

## **To the Esteemed Members Responsible for Selecting the Secretary-General of the Organization for Education, Science, and Culture**

With greetings of respect and appreciation,

We (*Egyptian Heritage Professionals*) are all aware that the Organization for Education, Science, and Culture (UNESCO) was born out of the horrors of the Second World War in 1945, when humanity as a whole realized that destruction and devastation bring nothing but loss and suffering. That peace is not built by force or by arms, but through enlightened minds and hearts that believe in human dignity. The Charter of this Organization came to proclaim the abhorrence of wars and to make education, science, and culture bridges of communication among peoples, instead of borders being reasons for division and conflict.

We write to you today in light of what has been observed since 2016, the year in which the Egyptian candidate **Khaled el-Anany** assumed the portfolio of antiquities in a country the size of Egypt, one of the greatest civilizations of the ancient world.

We have all followed the acts of tampering and destruction that have afflicted the archaeological and heritage system in Egypt from that date until today. Here we recall that the Charter of the Organization is founded upon the safeguarding of humanity's shared heritage and the protection of its creative achievements, which constitute a noble mission and a guiding light for generations—so that this great legacy may remain a witness to the unity of destiny, and a source of inspiration for youth regarding the necessity and duty of preserving civilization, while working to build a future marked by peace and mutual understanding.

### **We summarize our objections to this candidate in the following points:**

1. **The deliberate weakening of the administrative system for the protection and preservation of Egyptian heritage**, to appoint individuals selected on the basis of loyalty rather than merit, individuals who would not obstruct the approval of requests that contravene established regulations and laws. This has even led to the demolition of a considerable number of monuments. His well-known statement, "*Antiquities are nothing but a pile of old stones, and Egypt is full of antiquities—if we were to register them all, we would never finish!*", stands as the clearest testimony to his outlook and convictions.
2. Humanity will also not forget what he did to two of his academic colleagues in 2019, when he falsely accused two esteemed scholars of the highest academic standing—**Dr. Mohamed Abdel Meguid** and **Dr. Khaled Mostafa Azzab**—of collaborating with a foreign Arab entity against Egypt and of membership in a banned group. They were subsequently imprisoned (Case No. 558 of 2020), in flagrant violation of all ethical and professional norms. Those working in the fields of underwater archaeology and at the Library of Alexandria will never forget their imprisonment for a year and three months, nor the public plea of Dr. Khaled Mostafa Azzab's daughter to the Prime Minister, in the hope of learning the whereabouts of her father's detention—and whether he was even still alive after the brutality and humiliation he endured at the moment of his arrest.
3. **Violation of Egypt's national Antiquities Law (Law of 1983)** since it entered into force, through repeated breaches of its principal provisions, including the amendment of the text relating to the delisting of a monument or heritage site. This amendment made such a decision subject solely to the signature of the Minister (the current

Egyptian candidate), which runs counter to all logic, particularly in countries with ancient civilizations.

Article 14 – Official Gazette, Issue 23 (bis A) – 11 June 2018:

*“It shall be permissible to remove the registration of an immovable antiquity, or part thereof, by decision of the Minister upon the recommendation of the Board of Directors and with the approval of the competent committee. The delisting decision shall be published in the Official Gazette.”*

It is noteworthy that both the members of the Board of Directors and the members of the specialized committees are directly appointed by the Minister himself. For this reason, the local press gave him the title of *“the Delisting Antiquities Minister.”*

**The establishment of precedents that disregarded the fundamental principles of archaeology, for example:**

**The relocation of antiquities from their original context**

**4. The obelisk of the Grand Egyptian Museum (relocated from the archaeological site of Tanis in the Delta)**

In one of the most controversial incidents in the field of Egyptian antiquities, the Egyptian candidate committed a blatant violation of the rules of heritage preservation when he ordered the transfer of an ancient obelisk from its original site in Tanis in the Delta to the courtyard of the Grand Egyptian Museum.

The relocation—publicly promoted by the candidate as a national achievement—turned into an archaeological disaster when the obelisk was fractured during its lifting in the museum’s outer courtyard, in full view of the project director himself. What followed was even more serious than the breakage: photography was prohibited through intimidation, and sources reported that bribes were paid to workers in exchange for silence regarding the incident.

