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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للترية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

The Culture Sector Division for Heritage

H.E. Mr Lionel Strenght Veer
Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of
Netherlands
Permanent Delegate to UNESCO
UNESCO House

Ref.: CLT/WHC/7619/NL/MA/PT

30 October 2014

Subject : **ICOMOS Technical Review on the State of Conservation of the World
Heritage property 'Historic Area of Willemstad, Inner City and
Harbour, Curaçao' (C 819), Kingdom of Netherlands.**

Dear Ambassador,

I am pleased to transmit here enclosed the comments of the Advisory Body ICOMOS regarding the information provided by your authorities on 16 September last on the proposed construction of a new hospital within the boundaries of the World Heritage Property of 'Historic Area of Willemstad, Inner City and Harbour, Curaçao'. Please, kindly find the evaluation document in the Annex to this letter.

We are confident that you and the authorities concerned will review the comments of ICOMOS and keep the World Heritage Centre updated in case of any further development of this project.

May I take this opportunity to thank you and the local authorities concerned for your collaboration in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*.

Kishore Rao
Director
World Heritage Centre

cc: National Commission of the Netherlands for UNESCO
National Focal Points for World Heritage
ICOMOS International

ICOMOS Technical Review

Property	Historic Area of Willemstad, Inner City and Harbour, Curaçao
State Party	Netherlands
Property ID	819
Date inscription	1997
Criteria	(ii)(iv)(v)
Project	New hospital within the borders of the buffer zone

The World Heritage Committee, at its 21st Session held in Naples, Italy, in 1997, inscribed the *Historic Area of Willemstad, Inner City and Harbour (Netherlands)* on the World Heritage List. The Committee decided to inscribe this property “on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iv) and (v), considering that the Historic Area of Willemstad is a European colonial ensemble in the Caribbean of outstanding value and integrity, which illustrates the organic growth of a multicultural community over three centuries and preserves to a high degree significant elements of the many strands that came together to create it.”¹ A retrospective statement of Outstanding Universal Value was approved by the World Heritage Committee at its 38th session in 2014.

A project for a new hospital within the buffer zone of the World Heritage property has been recently submitted by the Dutch authorities in September 2014, in agreement with the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. The decision to build this complex responds to the need to modernize the existent hospital, more than 100 years old, and provide it with the latest technologies in the field of health care.²

The need to upgrade the local health facilities is absolutely understandable. Notwithstanding, ICOMOS has fundamental concerns regarding the proposed modification of the buffer zone and also with respect to the architectural project submitted, among the main problems.

The existent hospital is located in the World Heritage property’s buffer zone, on the side of the Otrabanda sector. The new hospital that is proposed is quite a large complex to be located in the area where the old health centre currently is. It would also occupy adjacent grounds on part of the official buffer zone (see Map 1). In order to allow space for the new ensemble, it is planned to demolish the existent hospital buildings (see Map 2).

In the document “Summary/Translation Modification Plan Buffer Zone Historic Area of Willemstad, Inner City and Harbour, Curaçao” provided by the State Party, the authorities do recognize - according to their legal regulations - that “it appears from the review of the building plan for the HNO that it does not meet the requirements of the plot layout, building height, front width and shape of the roof”.³ It is also declared that the proposed buildings “do not fit the requirements / limitations of Article 4 EOP and that the view of the ‘Inner City’ is disturbed.”⁴

Contradictorily, as a solution, instead of finding a more adequate location for the complex or adjusting the architectural project, they propose to change the original boundaries of the

¹ WHC website <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/2897>

² Letter to Mr. Kishore Rao from the Permanent Ambassador of the Kingdom of Netherlands to UNESCO, September 16, 2014

³ Document “Summary/Translation Modification Plan Buffer Zone Historic Area of Willemstad, Inner City and Harbour, Curaçao” provided by the State Party

⁴ Ibid.

established buffer zone, so that the new hospital would no longer be located within a restrictive, protective area.⁵

Comparing the official map of the World Heritage property and its buffer zone (see Map 3) with the map that shows the proposed modification to the buffer zone (see map 4), it is evident that the modification would significantly reduce the buffer zone, which would then be just a narrow strip which means less protection to the World Heritage property.

