

SUR – The Walled City of Diyarbakir
Conflict, Dispossession and Destruction
Damage Assessment Report

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Introduction:

The Fortress and inner city of Diyarbakir and the adjacent Hevsel Gardens have maintained their importance for thousands of years, due to the strategic location of the city between the East and the West. The multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-layered cultural landscape of the walled city of Sur, today the Sur District, has woven many different cultures into its fabric. The city has been the heart of many civilizations and the regional capital at the time of the Persian, Roman, Sassanian, Byzantine and Islamic empires. Its original civil architecture, religious buildings consisting of mosques, churches and other public buildings such as caravanserais and traditional baths are cultural assets of the city, designated an Urban Conservation Area since 2012. UNESCO declared the City Walls and adjacent Hevsel Gardens a World Heritage Site in 2015, with the walled city being the buffer zone.

In the Sur District, there are 595 registered cultural heritage sites, 147 of them are of monumental/ devotional nature and 448 of them are examples of civil architecture. The Sur District was registered as the “Diyarbakir Urban Conservation Area” in 1988.

The Sur District consists of 15 quarters (or neighbourhoods). In 2015 the total population was 50 341.

The UNESCO World Heritage nomination process of the “Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape” was launched in January of 2012. The Field Management Plan was prepared with the participation of all relevant institutions, organizations, NGOs, scientists and the headmen of the city. “Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape” was registered as a World Heritage Site at the 39th meeting of the World Heritage Committee in July 2015.

Only two months after the designation of the “Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape” as World Heritage, and the Sur Districts as its buffer zone armed clashes broke out, curfew and complete blockade declared in the Cevat Paşa, Dabanoğlu, Fatih Paşa, Hasırlı, Cemal Yılmaz and Savaş neighbourhoods of Sur within the periods 9/6/2015, 9/13/2015, 10/10/2015 – 10/13/2015, 11/28/2015 – 11/29/2015, 12/2/2015 – 12/10/2015 and 12/11/2015. Armed skirmishes, curfew and blockades set up by special police forces and the gendarmerie, continued in five neighbourhoods, and were extended to the neighbourhoods of Ziya Gökalp, Süleyman Nazif, Abdaldede, Lalebey and Alipasha from 27 January 2016 to 03 February 2016. The Diyarbakir governor’s office declared on the 10 March 2016 that operations had come to an end.

Even before the operations had ended, in February 2016, heavy duty bulldozers and excavators started demolition and excavation work in the blockaded neighbourhoods. The debris was carted indiscriminately and dumped on the University campus, near the Tigris river bank, and covered with earth, without allowing for any assessment or approval by Cultural Heritage Protection Board. The Environmental Protection Board of our Municipality made a record of this haphazard procedure on the 29th of February 2016. Thus, in a location which was a registered protection site and buffer zone to a World Heritage Site, without determining the damage, without obtaining permission from the Council for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, demolition, excavation and debris removal were undertaken. The necessary permissions for the removal of the excavation were taken out only about a month later.

In the Resolution No. 3873, dated 23 March 2016 of the Cultural Heritage Conservation Council, it is stated that *“the removal of debris obstructing streetways may be allowed under the supervision of the museum staff; if debris from partially or completely destroyed registered buildings is encountered, then all significant construction elements should be kept at the original site, under the supervision of the museum specialists, for later assessment.”* Nevertheless in an aerial photograph taken by a resident on the 4th of April 2016, and the satellite images obtained by the Greater Diyarbakir Municipality, it is quite clear that this resolution has not been adhered to, that hundreds of buildings have been demolished, wide swathes have been razed to make way for squares and avenues where none existed, that schools have been turned into security stations or military posts. The wide roads now connect these stations.

An appearance of legality was created by conducting the demolition under the supervision of the local personnel of the Culture and Tourism ministry. The demolition, in defiance of the Conservation – Construction Zoning Plan and the Area Management Plan, was conducted without the permission of the Sur municipality, responsible for enforcing these plans.