The matter did not end there. The obelisk was “restored” using cement, with bricks painted in a color similar to the stone inserted to conceal the cracks and fractures, in what specialized sources described as a *“deliberate concealment of the truth.”* Subsequently, the obelisk was fixed inside a hollow metallic basin to prevent it from falling again, a solution that may appear practical but strips the monument of its historical symbolism as a link between earth and sky.

This incident reveals the extent of the candidate’s transgressions, which run counter to the fundamental principles of archaeology, and raises grave questions regarding the absence of transparency and accountability in the management of one of the most vital files relating to the identity of history and the authenticity of heritage—namely, the protection of humanity’s eternal legacy from tampering and distortion.

**5. The Karnak Temple Ram Statues (relocated from the Karnak archaeological site in Luxor)**

The Egyptian candidate proposed the idea of transferring the ram statues of Karnak Temple—monuments that had stood proudly in their original sacred context for more than four millennia—in order to decorate Tahrir Square, presenting this to the political leadership as an

“innovative idea.” Indeed, the four statues were removed in a scene described by local residents as “disgraceful,” where they were loaded onto small trucks and concealed under white sheets to hide them from public view as they passed through the streets of the city (see attached photograph).

The irony becomes clearer when recalling a statement by Dr. Zahi Hawass in 2010, who vigorously defended the relocation of the statue of Ramses II from Ramses Square to the Grand Egyptian Museum, declaring: “*We are protecting it from pollution, and its place is not in the square.*” What occurred in 2019 stands in direct contradiction to that principle: the Karnak Ramses were taken from their sacred precinct and placed in one of Egypt’s busiest squares, transformed from venerable religious and symbolic monuments into mere urban decorations amidst the congestion of the city.

This contradiction raises deeply troubling questions: is the true objective the protection and preservation of antiquities, as is publicly claimed, or is there instead a tendency to instrumentalize them as tools of political embellishment, disregarding their historical and spiritual value?

#### **6. The Tahrir Square Obelisk (relocated from the archaeological site of Tanis in the Delta)**

The obelisk currently stands at the center of the square, having been relocated at the initiative of the Egyptian candidate, who presented the idea within the framework of a national project to the political leadership, persuading them that it would serve as a civilizational addition reflecting the grandeur of the past and emulating the great squares of the world.

What was not disclosed by those overseeing the project is that the urban model upon which this plan was based is not a contemporary innovation, but rather a European design dating back to the fifteenth century, inspired by Roman traditions of placing obelisks at the heart of cities.

In other words, what took place was not an authentic Egyptian vision that respected the context of antiquities and their symbolic meaning, but rather the recycling of an old European concept, presented as though it were a revival of national identity.

Thus, the obelisk, after thousands of years of standing majestically in its original environment, has been repurposed as a decorative element within an urban beautification project. This raises deeply unsettling questions: is Egyptian heritage regarded as a civilizational symbol whose sanctity must be preserved, or as a decorative instrument used to lend an appearance of “antiquity” to urban projects that carry neither the spirit of place nor its history?

#### **7. The Two Obelisks of the City of Arts in the New Administrative Capital (relocated from the archaeological site of Tanis in the Delta)**

The series of relocations of Egyptian obelisks from their original contexts did not stop there. Still, they extended to the City of Arts in the New Administrative Capital, when the Egyptian candidate presented the proposal to General Mohamed Amin, head of the *Tahya Misr* Fund. He persuaded him that the two obelisks would constitute “an added value to the site,” particularly in light of the scheduled visit of French President Emmanuel Macron and his Egyptian counterpart in January 2019.

This decision did not arise from an archaeological vision or a strategic approach to heritage preservation; instead, it was motivated by political and ceremonial considerations. Thus, the two ancient obelisks were transferred from Tanis in the Delta to the entrance of the city, stripping them of their authenticity and symbolism. Designed originally as religious and spiritual symbols intended to connect earth and sky, they were reduced instead to decorative instruments summoned for political occasions and protocol displays, in stark rupture with their original philosophy.

**8. The establishment of precedents that disregarded the fundamental principles of conservation, for example:**

In a scene that provoked condemnation from specialists and heritage experts, the Egyptian candidate oversaw restoration works on the statues at the façade of Luxor Temple in a manner that experts described as a “*scandal*.” He ordered the restoration of the front statues using cement in a crude and disturbing way, resulting in a disfigured appearance that stands in total contradiction to international standards and that distorts the aesthetic integrity of the archaeological site.

