carry the memory of the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Crusaders, and the

generations of Lebanese families who have lived among them. Its heritage does not belong to Lebanon alone: it belongs to all humanity, and it is held in trust, by the obligations that international law places on every State and every armed party.

That legal architecture is now being violated systematically, explicitly, and with apparent impunity. When Enhanced Protection is granted and ignored. When evacuation orders empty UNESCO World Heritage cities. When ancient olive groves, millennial shrines, and community schools are bulldozed while the communities that built and maintained them are displaced — then the international community faces a choice. It can enforce the law it created, or it can watch in silence as that law is rendered meaningless.

ICOMOS Lebanon calls for action. Not statements. Not expressions of concern. Action: immediate, concrete, legal, and enforceable.

Heritage is not a luxury to be protected when the fighting stops. It is the very fabric of human dignity, identity, and memory. When it is destroyed, something is lost that cannot be recovered by any reconstruction program, any compensation fund, or any diplomatic communiqué.

**ICOMOS Lebanon will continue to document, alert, and advocate — with or without international support. But the communities of Tyre, of Chamaa, of Yaroun, of the tobacco fields of Aytaroun, of the olive groves of Bint Jbeil, deserve more than documentation. They deserve protection. They deserve justice. They deserve the right to return to their land, their heritage, and their dignity — now.**

**On behalf of the ICOMOS Lebanon National Committee**

**Assaad Seif, President**

Date: 27 May 2026

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