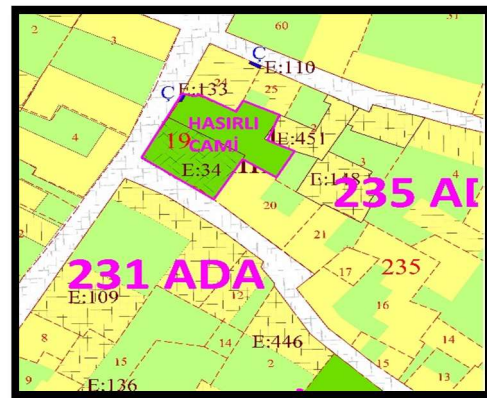
The Sur District is under the protection of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Assets (No. 2863) since it is an Urban Protection Site, and of international law, due to its being the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site (The City Walls and the Hevsel Gardens) In order to demolish any of its registered buildings,

1. The responsible departments must procure, separately for every building to be demolished, an assessment from the Conservation Council, stating that there is immanent danger of collapse,
2. The Municipal construction control technical personnel should draw up a report regarding the demolition of each individual building, which may be in danger of collapsing, according to the Law No. 3194, Article 39.
3. However, in the blockaded neighbourhoods, no technical assessment has been made, neither have the requisite permissions obtained for tearing down the registered buildings from the Conservation Council and the concerned Municipality. These violations of the national and international rules and regulations continue. Without making the measured drawings, the restoration and restitution plans for the registered buildings, the remains of original, characteristic building elements have been dumped outside of Sur, by personnel who have not been trained for this job. Many photographs attest to this fact. The complete disappearance or destruction of some buildings after the demolition are illustrated in the photographs below:

Hasırlı Cami (Mosque):



Photo. 1: Hasırlı Cami (Mosque)



Map 1: Street location of Hasırlı Cami



Photo. 2: From aerial photographs it may be seen that Hasırlı Cami, located at parcel no 235/19 has been completely destroyed and the debris removed, without a trace left in its place.

Armenian Catholic Church:

The bell tower, south courtyard wall, main entrance door, the courtyard located to the west of the church and the church outbuilding of the Armenian Catholic Church, another important registered structure, are completely destroyed and a wide road has been opened in this area. (see below)



Photo. 3:

After the restoration in 2014



Photo. 4:

March 2016

The destruction resulting from razing a road through the church.



Photo. 5: 16 May 2016, another view of the Armenian Catholic Church after part of it has been taken up by the road.

Writer, novelist Mehmet Uzun's House:

The *kabaltı*, or *abbara* (a kind of arch), another example of registered civil architecture, projected to become the Mehmet Uzun Museum. Restoration process begun before the conflict was completely destroyed and the carrying system has been damaged.

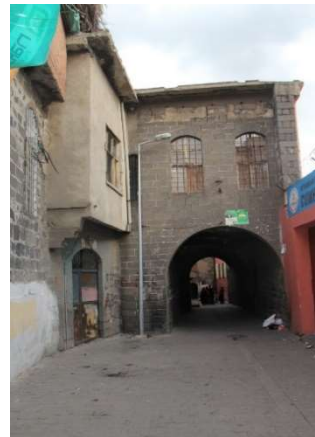


Photo. 6: Restoration works before the demolition, 2015



Photo. 7: Mehmet Uzun House, after demolition. 10.05.2016

Chamber of Trade and Industry building on Yenikapı street:

The southern part of the house has been demolished to widen the Yenikapı street.



Photo. 8: Appearance of the registered building belonging to the Chamber of Trade and Industry, May 2016.



Photo. 9: The Yenikapı street, which kept its original width of 8m before the demolition, has been turned into a 15 m wide street.



Photo. 10: The excavators on Yenikapı street.

