

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Our Ref.: TK/GH/GJ/6

Paris, 17 January 2019

For the attention of:
The Municipality of Oslo
Planning and Building Office
postmottak@pbe.oslo.kommune.no

The Prime Minister,
Ms Erna Solberg
postmottak@smk.dep.no

The Minister of Environment,
Mr. Ola Elvestuen
postmottak@kld.dep.no

The Minister of Local Government
and Administration,
Ms. Monica Mæland
postmottak@kmd.dep.no

Subject : Akersgata 44, Demolition of the Y-Block

Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, Madam/Sir,

We are writing with reference to the official demolition application sent by the Nordic Office of Architecture AS, to the Municipality of Oslo - Planning and Building Office on 20 December 2018, ref. 201818270.

ICOMOS (The International Council on Monuments and Sites) is dismayed to learn that the Norwegian Government has not taken our International Heritage Alert dated 28 September 2016 into consideration.

<http://www.icomos-isc20c.org/pdf/finalinternationalheritagealertgovernmentbuildingsosloicomsoisc20caugust2016.pdf>

The Heritage Alert was followed up by a Declaration of the ICOMOS Europe Group meeting in Helsinki in June 2018, also sent to the Prime Minister with copies to the relevant Ministers. https://www.icomos.org/images/DOCUMENTS/Secretariat/HeritageAlerts/2015/Oslo_Norway/HelsinkiDeclaration.pdf.

We observe that no comments from Norway's own cultural heritage authorities or other Norwegian or international heritage experts have been taken into consideration. The report from the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage made an assessment in 2013, which concludes:

"The main construction and artwork of the H-block and the Y-block were not damaged by the terror attack. The cultural heritage, architectural and artistic values in the complex have not been undermined. The Directorate for Cultural Heritage recommends preservation."

http://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/176846/1/Regjeringskvartalet_utredning.pdf

Norway is a highly respected nation for its democratic values and transparency. It is also widely recognized for its forward thinking attitude concerning issues of cultural heritage. The international scientific community is quite amazed at the lack of respect for the professionalism of both international expertise and Norway's own official directorates and offices. The process, as far as we can see, has not done honour to Norway's rich democratic tradition.

The Government Quarter of Norway in Oslo, consisting of the H-block from 1958 and the Y-block from 1969, are considered to be the most important monumental expressions of post-World War II modernism in Norway within both architecture and the pictorial arts. The two buildings, designed by Erling Viksjø, are Norway's most important symbols of post-war optimism and belief in international democracy, dialogue and openness. Besides the obvious architectural and symbolic qualities, the rare qualities of the building complex is further enhanced by the inseparable integration of the iconic art works by Picasso and other Norwegian artists working together with him.

Any dismantling of these art works, if such a process should be successful, will impair the art works and wherever they are exhibited, it will be an exhibition of shame.

On 15 February 2016, ICOMOS had a meeting with the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Administration. Present at the meeting were State Secretary Paul Chaffey, representatives from the Department for Central Government Building, Security and Administrative Services and a representative from the Ministry of Climate and Environment, Department for Cultural Heritage Management and representatives for ICOMOS. ICOMOS had also prepared a statement, published on

Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgZwbuDWa_4&feature=youtu.be

The State Secretary was very clear on the point, that the decision to demolish the Y-block was already made on a governmental level, and was hardly approachable. The main argument being security, since a thoroughfare runs in a tunnel beneath the short, northern wing of the building. Parts of the building, amongst which the northern wing, are actually still today in full use by government employees, who are very happy to work in the building. The security claim is seen by ICOMOS as questionable, as the government has until today not provided any documentation as to the necessity of demolishing the Y-block. This was stated in the ICOMOS International Heritage Alert in 2016, and the situation has not changed.

The conclusion of ICOMOS and other professional stakeholders is that demolishing the Y-block has been a presupposition for all planning work and zoning plans for the area, excluding any informed discussion on a possible and sustainable use of the Y-block. All feasibility studies that were presented in April 2015 were made on this basis. No consideration was given to the inherent artistic qualities of the Y-block and its possible reuse as part of a rebuilding project. It was excluded already as point of departure. These political decisions have been made in spite of clear, well founded studies and recommendations made by the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage in 2013, and repeated in 2016. The decisions and position of the Norwegian Government will seem incomprehensible only a few years from now, too late, and only to shame Norway internationally. ICOMOS is surprised that the Norwegian Government after being presented such clear advice against a demolition, upholds its original intention without any room for discussion. As stated in the Heritage Alert, there seems to have been no informed discussion on possible and sustainable use of the Y-block.

A demolition of the Y-block in Oslo represents a loss of international cultural heritage, and a defeat for democracy itself. ICOMOS strongly recommends the Norwegian Government to revise its ill-considered decision.

Yours sincerely,



Toshiyuki Kono
President of ICOMOS



Thomas Gunny Harboe
President of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth Century Heritage (ISC20C)