



Press Release

## **World Heritage Watch Report 2023: Serious Earthquake Damages to World Heritage Sites**

**Organization presents first full documentation among 45 reports on World Heritage sites**

Berlin, 2 June 2023

In a new report, World Heritage Watch, the global network monitoring UNESCO's World Heritage sites, has published a first documentation and preliminary assessment of damages to four World Heritage sites in Turkiye and Syria from the devastating earthquake that hit the region in February.

The four sites affected are Diyarbakir with its massive city and fortress walls in Turkish Kurdistan, as well as three sites in Syria: the historic city of Aleppo, the "Ancient Cities of Northern Syria" in its battered Idlib Governorate, and the two medieval castles of Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din, further south.

"Aleppo has been hit most severely while the damages in the other sites are widespread but less heavy, although some buildings need urgent stabilization. Many buildings in Aleppo which were destroyed in the war have not been restored according to standard, and these are affected worst by the earthquake," explains Stephan Doempke, chair of World Heritage Watch and the editor of the Report. "The situation in Syria is compounded by the fact that international public organizations cannot work in the country due to the sanctions imposed on the Assad regime."

The reports were compiled by local NGOs and activist experts immediately after the earthquake, but one official report by Syria's Directorate-General for Antiquities and Museums was included, too.

The documentation comes as a Special Reports section of the organization's WHW Report 2023 which includes another 45 World Heritage sites around the world threatened by overtourism, climate change, or outright destruction by government projects.

"Some places are being destroyed as we speak", says Doempke. "They need urgent intervention, and we are wondering why some of them are not even on the agenda of the World Heritage Committee this year. UNESCO is caught up in procedures and political lobbyism. It urgently needs an efficient rapid response mechanism."

Urgent cases where the Committee should step in immediately are the ongoing eviction of the indigenous Maasai from Tanzania's Ngorongoro Conservation Area, the disfigurement of the Acropolis of Athens, the crumbling mining mountain near Potosí in Bolivia, the drying up of Spain's Doñana National Park, and the plan to destroy the oldest archaeological site of St. Petersburg for a business complex – all covered in the WHW Report.

In Historic Cairo, where the arguably most important necropolis of the Islamic world is being bulldozed to make way for a freeway system, dozens of Egyptian intellectuals, frustrated by UNESCO's inactivity, have directly addressed the presiding country of the World Heritage Committee, Saudi Arabia, requesting them, as the guardian of Islam, to save what is left of the necropolis. Destruction is happening so fast that it was not even possible to write a report about the situation.

The World Heritage Watch Report is not based on a comprehensive survey of all World Heritage sites. Rather it contains those reports which have been submitted by civil society actors around the world, based on intricate knowledge of conditions on the ground as well as national politics.

The full World Heritage Watch Report 2023, as well as some photos, can be downloaded from <https://world-heritage-watch.org/content/world-heritage-watch-report-2023>