Photo. 11: Demolition behind the Leaded Mosque, 16 May '16. 2016)

After the period of armed conflict, the coordinator of the Area Management and the Greater Diyarbakir Municipality repeatedly applied to the Governor of Diyarbakir in order to assess and record the damage, however permission was denied on the grounds that the area was “not safe.”

As a result of the demolition, which has been going on since February 2016, and is still going on as of the writing of this report (16 June 2016), the Sur District, buffer zone of the World Heritage Site and a Registered Urban Site has been turned into a bare flatland. (Photos. 18,19). It has been ascertained, up to July 2016 that 76 registered buildings have been torn down. Likewise, 89 buildings which were under conservation and recorded in the Conservation Plan revised in 2012, since they were part of the urban fabric, were torn down completely. It was observed that the street plan, which gave integrity to the city, as well as the outlines of the original parcelling have been completely obliterated.

At the 17th plenary session of UNESCO which met in Paris between 17 October-21 November 1972, it was noted that cultural heritage was not vulnerable only to natural and traditional causes of depreciation, but that changes in social and economic conditions could give rise to much more threatening conditions of decay and destruction. Therefore it was decided that the member states should use their resources to the utmost in order to avoid this destruction and when necessary, seek financial, artistic, scientific and technical aid and cooperation. However, in Sur, the state in question has carried out demolition, excavation and debris removal with heavy machinery, without even undertaking basic fact finding and technical and scientific reporting of the damage in the wake of the armed conflict. Thus the integrity, authenticity and identity of the historical, cultural texture of the site has been irreparably damaged.

In order to make in situ assessment and recording of the damage, there are ways to collect the data without entering the area in question. Using drones or unmanned aerial vehicles, video recordings and laser scanning techniques as well as satellite images may be used to determine the nature and extent of the damage. Thus, reliable information could have been gathered without the removal of significant building elements from the area. In this way it could have been possible to decide whether certain buildings could be saved without tearing them down, and they could have been restored before all trace of them disappeared. In spite of this, inside the urban historical site, bulldozers and other such equipment buildings registered or otherwise were torn down, roads were created where none existed in the conservation Plan, existing streets were widened and the original plan and of the city destroyed. With the excavations and debris removal which totally wiped out the traces of the buildings in five neighbourhoods which were blockaded, this area has become a faceless flatland, the original texture of the historical city has been irreversibly damaged.

The satellite pictures and those taken from civilian commercial flights on different dates reveal this damage. The total area of Sur is 148 hectares, the blockaded neighbourhoods make up 75 hectares.

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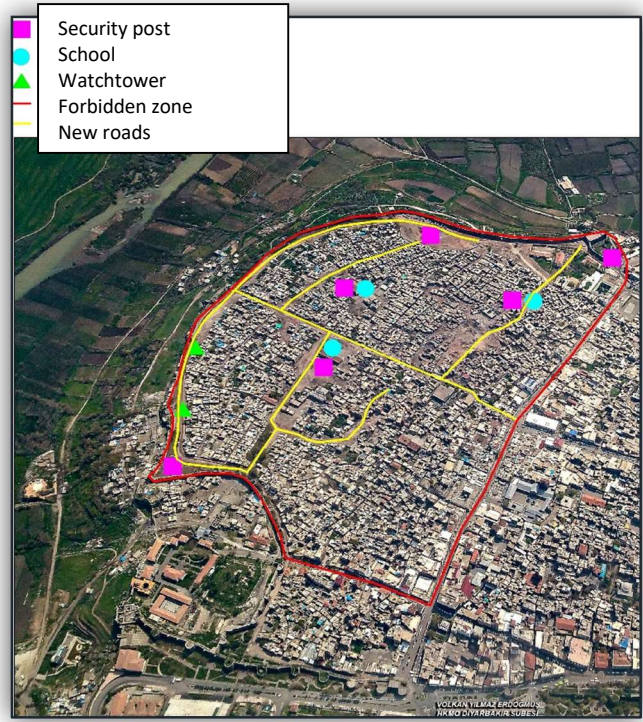


Photo. 12: 2015 Satellite image, before conflict

Photo. 13: April 2016 view, commercial flight

After the operations demolitions were carried out with “security priority”.(Schools were turned into police stations and roads razed to connect these stations.)