The proposed complex would be located less than 200 meters from the core area, specifically from the Otrabanda sector of the World Heritage property where the built environment is particularly delicate (see photographs on page 7).

In addition, the drawings provided regarding the project for a new building indicate that its dimensions and scale would not appear appropriate for a harmonious integration with the neighbouring historic areas (see drawings on page 8). The building will therefore have too strong a visual impact on the property.⁶ It is worth remembering that, although the property has retained its integrity, there are still visible impacts of a tall hotel, built years ago in the Punda sector affecting the townscape, and also of the large highway on the border of the Otrabanda sector (see photographs on page 11).

Unfortunately, the documents submitted by the State Party do not include 3D drawings which could make it easier to understand the new hospital's architectural form. It is, for this reason, difficult to fully evaluate the quality of the proposed buildings.

The documents explain that parts of the current hospital complex will be torn down. The photographs provided of the buildings to be demolished do not show any architectural value, and this action can therefore be justified. However, it is not clear when "the old hospital" is then referred to as having architectural and urban values. In this case, its demolition must be analysed.⁷

Beyond the above-mentioned problems there are other concerns which will need careful analysis:

- The new, large hospital would necessarily imply important traffic and the large number of vehicles would produce atmospheric pollution that might affect the World Heritage property.
- A hospital of this kind produces a large amount of chemical and biological waste (medical waste) and eventually radioactive waste which will require highly efficient treatment and disposal in order not to contaminate nearby areas, especially Otrabanda.
- Would the considerable demand of water and energy supply for the hospital affect the World Heritage area?

According to the letter from the Permanent Delegate of The Netherlands to UNESCO, the "local experts are of the opinion that the building plan as presented will not affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage property and thus will not pose a threat to the property of the historic area of Willemstad."⁸ ICOMOS considers that a Heritage Impact Assessment would be required in order to systematically establish the potential impact of the planned building on the values and integrity of the World Heritage property.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Drawings 4b_B-DO-TOT-105 - Gevels totaal (Noord- en oostgevel) and 4c_B-DO-TOT-106 - Gevels totaal (Zuid- en westgevel)

⁷ Document "Existing buildings for demolition, in the developing area including photographs."

⁸ Letter to Mr. Kishore Rao from the Permanent Delegate of The Netherlands to UNESCO, September 16, 2014.

Recommendations:

As set out in paragraphs 103-107 of the *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, buffer zones play an important role as an added layer of protection to the World Heritage properties. The definition of the boundaries of a buffer zone is the result of studies on the features of the World Heritage property and its setting and on potential visual impacts that could jeopardise the Outstanding Universal Value. ICOMOS considers that, once approved by the World Heritage Committee, buffer zones become an essential complementary component of the World Heritage property and must therefore be the target of precise protection measures.

On the basis of the previous considerations, ICOMOS invites the State Party to take into account the following recommendations:

- Conserve the boundaries of the buffer zone approved by the World Heritage Committee.
- Undertake a broader territorial and urban analysis of the area where the new complex is proposed in order to precisely determine its potential impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.
- In the case that the decision is made to construct a hospital in the proposed location, undertake a Heritage Impact Assessment of the building that includes a local consultation with highly qualified conservation experts, architects, planners and designers from Curacao, and submit its results to the World Heritage Centre.⁹
- In the case that the decision is to construct the large hospital in another location, it could be envisaged to install a modern but smaller and simpler health service on the current site.
- Guarantee that any new building or group of buildings represents a high-quality architectural addition to the World Heritage property.¹⁰ (See local examples on pages 9 and 10)
- Guarantee that visual impacts to and from the World Heritage property will be compatible with the preservation of its Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and authenticity.

ICOMOS, Charenton-le-Pont
October 2014

⁹ Michael Newton, Gertrude Gehlen, Myriam Jonker, Lyongo Juliana, among others.

¹⁰ In Curacao, there are examples of successful additions of contemporary elements to old buildings or contexts such as Maduro Library, Hotel Avila, Kloster Hotel among others.