The issue extends beyond visual taste: the city has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1979, which entails a strict obligation to respect the “outstanding universal value” that forms the basis for its inscription. Restorations of this kind not only violate the scientific principles of conservation but also jeopardize Luxor’s status on the World Heritage List as a whole. Nor was this incident isolated. The candidate proceeded with further non-compliant restoration projects at the temples of Western Thebes, where interventions were recorded that lacked scientific standards—reflecting a recurring pattern of irresponsible interference with Egyptian heritage, rather than its safeguarding for future generations.

The Egyptian candidate also issued administrative orders to the restorers of Saqqara—an area inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List—to intervene in the archaeological mission working at the excavations northwest of King Merenre’s pyramid in Saqqara, and to cut out five tombs from their original context. Indeed, the tombs were dismantled, with three transferred to the Grand Egyptian Museum, the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, and the Imhotep Museum at Saqqara.

It is well known that this constitutes a violation of the laws governing the protection of antiquities, in particular Article 7 of the Venice Charter regulating conservation and restoration of historic sites and monuments—the principal reference for the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1974, to which Egypt is a signatory. This article explicitly prohibits the dismantling and relocation of immovable heritage such as tombs and temples.

Thus, grave questions arise: who holds accountable those responsible for such practices? And have Egypt’s ancient temples become experimental grounds for cheap building materials, rather than eternal witnesses to the genius of civilization?

**9. The precedent of hosting weddings, parties, and loud festivals within ancient houses of worship (see attached photographs)**

In a transgression that deeply pains anyone conscious of the value of history and the sanctity of sacred places, the Egyptian candidate oversaw the transformation of venerable sites of worship into venues for dancing and noisy festivities. Circulating images document distressing

scenes of weddings and parties being held inside Pharaonic temples—spaces where the ancient Egyptians once gathered for prayer and sacred rituals—now resounding with oriental dancing and the blare of loudspeakers.

Nor were Islamic monuments spared from such practices. In the heart of Historic Cairo, the candidate authorized the conversion of the Mosque of Mohamed Ali at the Citadel into what resembled a banquet hall, where marriage ceremonies were conducted, lavish buffets laid out, and even stoves connected to gas cylinders were installed within its precincts to heat food. Most disturbingly, the shrine within the mosque itself was used as a *vestiaire* for the bride and her companions to change clothes—an incident that epitomizes the level of disregard shown for the sanctity and the cultural and religious value of the site.

Such incidents cannot be dismissed as mere “mismanagement.” They constitute a dangerous precedent that flouts both international and national laws governing heritage protection, exposing how sacred sites have come to be treated as event halls, with no consideration for their historical or spiritual significance.

The question must therefore be asked: can someone who has permitted the transformation of places of prayer and sanctity into venues of amusement and luxury be entrusted with the heritage of the world? Has the candidate’s commercialized outlook on Egyptian heritage—seeking to exploit rather than safeguard it—become a model the world wishes to emulate?

Do the esteemed members responsible for selecting the Secretary-General of the Organization for Education, Science, and Culture truly accept a vision that reduces heritage to the whims of commercial interests and superficial displays? (see attached photograph)

We cannot fail here to recall the major celebration attended by the President of the Republic of Egypt in Luxor—ancient Thebes, the world’s most renowned heritage site, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979. On that occasion, the Nile’s banks were transformed into an “artificial” spectacle, complete with the construction of statues and large-scale replicas, the fabrication of dozens of boats, and a general treatment of the heritage area with neglect, failing to incorporate any genuine heritage value. The result was a scene both farcical and tragic: remnants of temporary buildings, boats, statues, and various decorative elements left behind. An absurd spectacle, reflective of an official indifferent to responsibility and concerned only with self-promotion.

#### **10. Endorsing urban development machinery at the expense of heritage—public mockery and heritage massacres (see attached photographs)**

The Egyptian candidate’s interference with national heritage was not confined to actions on the ground; it also extended to international fora. During sessions of the committees concerned with the World Heritage List—particularly with respect to Historic Cairo and the military leadership’s wish to adjust the boundaries of the area to permit developmental projects—several Egyptian generals appeared in open support of the candidate as he publicly attacked UNESCO representatives, in full view of the local press. Matters did not stop at mocking the Organization’s recommendations, but escalated to direct derision and accusations of backwardness and racism against the officials of the World Heritage Centre. These actions were not isolated; they were associated with identifiable figures whose roles have been documented in what is now referred to as “heritage massacres.” All of this took place under

the auspices and official authorization of the Minister of Antiquities, who provided the formal cover for their decisions.

