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Sneska Quaedvlieg-Mihailovic, Secretary General of Europa Nostra
Stephan Doempke, Chairman, World Heritage Watch

RE: FORTHCOMING UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE MEETING, ALSO CONCERNING THE STATUS OF VENICE AND ITS LAGOON

Venice, Tuesday 13 July 2021

Dear UNESCO World Heritage Committee Member

We are writing to express our strong support for the proposal which the UNESCO World Heritage Center has made to the World Heritage Committee - which will hold its extended 44th session from 16-31 July 2021 under the chairmanship of the People's Republic of China - to place Venice and its Lagoon on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger, and to do this without further delay.

This is the latest of our appeals to UNESCO that began more than five years ago, in 2015 when the first delegation representing the UNESCO World Heritage Centre visited Venice. This was followed up with a [detailed document](#) containing contributions from all the main local organizations. We [wrote](#) to you again prior to the 2019 UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan, and presented further information and [continuing concerns](#) during their second official visit in January 2020.

Reports from the reactive monitoring missions of October 2015 and the advisory mission of January 2020 have made clear that almost all crucial problems remain unresolved, as reflected in the draft decision (WHC/21/44.COM/7B.Add, pp.43-48), especially recommendations 4 - 13, thus warranting inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger at the forthcoming meeting in China, especially in consideration of the previous extensions granted to the State Party.

The persistent issues afflicting the precarious state of conservation of Venice and its Lagoon have long been associated with a complex and ineffective governance framework. It lacks a long-term vision and strategy involving the local community in order to preserve the Site's OUVs and its attributes, address tourism management, optimise the use of valuable cultural and natural resources, control infrastructure and urban development projects and reverse the dramatic demographic decline of the Venice population specifically.

Concrete solutions regarding large cruise ships and failure to carry out Heritage Impact Assessments, as well as assessing single and cumulative potential impacts of planned projects, have been left to the State Party to 'investigate.' More incisive actions are needed urgently in order to make all stakeholders more directly accountable.

No mechanism has been established yet to comply with Paragraph 118 bis or notify the World Heritage Centre of proposals according to Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines. As a result, projects that will have negative impacts on the OUV of Venice and its Lagoon are being implemented -- even in the future buffer zone. The continued effects of certain activities on Venice and the vulnerable Lagoon ecosystem, combined with climate change, are already causing irreversible changes to the site.

We are concerned that the Committee will be unable to uphold the credibility of UNESCO's World Heritage List if it does not officially designate Venice and its Lagoon as endangered World Heritage, given the accumulation of evidence including environmental data and existential threats to culture, the growing public concern, [reported in international media](#) and numerous statements and appeals made by local community groups and national [associations](#), as well as by European and international NGOs, like Europa Nostra that declared, already in 2016, Venice and its Lagoon as THE most endangered site in Europe.

Your decisiveness at this critical moment would trigger the State Party (a total of 20 authorities both at the national and local levels in charge of the site's protection and management) to engage in the vital discussions and timely actions that the Site so desperately needs. It would also be seen as a constructive contribution by UNESCO, fully within the spirit of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Of course, the designation should be implemented constructively and in a positive spirit to mobilise energy, resources and ideas, both from public and from private stakeholders, to promptly return Venice to its World Heritage Status again.

We count on UNESCO's support for civil society's continuous, tireless and increasing efforts to safeguard Venice in whatever ways we can, while we are unable to effect the requisite changes on our own. We also strongly believe that the duty to safeguard the site extends to the whole of the international community, best represented by UNESCO.

We look forward to following the proceedings of the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee and count on your comprehension and help.

Yours faithfully,

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di Venezia](#)

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