



# Urgent Appeal to UNESCO to protect ancient Damascus

Non-official Translation  
Original: Aabic

HE. Mrs. Audrey Azoulay

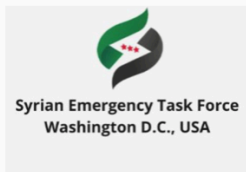
Director-General of UNESCO

Greetings,

The ancient city of Damascus was included in the World Heritage List, after the third session of the World Heritage Committee was held in Cairo in 1979. At that time, the committee noted the reservation expressed by the (International Council on Monuments and Sites) ICOMOS regarding the threat to the site from rapid urban development. As stated in UNESCO Resolution No. CC-79/CONF.003/13 – Paris on November 30 of the same year.

As you know, the ancient city of Damascus contains a huge archaeological treasure reserve dating back thousands of years and many successive civilizations in Damascus (the oldest capital in history and inhabited to this day). These architectural monuments are connected with cultures that intersect and live in the Syrian lands, from the pagan temples of the Romans, the most prominent of which is the Temple of Jupiter at the gates of the Great Umayyad Mosque, the first architectural model of the mosque designed by all Muslim mosques around the world, to the Jewish, Christian, Arab, Islamic, Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman regions, reflecting the spirit of coexistence known throughout the history of the Syrians.

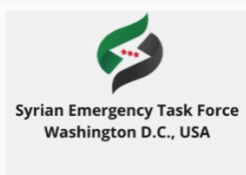
It is no secret ,for your Excellency, that the collapse of the legitimacy of a ruling regime that massacres its own people, perpetrates massacres against innocent civilians, uses chemical weapons and other internationally prohibited weapons is not dependent on the political legitimacy of the ruling regime. Rather, it extends to stripping it of its capacity to manage and protect valuable human heritage, as evidenced by past years, which have witnessed more massacres against archaeological sites that were burned systematically to serve multiple purposes, notably changing the heritage identity of Damascus; including the evacuation of archaeological sites in favor of administrative and financial corruption to create projects to replace destroyed buildings.



The last of these crimes was the burning of the palace of Prince Abd al-Rahman Pasha al-Youssef, the emir of the Syrian pilgrimage during the Ottoman-Turkish era, in the Sarouja market, at dawn Sunday, July 18, which is a unique architectural masterpiece lost by human civilization due to the fire that also spread to the house of former Prime Minister Khaled al-Azm, and it was approved as a home for more than 4 million historical documents. The palace of Prince Abd al-Rahman Pasha al-Youssef, during his visit to Damascus in 1898, the German Kaiser Gilium II stayed as a guest there. According to statements by Assad regime officials to Agence France-Presse, the importance of the houses of Al-Youssef and Al-Azm, which are registered in the Syrian National Heritage List, "lies in their association with the political and social memory of Syria." Before this fire, there was a series of arson attacks that affected many buildings and old markets in the Old City, which led to organized looting of Syrian antiquities. In addition to the destruction of major markets such as the Kerman Bazaar, and the burning of Al-Asrouniyya Bazaar in 2016 and parts of the famous Al-Hamidiya Bazaar in 2022, many of which were smuggled in neighboring countries, and before that the "Hulu Pasha Al-Abed" palace, the first Syrian presidential palace, was burned in the Sarouja market itself, which contained documents of the Ottoman civil court in Damascus, in addition to Umayyad holdings and many other artifacts dating back to the establishment of the Syrian state at the beginning of the twentieth century. All of this requires all of us to move quickly to rectify this situation, and not let it cause the loss of the Syrian heritage piece by piece.

Based on the above; we call on UNESCO to activate its necessary role in the protection of Syrian human heritage in accordance with Article 26, paragraph 2 of the Law on Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, published on 10 July 2019. It is stated that the tasks of the World Heritage Preservation Committee are to "ensure the effective protection of world heritage assets", and that means imposing guardianship over this heritage, Preventing the Assad regime from sabotaging and wasting it, or destroying it as its Iranian allies want, using all the means provided by international law in favor of blatantly and recklessly demographic shift, a massive population shift, and the erasure of the civil identity of Syria and its people.

And because of these crimes of arson, by the soldiers of the regime and the Iranian militias, which ignited five fires in the past three years only in Damascus and in archaeological sites of great symbolism for the world heritage in Syria, for the purpose of demographic and historical change; We hope that you will take practical measures to protect the treasures of heritage in Damascus, in particular, and in Syria in general, and that our committee, whose formation will be announced soon, will be approved under the name "The Independent Commission for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Damascus." It will include Syrian statesmen, intellectuals, scholars, and non-governmental organizations from the United States of America, Europe, the Arab world, and various parts of the world.



This is in line with paragraph 38 of the Act on Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, which allows you to rely on anyone you see fit to ensure the protection of antiquities. This article states that "the committee may invite other international and non-governmental organizations with appropriate scholars and expertise to assist them in the implementation of programs and projects".

Our common goal is to protect ancient Damascus, and to stand up to everything that threatens its civil survival, and to ensure that it is not subjected to brutal, programmed, unlimited destruction at the hands of a regime that takes advantage of the world's silence over the crimes it has committed against humanity, and initiates new crimes against urbanization.