Map 1

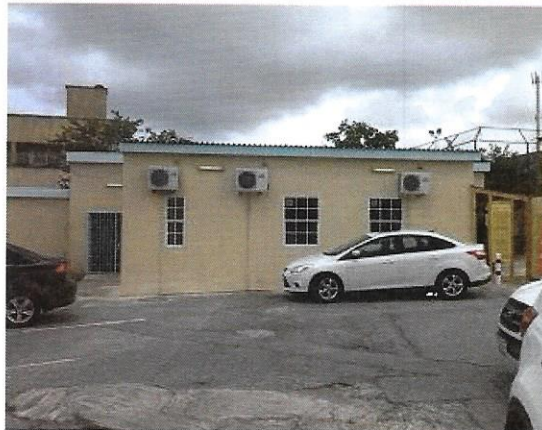
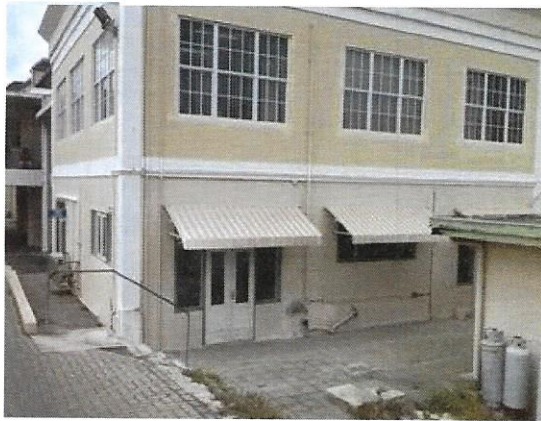


200m

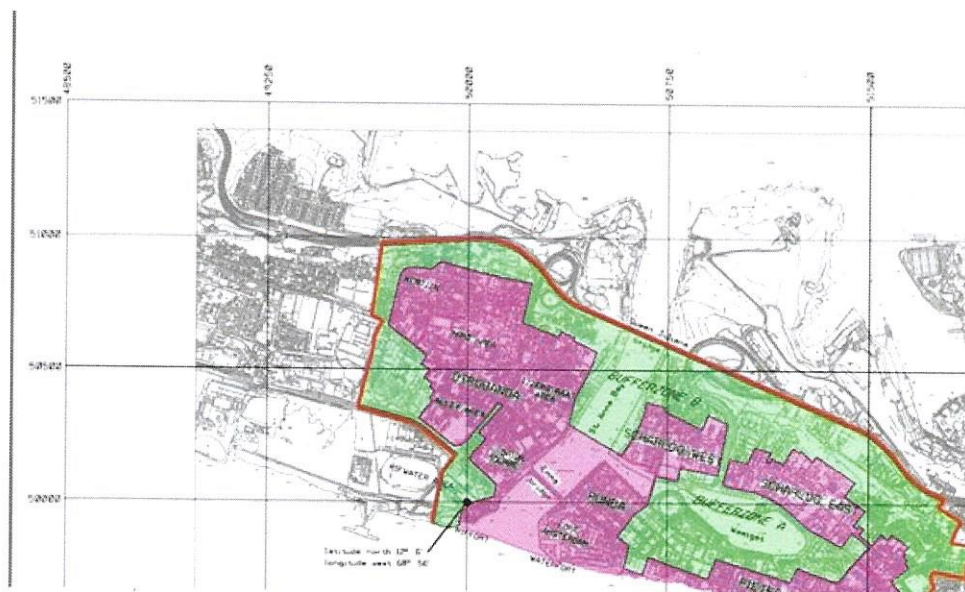
Ministerie VVRP, 20 augustus 2014



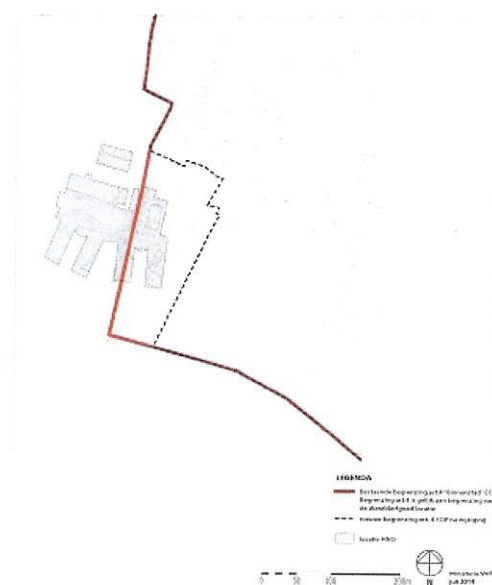
Map 2



Some of the buildings to be demolished which do not represent any architectural value.



