

**ICOMOS Lebanon - Statement of Concern
on
The UNESCO World Heritage Site
Ouadi Qadisha and the Forest of the Cedars of God, Lebanon**

26/02/2025

Statement of Concern on Imminent Threat of Destruction of Cultural Heritage

The International Council on Monuments and Sites of Lebanon (ICOMOS-Lebanon), representing the national heritage community, expresses deep concern about the current condition of protection and preservation of the *Ouadi Qadisha and the Forest of the Cedars of God* inscribed since 1998 as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

A recent decision issued by the Ministry of Culture (Decision No. 13/m.a.m/2025, dated 28/01/2025) authorizes the construction of a 2.5-meter-wide road leading to Qannoubine village. This project includes the creation of a road and potentially a bridge, reaching the heart of this outstanding cultural landscape, thus posing a serious and irreversible threat to its natural and cultural essence.

This decision was made without:

- A study assessing the necessity and feasibility of the project, ensuring it aligns with heritage protection standards.
- A Heritage and Environmental Impact Assessment, which is a prerequisite for any intervention in such a sensitive place.
- The approval of the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA), the official scientific and technical body responsible for heritage protection within the Ministry of Culture.
- Consultation with the local and professional community, which plays a key role in the management of the valley.

The lack of proper study and consultation in such a fragile and historically significant site is unacceptable. The implementation of this road will cause irreversible damage to the valley's unique sacred landscape jeopardizing its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and associated integrity and authenticity.

Regarding integrity, the project threatens the wholeness and intactness of the property by:

- Disrupting the complete representation of features that convey the site's significance as an early Christian monastic settlement, particularly by compromising the historic isolation and spiritual character that has defined these religious establishments.

- Introducing adverse development effects through the 2.5-meter road and bridge construction that would fragment the cultural landscape and compromise the integral coherence of the valley.
- Potentially destabilizing the physical fabric of the monastic and vernacular structures through construction vibrations and increased traffic.
- Disturbing the essential relationships between the natural landscape, and the religious and vernacular structures that are fundamental to the site's distinctive character.

In terms of authenticity, the project would compromise several key attributes:

- Location and setting: The pristine landscape setting that has historically defined the valley's character as a place of meditation and refuge would be fundamentally altered.
- Use and function: The traditional spiritual aspect of the valley would be diminished through increased vehicular access and resultant tourism pressure.
- Spirit and feeling: The sense of isolation and contemplative atmosphere, central to understanding the site's historical monastic function, would be permanently compromised.
- Form and design: The original spatial organization of the valley, characterized by its deliberately difficult access, would be undermined by modern infrastructure.

These impacts directly threaten the site's ability to demonstrate criterion (iii) as a shelter for monastic communities and criterion (iv) as an exceptional example of early Christian monastic settlements, where the rugged, isolated landscape was integral to its spiritual and meditative function.

Furthermore, the road construction is inconsistent with the protective measures recommended by UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee, which emphasize maintaining the site's historic character, ensuring strict visitor management, and preserving the undisturbed relationship between its monastic structures and the surrounding landscape.

Therefore,

ICOMOS-Lebanon strongly call for:

1. The immediate suspension of the Decision to avoid irreversible harm to the site.
2. A thorough assessment, including a Heritage and Environmental Impact Assessment, to be conducted before any further steps are taken.
3. A transparent and inclusive decision-making process, engaging all relevant authorities, including the DGA, UNESCO, local communities, and heritage specialists.

This intervention threatens, not only Lebanon's cultural and natural heritage but also its commitment to international heritage protection standards. We urge the responsible authorities to reconsider and adopt a more sustainable and responsible approach before it is too late.

ICOMOS-Lebanon stands firm in its mission to safeguard Lebanon's heritage and calls upon all stakeholders to ensure the protection of Ouadi Qadisha.

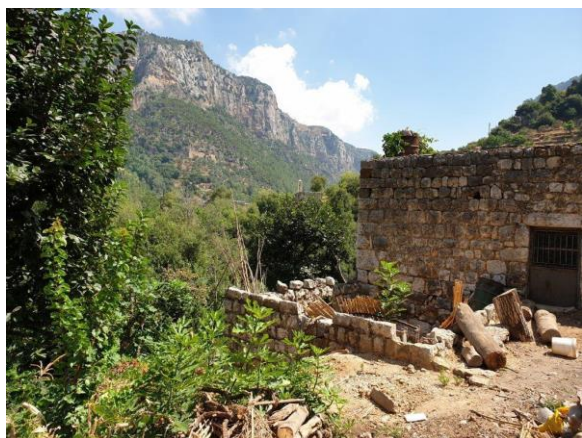
The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit international organization, committed to furthering the conservation, protection, use, and enhancement of the world cultural heritage. As an official advisory body to the World Heritage Committee for the implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS evaluates nominations and advises on the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS Lebanon, as the national committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, is dedicated to the protection and preservation of Lebanon's rich cultural heritage. It serves as a leading voice in promoting the conservation of monuments, sites, and landscapes within the country. Through expert advice, advocacy, and collaboration with national and international entities, ICOMOS Lebanon works to ensure that Lebanon's heritage is safeguarded for future generations. The committee is actively involved in the development of heritage protection policies, raising awareness about the significance of cultural heritage, and supporting the integration of heritage conservation in sustainable development. It also plays a key role in responding to emergencies that threaten Lebanon's cultural heritage and contributes to international heritage initiatives, particularly within the framework of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. icomoslebanon@icomos.org

Note

The Qadisha Valley is one of the most important early Christian monastic settlements in the world. Its monasteries, many of which are of a great age, stand in dramatic positions in a rugged landscape. Nearby are the remains of the great forest of cedars of Lebanon, highly prized in antiquity for the construction of great religious buildings. **UNESCO World Heritage site (listed in 1998).**





Qannoubine Village - Photos credit: J. Yasmine, M.L. Farah