ICOMOS

ICOMOS issues Heritage Alert over threat to Zvartnots International Airport's historic terminal in Armenia

Press Release
23 November 2026



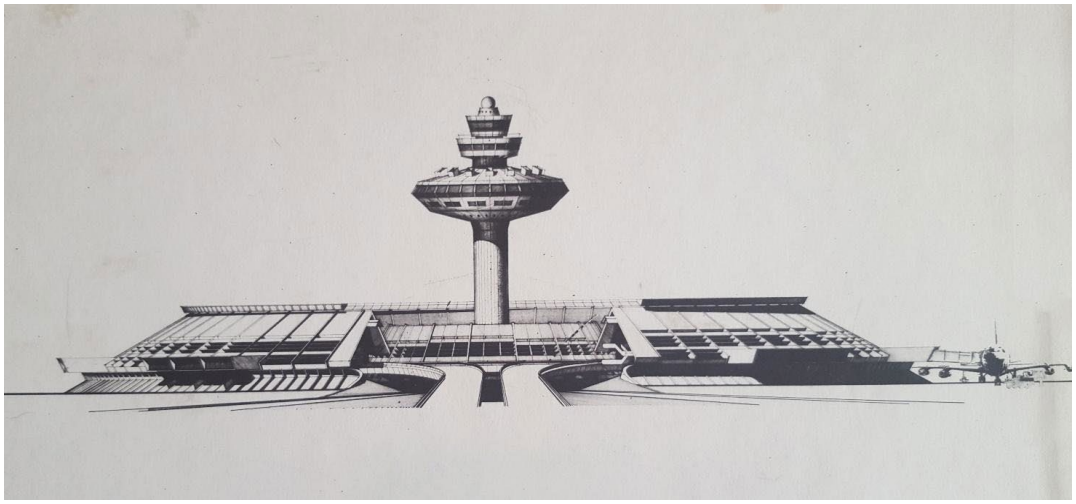
Control Tower, Outer and Inner Circular Ring (2018). Photo courtesy of: Dumitru Rusu. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), together with its International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C), is issuing a Heritage Alert calling for the retention and enforcement of the legal protection of the original passenger terminal of Zvartnots International Airport in Yerevan, Republic of Armenia, and for a halt to any decision that could lead to its delisting, demolition or partial dismantling.