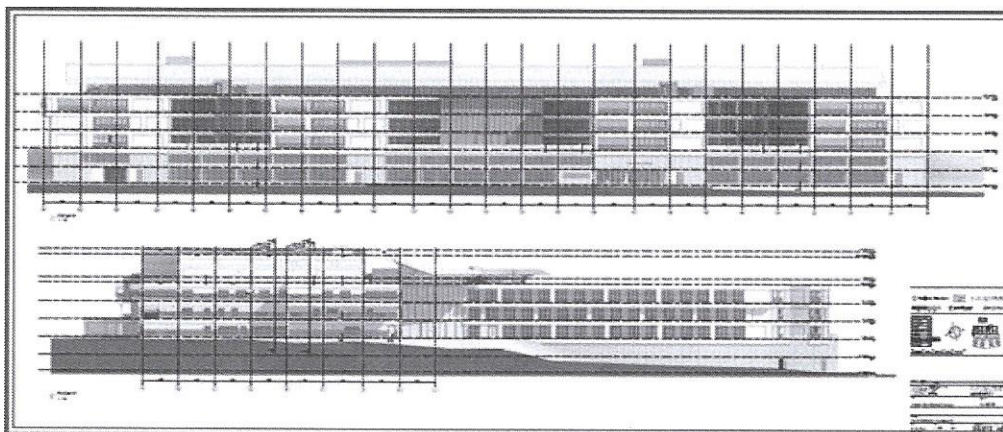
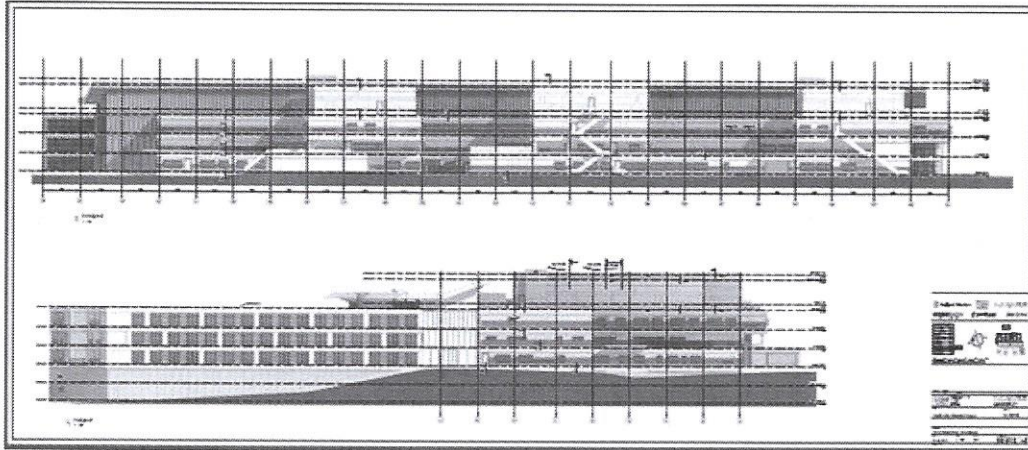
Map 3. World Heritage Property and its buffer zone.