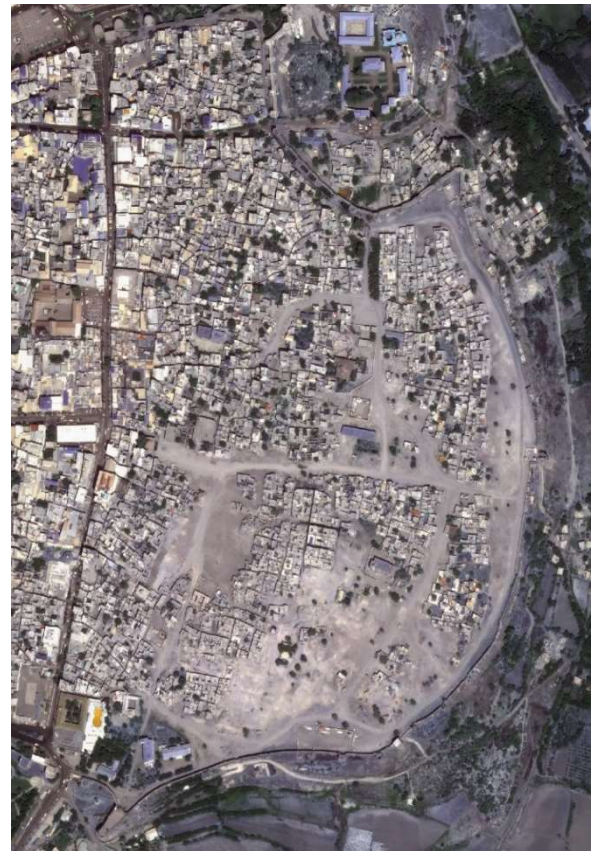


Photo. 14:Satelllite image taken on 10 May 2016, after the termination of the operations.

Photo. 17: 16 August 2016 satellite image.



Photo. 18: 4 April 2017, picture taken from a commercial flight



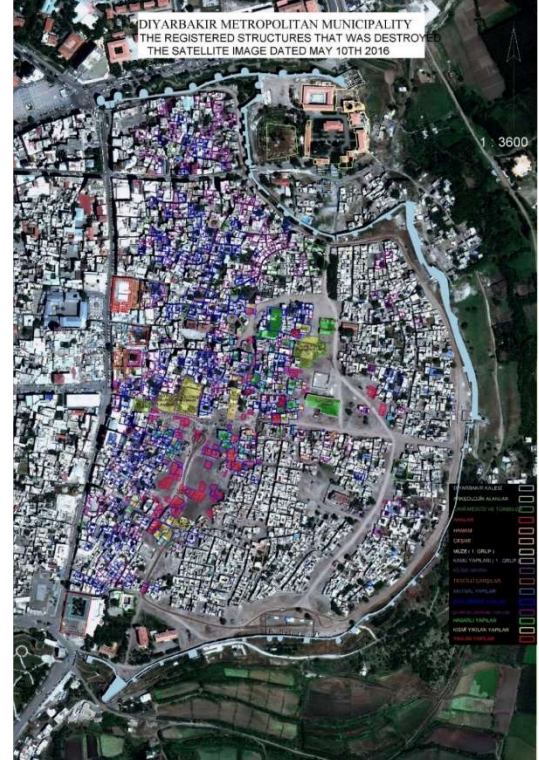
Photo. 19: Inside the walled city, turned into a flatland, 19 April 2017.

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Photo. 20 : 4 May 2017 Aerial photograph.

