Cultural Salon on
“Towards the protection of Archeology and Heritage Sites
to promote Iraqi multicultural identity”
Baghdad, 18 February 2012

Recommendations

On 18 February 2012, a seminar on the protection of archeological monuments and heritage buildings was convened at “Safia Al Souhail Cultural Salon” in Baghdad with participation of more than 200 persons, including representatives of the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, parliamentarians, members of the Committee of Tourism and Antiquities at the Iraqi parliament, the Supreme Judicial Council as well as Baghdad Governorate and its Commission for Antiquities and Heritage. The event was also attended by a number of intellectuals, youth, students, academic, members of the Cultural Councils, CSO’s journalists and writers, as well as representatives of the diplomatic corps in Iraq.

Iraq has a significant heritage wealth that expresses the experiences it went through and above all the multicultural dimension of its identity. Baghdad has combined different heritage architectural forms. There are heritage homes distributed in several areas in Baghdad, including 7 heritage homes on Jaffa Street, heritage homes in Al Athamiya area near Numan Hospital, Shahou Palace in the Al Adhamiya beachfront area, Rasheed Ali Kilani home in Al Adhamiya and other heritage buildings.

Participants highlighted the necessity to develop specific measures at local and national level to ensure the preservation of the archeological and civilization legacy which characterizes Iraq and is at risk for several causes. There are several reasons that call for preserving heritage, including:

- Social and historic reasons: The need to continue the social function, tie it to the memories of ancient area occupants, embody historic and personal events and phases, translate special living phenomena, thus giving continuity to the civilization spring through the ages.
- Economic reasons: The touristic function of architectural heritage is an important source for many countries, like Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Italy and England in supporting their economy.
- Political reasons: Maintaining the heritage to learn from the past. Telling history and its events is an expression of the political state in that period of time, and an expression of the values of the regime, its strength and stability.
- Religious reasons: Placing the religious value in architectural groups, including houses of worship, housing, markets, etc.

Participants also agreed on a list of recommendations related to the legislative field, highlighting in particular the need:

- to establish a National Rescue Commission with a clear and specific mandate to preserve archeology and Heritage Sites and promote Iraqi multicultural identity. The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities Law, which creates the General
Archeological Commission and the General Tourism Commission, should be ratified without any further delay. The Archeology Commission shall maintain its independence to undertake its functions.

- to amend the Antiquities and Heritage Law no 55 of 2002 and activate it with stricter controls in harmony with the current general conditions. This is currently being studied by the committee for submission to parliament and referral to the Legal Committee for a preliminary reading, followed by a second legislative reading.

- to abide by the international conventions and agreements signed with regard to maintaining the heritage sites, maintaining and preserving them.

- to activate Article 113 of the constitution. According to this article, antiquities, archeological sites, heritage buildings, scrolls and coins are considered national treasures that fall under the jurisdiction of the federal authority, and are managed in cooperation with the districts and governorates. This shall be regulated by law.

- to have a professional and not political Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Its minister and officers should be specialists in the field.

- to foster cooperation between the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the concerned state departments, including the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Baghdad Governorate, and the Baghdad Municipality.

- to allocate an appropriate budget dedicated to the preservation of the archeology and heritage sectors.

- to establish a non-governmental scientific society and organize a civil campaign to protect the antiquities and heritage, and to monitor, follow-up and defend.

Specific recommendations were also addressed to a range of relevant public entities, calling on:

- the engineering departments of the Awqaf (Sunni Waqf Bureau, Shiite Waqf Bureau and the Christian Waqf Bureau) to maintain and renovate the buildings run by government bodies, such as the mosques, churches, some heritage homes (waqf) and commercial markets, etc, in addition to offering advice and supervision to owners of private property to renovate and maintain their buildings pursuant to principles and controls that guarantee the preservation of the heritage of those buildings.

- the Baghdad Municipality / Projects Department to direct the owners of private property and to offer support to rebuild the decaying and condemned buildings in the same architectural style by creating laws and regulations that grant building permits in heritage sites in a manner that guarantees the preservation of their heritage value.

- the Baghdad Municipality and local councils in the governorates to improve the level of services offered in the heritage regions and neighborhoods, such as providing water, electricity, communications, sewage, etc, and renovating the streets where the heritage buildings are located to guarantee providing all requirements and services to tourists and the inhabitants at the same time.

- the Chambers of Commerce to support the diverse commercial activities on Rasheed Street and the other heritage sites, especially those that are famous there and attract the tourists, such as making and selling copper and silver products and heritage jewelry, pottery, antiques, antique carpets, etc, in addition to supporting heritage libraries that the Rasheed Street is famous for (Mutanabi Street).
- the Municipality departments and local councils in the governorates to intensity monitoring of store owners and finding them in cases of violations and displaying their goods on the sidewalks of heritage sites, in addition to banning street sellers from occupying the land in the heritage sites to sell their goods, due to the negative impact on traffic and the fact that these violations distort the image of these heritage sites.

- the Municipality departments and local councils in the governorates to remove the commercial activities that have an adverse impact on the heritage sites, especially Rasheed Street, such as the car repair shops at the street entrance from the Bab Sharqi side as well as the commercial plans and presses near the Haidar Khana Mosque.

- the Municipality departments / Projects Department in Baghdad and the governorates, in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, to address the placing of housing neighborhoods and alleys in heritage sites and make the appropriate decision in their regard to guarantee the preservation of the heritage of these sites.

- the traffic departments in Baghdad and the governorates to address the traffic crisis in the heritage sites and find permanent solutions for it, such as banning large vehicles from passing during the day and any other solutions that contribute to resolving this crisis in these areas.