Map 4 Proposed modification of the buffer zone



The protection of the delicate built fabric of Otrabanda would be effected if the buffer zone on that side is modified



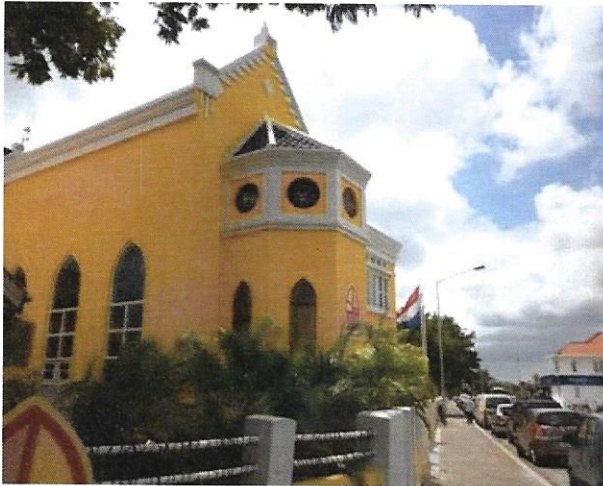
The proposed complex will have too strong a visual impact on the World Heritage property



The colorful and harmonious townscape of Punda's waterfront.



Buildings on Otrabanda's waterfront with a contemporary design successfully reinterpreting traditional architecture



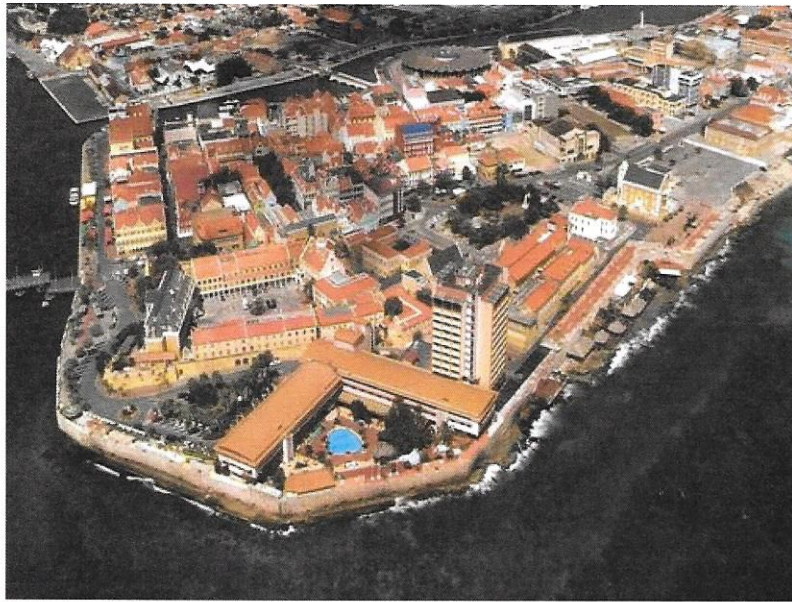
Kloster Hotel



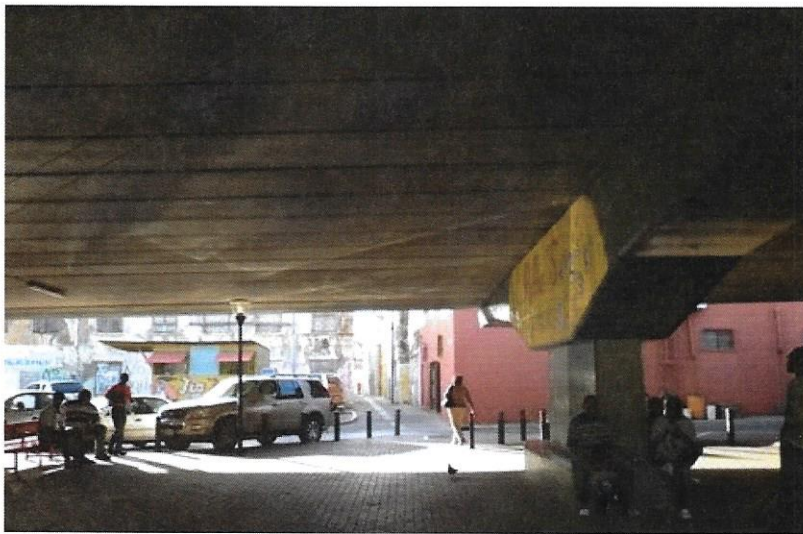
Avila Hotel



Maduro Library



A tower for a hotel in Punda affected the historic townscape years ago.



A strong past aggression to Otrabanda.