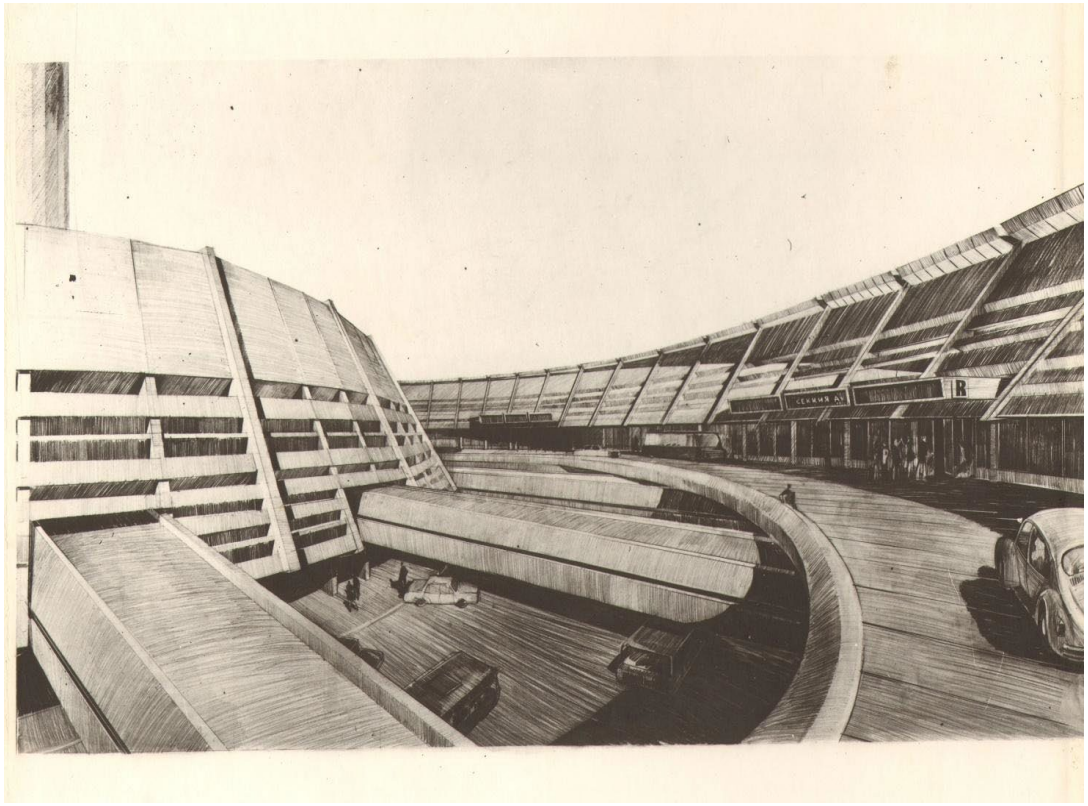
A LANDMARK OF ARMENIAN MODERNISM

Opened in 1981 and designed by architects Arthur Tarkhanyan, Spartak Khachikyan, Levon Cherkezyan and Georges Shekhlyan, together with engineer Sergey Baghdasaryan at the Armgosproekt Institute, the terminal is among the finest achievements of Armenian modernist architecture and one of the last surviving examples of the circular, drive-up jet-age terminal – a building type that flourished only briefly in the early 1970s and has since been lost almost everywhere.

As the principal air gateway of Soviet and later independent Armenia, it was the threshold through which generations of Armenians at home and across the diaspora departed and returned, and it holds a profound place in collective memory.



Original Design: Zvartnots Airport Main Elevation Drawing. Photo courtesy of: Arthur Tarkhanyan Center Archive. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0



Original Design: Zvartnots Airport Upper Access Ramp Sketch. Photo courtesy of: Arthur Tarkhanyan Center Archive. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0

A PROPOSED DELISTING WITHOUT DEMONSTRATED NECESSITY

The Zvartnots International Airport Old Terminal Building is protected under Armenian law and is included in the State Register of Immovable Monuments. However, this protection is now at risk.

On 22 July 2026, a draft government decision proposing to remove the old terminal from the State Register of Immovable Monuments, together with its justification, was published. The stated reason is that the building's protected status hinders the reconstruction and modernisation works envisaged by the airport development plan. No evidence of structural failure, safety concerns or an inability to conserve and reuse the building has been presented in support of the proposed delisting.

ICOMOS is also concerned about the deteriorating condition of the terminal. No maintenance or conservation programme has been publicly documented since passenger operations ceased in 2011, and in 2015 the elevated drive-up ramp and its radial walkways (defining elements of the building's composition and of its celebrated

circulation concept) were removed under a permit based on a technical assessment that has never been made public. Deterioration produced by prolonged neglect should not now become the justification for demolition.

Transport buildings of this generation are increasingly recognised internationally as heritage assets rather than obsolete infrastructure, and a number have been successfully conserved and adapted to new uses. Retention is also achievable within the existing concession agreement, which provides a mechanism for adjusting the financial terms where regulatory requirements affect the operator's obligations. The obstacle at Zvartnots therefore appears to be less a question of technical or financial feasibility than the absence of a conservation-led option in the planning now under way.



Side Panel Relief (2018). Photo courtesy of: Dumitru Rusu. Licence: CC BY-SA 4.0

ICOMOS AND ISC20C RECOMMENDATIONS

ICOMOS and ISC20C make the following recommendations:

- Retain and enforce the protected status of the Zvartnots International Airport Old Terminal Building under Government of Armenia Decision No. N 1616-Ն of 7 October 2004 and the Law on the Preservation and Use of Immovable Monuments of History and Culture and the Historical Environment (No. ՀՕ-261, 12 December 1998);
- Prohibit any demolition or partial dismantling of the terminal building or its control tower, including the proposed demolition of the outer departures ring, and refuse any permits that would result in the irretrievable loss of the site or its defining elements;
- Publish the technical and seismic assessments and commission an independent structural and condition survey subject to professional scrutiny;
- Require a full Heritage Impact Assessment of any proposed redevelopment, expansion or alteration before approval, and make no decision on demolition, partial demolition, delisting or major alteration until the assessment is complete and independently reviewed;
- Require a maintenance and making-safe strategy to halt the building's continued decay, pending a full conservation scheme;
- Ensure that the airport redevelopment retains and conserves the site through adaptive reuse and preservation that respects its architectural and functional values;
- Safeguard the building's integrated artworks, including the cast light-alloy relief and the stained-glass panels;
- Develop a strategic plan to understand, recognise, and protect Zvartnots International Airport. This should include public engagement to foster broader recognition of the cultural significance of Zvartnots' socialist modernist heritage within Armenian society.

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The **International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)** is a non-governmental, not-for-profit international organization committed to furthering the conservation, protection, use and enhancement of the world's cultural heritage. With over 12,000 members, 110+ 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. www.icomos.org

The **ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C)** focuses on promoting the conservation of twentieth-century places and advocating for sites that are at risk due to neglect, disfiguration and/or development pressure. https://isc20c.icomos.org/