

Statement  
on  
Cultural Heritage Losses in Sudan

Society of Architectural Historians  
Heritage Conservation Committee

The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) express our concern at the escalation of fighting between the Sudanese army and the insurgent militia in Sudan, following the expiration of a negotiated ceasefire. The conflict, which has raged since April, has already caused enormous loss of human life and plunged the country into humanitarian crisis. Some 4 million people have been displaced, many of their homes now occupied by militia forces. While injury and loss of life are of first concern, the loss of cultural heritage is significant. SAH joins with the World Monuments Fund and other international organizations to condemn such attacks upon people and upon Sudanese cultural heritage.

Reports of damage to and looting of cultural heritage resources are disturbing. All parties involved in the conflict have obligations under the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to which Sudan acceded in 1970, and to the 1972 World Heritage Convention which Sudan ratified in 1974, as well as duties and responsibilities under international humanitarian law. It is important to protect and preserve the cultural heritage of the people of the Sudan.

In wartime, the preservation of monuments must necessarily be prioritized below the protection of human life. We argue, however, that the protection of these cultural sites is important as well, as they can become instruments for long-term peace. As the war between the Sudanese army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continues, important cultural and historical landmarks in Sudan are being destroyed, damaged, and looted, and are often targeted because of their cultural significance. Heritage for Peace, a cultural heritage NGO working with local researchers and archaeologists through their Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative (SHPI), has identified many cultural and archaeological sites around Sudan have been targeted or suffered collateral damage. In Khartoum the library and archive collection of the Mohamed Omer Bashir Centre for Sudanese Studies at Omdurman Ahlia University were lost to fire. The Natural History Museum in Khartoum suffered significant damage, also due to fire. The shelters that protect the relocated Buhen and Aksha temples, located in the garden of the National Museum in Khartoum, have been damaged. In Omdurman, the Old Market was destroyed by a fire. All four museums in the Darfur region, the Sultan Bahruddin Museum in el Geneina; the Nyala Museum; the Sheikan Museum in el Obeid; and the Sultan Ali Dinar Museum in el Fasher, all face significant threats of damage and looting due to the ongoing conflicts in the area. In the Northern State and the River Nile State two World Heritage Sites, Gebel Barkal and the sites of the Napatan Region, as well as the archaeological sites of the Island of Meroe, while located away from direct armed conflict, are at risk because their remote locations and insufficient security render them vulnerable to looting and theft. Compounding the issue, a significant number of displaced people have sought refuge in the towns surrounding these sites, leading to the sites being repurposed as shelters for the displaced population.

SAH strongly endorses and supports all efforts to protect the cultural heritage of Sudan threatened by warfare, looting, and organized destruction. The protection of these threatened cultural heritage sites is essential, as is a long-term strategy that seeks to retain and conserve them.

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