**Please accept, Your Excellency, a renewal of our deepest respect and appreciation.**

20/07/2023

The names of the signatories are listed in the order in which they were received. The call is open for signature later for those who want it:

### **Personalities and dignitaries:**

Dr. Riyad Hijab, former Syrian Prime Minister – Dr. Riyad Na'san Agha, former Syrian Minister of Culture – Asaad Mustafa, former Syrian Minister of Agriculture – Ambassador Dr. Farouk Taha, former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs – Prof. Burhan Ghalioun, thinker – George Sabra, politician– Major General Muhammad Al-Fares, the Syrian astronaut– Dr. Haytham Albizem, President of Global Justice Organization – Ghayath Kanou, Syrian journalist and journalist, former central director in the Ministry of Information – Maissa kabbani, Director of Global Justice Development Projects – Ibrahim AlJabin, novelist and Mediator – Moaz Mustafa, Executive Director of the Syrian Emergency Task Force – Dr. Mumtaz Al-Sheikh, former Director General of the Syrian Radio and Television – Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Khatib, former Deputy Minister of Education – Dr. Yahya Al-Aridi, Former Dean of the Syrian Media College – Fadwa Al-ajili, Politician and Communication Officer in the Arab Democratic Alliance – Dr. Hamza Al-Mustafa, Director-General of Syria TV – Muhammad Amin Karkokli, former general director – Attorney Yasser Al-Farhan, advisor to Mizan Organization for Human Rights – Attorney Abdullah Al-Sultan – Dr. Osama Qadi, economist – Poet Nouri Al-Jarrah – Philosopher Dr. Ahmed Barqawi – Dr. Khaldoun Al-Shamaa criticer – Dr. Faiq Kanao, academic and economist– Counselor Khaled Shihab El-Din, President of the Free National Assembly for Employees in State Institutions – Fahd Al-Mousa, Secretary of the Association of Free Syrian Lawyers – Attorney Jassem Al-Ali – M. Imad Ghalioun, former member–



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-of the Syrian parliament, Dr. Abdel Hamid Al-Awak, Judge and academic ,Omar Marouf, expert in development, Omar Shahrour, head of the Syrian Justice and Development Party, Yahya Diab, dissident diplomat, Faris Al-Shoufi, political activist, Dr. Imad Al-Din Al-Musabih, expert in economics at the University of Riyadh, Dr. Nidal Khalouf, Ph.D. in international law- Mr. Iyad Qudsi, former deputy head of the interim government - Ikhlas Badawi, former parliamentarian - Jabr Al-Shoufi, a political activist - Adeeb Al-Bardawil - Basil Maarawi, a dentist - Mazen Uday, a political activist - Sheikh Dr. Ihsan Badrani - Ali Nasereddin, Lebanese journalist - Farid Hanna - Dr. Khader Al-Soufiri, Vice President of the Federation of Community Associations, Dr. Abdullah Turkmani, university professor, writer and researcher - Attorney Rami Al-Najari - Dr. Allal Zein El Din - Youssef Fakhreldin - Abdel Hakim Qeteifan, actor and politician- Waha Al-Raheb actress and novelist - Mamoun Al-Bunni director and writer - Faris Al-Dhababi writer - Murad Darwish civil engineer - Dr. Jawad Abu Hatab, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and former President of the Interim Government - Saad Fansa, writer - Fawaz Tello, political activist - Dr. Hassan Eid, doctor - M. Yahya Badr, researcher - Dr. Major General Salim Idris, former Minister of Defense in the Syrian Interim Government - Lawyer Hussein Mustafa Al-Sayed, member of the International Federation of Jurists and President of the Syrian Human Rights Association in Istanbul - Dr. Wael Al-Hussein, academic and researcher in antiquities - Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Jibn Al-Aqidat - Ali Safar, director and writer - Dr. Mahmoud Al-Hamza, academic and politician - Dr. Adham Basho - Attorney Muhammad Tammo Syrian Lawyers Association - Dr. Imad Barq, Vice President of Aleppo Free University - Dr. Zahir Baadrani, President of the Syrian Future Movement - Dr. Brigadier General Abdullah Al-Asaad, Head of the Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul - Osama Bashir Academic - Khaled Al-Sawaf - Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Syrian Engineers Association - Peren Birsaygli Mut Turkish writer and publisher, director of the Farabi kitap House- Dr. Ahmed Kanaan, academic, former dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Damascus. Dr. Abd al-Rahman al-Haj - Director of the Syrian Memory Foundation - Attorney Abd al-Nasser Hoshan - Attorney Musa al-Hayes, President of the Arab-European Organization for Human Rights - Brigadier General Muhammad Mufid Andani, former Syrian Interpol President - Shayesh Miteb al-Mulhim - Muhannad al-Alwan, developer and programmer - Dr. Monther Esber - Anas Abed Rabbo - Dr. Munther Esber - Anas Abed Rabbo - Mahmoud Al-Zaybak, journalist for Al-Jazeera channel.

### Organizations:

Global Justice Organization - United States of America - Arab Democratic Coalition - Humanitarian Euphrates Civilization Organization - United States - Syrian Emergency Team Organization - United States - Mizan Organization for Legal Studies and Human Rights - Turkey - Damascus Foundation for Studies, Research and Culture - Britain - Syrian Ukrainian Network - United States - Syria TV Network - Qatar - Turkey - Syrian Democrats Movement - Sweden - Syrian Human Rights Association - Istanbul. Damir Movement - France.

