



ICOMOS PANAMÁ

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS

ICOMOS HERITAGE ALERT HISTORIC CENTER OF COLÓN

Update

By: ICOMOS Panamá

In September 23, 2021 ICOMOS issued a Heritage Alert on the Historic Center of Colón considering the adoption of Bill 654 of 2021, that modifies Law 47 of 2002, which designates the Old Quarter of the city of Colón as a historic monumental complex.

In September 23-24, 2021 the Heritage Alert was on newspaper and radio:

- Huertas F., José I. (23 Sept. 2021). *Emiten alerta de patrimonio mundial para ampliar la conciencia sobre amenazas al centro histórico de Colón.* <https://www.radiopanama.com.pa/noticias/actualidad/emiten-alerta-de-patrimonio-mundial-para-ampliar-la-conciencia-sobre-amenazas-al-centro-historico-de-colon/20210923/nota/4166757.aspx>
- González P., José (24 Sept. 2021). *ICOMOS pide no demoler edificios históricos en Colón.* <https://www.prensa.com/impresapanorama/icomos-pide-no-demoler-edificios-historicos-en-colon/>
- Huertas F., José I. (24 Sept. 2021). *Ley que adecúa normativa patrimonial de monumentos históricos protegidos en Colón “es una manzana envenenada”.* <https://www.radiopanama.com.pa/noticias/actualidad/emiten-alerta-de-patrimonio-mundial-para-ampliar-la-conciencia-sobre-amenazas-al-centro-historico-de-colon/20210923/nota/4166757.aspx>
- Arcia J., Ohiggins y Jaramillo, Migdalia G. (6 Nov. 2021). *Cortizo sanciona ley sobre patrimonio y se reúne con Coalición.* <https://www.prensa.com/impresapanorama/cortizo-sanciona-ley-sobre-patrimonio-y-se-reune-con-coalicion/>

Unfortunately, the negative impact of the new law was to remove from protection some historic buildings and complexes. Among them was the Modern Architecture building complex of “*Las Cuatro Potencias*”, designed as a social housing model by the first Panamanian woman architect, Rosa Palacios, that worked at the “*Banco de Urbanización y Rehabilitación (BUR)*” around 1946. Without its protection, this building was evacuated and demolished by December 2021.

A positive impact of the Heritage Alert was the approach of the Ministry of Housing to organizations such as ICOMOS Panamá and the Heritage Section of the Panamanian Society



ícomos PANAMÁ

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS

of Architects and Engineers (SPIA). The groups were summoned in September 30, 2021 for a technical visit to one of the most important and endangered buildings that represents the housing typology in Colón, the Wilcox House, threatened to be demolished since 2017. See: Arcia J., Ohiggins (2 Oct. 2021). *Consenso entre autoridades y gremios sobre la casa Wilcox*. <https://www.prensa.com/impresa/panorama/consenso-entre-autoridades-y-gremios-sobre-la-casa-wilcox/>



Images of the visit to the Wilcox House on September 30, 2021. Courtesy of Ministry of Housing.

After the visit, the willingness to cooperate from all of the stakeholders developed into a working group with the aim to conserve the Wilcox House. A letter was sent to the Ministry of Housing with some recommendations, including the conservation criteria mentioned in the former visit to the site. Furthermore, ICOMOS Panamá urged to include the Ministry of Culture in the discussions, and the recommendation was accepted for the next meeting on October 19, 2021 at the Ministry of Housing offices. By the next meeting, on December 2021, the Wilcox House was cleaned from vegetation and debris and the discussion was on the next conservation step, which is the construction of a roof and the documentation needed for the approval by the Ministry of Culture.

Here is a summary of the activities from ICOMOS Panamá and ICOMOS International related to the Historic Center of Colón in 2021:

1. July 30, statement from ICOMOS Panamá on the demolition of the Maal House.
2. August 4, letter with the statement to the Ministry of Culture, National Assembly, and local authorities of Colón.
3. August 18, letter with recommendations and actions for the Historic Center of Colón to the Ministry of Culture, National Assembly, and local authorities of Colón.
4. August 19, virtual round table *Legislación: conjunto monumental histórico del Casco Antiguo de la ciudad de Colón*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/o1N97x93Y6w>



ícomos PANAMÁ

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS

5. September 8, meeting at the National Assembly, without the right to voice or participate.
6. September 16, email letter to the National Assembly.
7. September 23, Heritage Alert, the documents were sent by ICOMOS International by email and delivered physically with a letter from ICOMOS Panamá on September, 28 and 29.
8. September 30, technical visit to the Wilcox House, Colón.
9. October 5, letter to Ministry of Housing with recommendations from the visit to Wilcox House.
10. October 19, meeting at the Ministry of Housing.
11. December, meeting at the Ministry of Housing.

Signed by,

Silvia Arroyo Duarte
President
ICOMOS Panamá
March 7, 2022