### **A. Historic Cairo, specifically the Mamluk Cemetery—Al-Arafa al-Kubra (see attached photographs)**

Over the course of months, an urban development plan—approved by the political leadership with the signature of the Egyptian candidate—was implemented in one of the rarest urban fabrics of Historic Cairo: the area of Al-Arafa al-Kubra, which encompassed a unique collection of Mamluk domes. According to testimonies from urban heritage experts, more than eighteen Mamluk domes listed on national protection registers were demolished, along with other structures and architectural styles protected under the Urban Harmony Law No. 117.

What occurred cannot be classified merely as “negligence” or “administrative shortcoming.” Instead, it points to a pattern of institutional complicity on the part of the candidate, whereby demolitions were carried out in broad daylight despite their contravention of local laws and international conventions, including the World Heritage Convention of 1972, to which Egypt is a State Party.

Field reports and testimonies from local residents reveal that heritage protection has been transformed into a political battleground, where the interests of large-scale projects are given precedence over the memory of the city, while mechanisms of accountability remain absent. The result, according to archaeological experts, amounts to what may be considered “*the greatest heritage massacre of the modern era*”—not only in terms of the scale of what has been lost, but also in the message it conveys: that heritage, with all its historical and human value, is no longer beyond the reach of the bulldozers of power.

### **B. The Saint Catherine's Monastery Area (Photos Attached)**

Located in the heart of southern Sinai, Saint Catherine's Monastery has stood for over fifteen centuries as one of the oldest continuously operating Christian monasteries in the world and is a designated UNESCO World Heritage site. However, its profound spiritual and historical status has not shielded it from the vision of a former Egyptian minister, which has critically impacted the monastery and placed it at the center of a dispute with the Egyptian state.

A significant investment project, termed “The Great Transfiguration,” was initially proposed by the aforementioned minister and subsequently presented to the political leadership as an ambitious plan to maximize the region's economic potential through the development of infrastructure and the promotion of religious tourism. Following this, there has been a notable increase in site visits to the monastery and its adjacent structures. The project's scope has progressively expanded to encompass the entire site, prioritizing investment interests. This vision has been met with considerable opposition from the Greek Orthodox Church, the custodian of the monastery. The Church contends that the project transcends mere urban development, viewing it as an attempt to curtail the monastery's historical land ownership and expropriate significant portions of its surrounding territories. This is perceived as a direct threat to its continuity as a vibrant religious center. (Photos Attached)

Furthermore, the historical existence of Saint Catherine's Monastery faces an existential challenge stemming from an ongoing legal dispute with the Egyptian government concerning the ownership of extensive tracts of surrounding land. The Church maintains that divesting the

monastery of its lands jeopardizes its viability as a living spiritual institution, potentially reducing it to a mere archaeological monument. This concern is amplified by large-scale urban projects such as "The Great Transfiguration," which is being implemented by the government. The approval for this project was championed by the former minister during his tenure, who also led the legal dispute file. The resulting legal outcome was presented to the political leadership as a "historic achievement" that legally defines the monastery's status. In stark contrast, the Greek Orthodox Church describes this development as a "spiritual catastrophe" and a "historic setback."

## **Conclusion**

In concluding these remarks,

As we anticipate your selection of the individual who will bear the sacred trust of future generations and safeguard the memory of humanity, we wish to underscore that this position is not merely a ceremonial post or a vehicle for international prestige. Rather, it is a mission and a profound moral responsibility before history and all humankind. What your esteemed organization requires at this juncture is a leader of conviction who fundamentally believes that education is not a luxury, culture is not an indulgence, and human heritage is not a mere ornament to be invoked at convenience. It is, in fact, the very essence of our collective existence and the bridge toward a more just and peaceful world.

May your deliberations culminate in a decision commensurate with the aspirations of millions, and may you bear in mind that the selection of the ideal leader is not simply an administrative procedure, but a covenant with the conscience of humanity.

The choice before you today will either raise the banner of humanity high or leave it captive to narrow interests.