Total number of parcels of land in Sur is 7714. In the 6 blockaded neighbourhoods this number is 3646. The parcels pertaining to the demolished buildings were documented by superposing the cadastral maps on the satellite images. Satellite images from 10 May 2016 show that 10 hectares have been demolished, whereas in August 2016 the destruction covers 20 hectares. After the appointment of a caretaker administration to the greater Diyarbakir and also Sur municipalities, satellite images are not available but pictures were taken from commercial flights, during landing or take off. (Photos.13 - 20).



Map 2, 3 : (left) 10 May 2016 Sur demolition map, and (right) map showing the locations of registered or otherwise significant buildings which were demolished.

From the aerial and satellite images it has been determined in August 2016 that a total of **1519** structures have been destroyed completely, among them registered civil and monumental buildings. 89

registered sites have been destroyed completely, 40 partially. 41 sites have only been damaged. Of these registered structures 76 are of civil, 13 of monumental and 81 marked as significant for the neighbourhood landscape. These numbers are growing every day.



Map 4 : Satellite image showing demolition. 16 August 2016, Sur.

The devastation of historical Sur took place in two different stages. The first, was the period of armed conflict lasting from 9 September 2015 to 10 March 2016., the second, still continuing stage of demolition and obliteration, which started after the cessation of armed hostilities on 10 March 2016.

In the first stage, heavy weapons, artillery, tanks, bombs and explosives were used. But the irreversible damage was inflicted in the second stage when demolition and excavations uprooted even the foundations of the buildings.

Forced displacement :

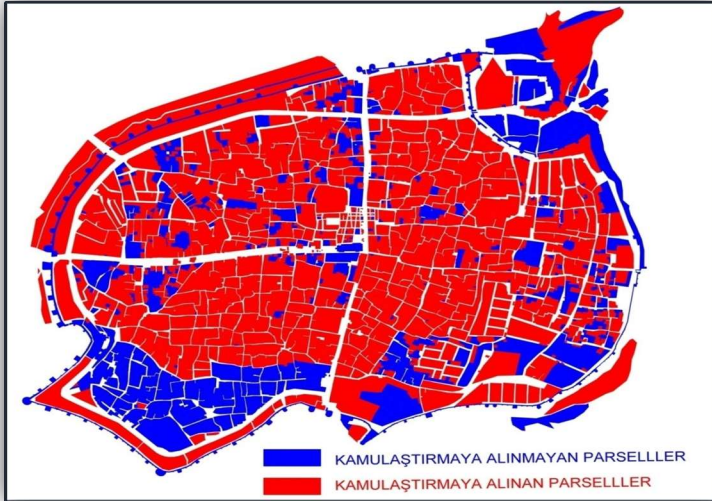
Starting from 9 September 2015, curfew has been declared in Sur six times with brief intervals, and the city blockaded. In this period the security forces have forcibly removed the residents from their houses. Finally, on the 10th of December 2015, the curfew was lifted for a few hours and the residents were forced to leave the area. Thousands of people were thus reduced to refugees in their own city, without any provisions made for housing or essential amenities. The population of Sur, according to the 2015 census was 50,341. Of the six uneighbourhoods where armed clashes took place and where curfew was declared, the population was 22,323, and tis total population has been evicted rom the area. In May 2016, the blockade was lifted in Cevatpaşa and part of Abdaldede neighbourhoods and the residents returned to their homes, however in the five other neighbourhoods the demolition which took place during the blockade has turned these quarters into stretches of barren land.



Photos 21,22: Images of forced eviction from the blockaded quarters.

Requisition Ruling

After the cessation of armed conflict, the Council of Ministers passed, on 21 March 2016, a resolution for the requisitioning of 6292 parcels out of 7714 located in Sur, and the expropriation of their owners.



By this decision, 82% of the parcels in Sur will be requisitioned by the state. A large part of the remaining 18% is in the possession of the Housing Development Administration and the Treasury. As a result, Sur will be entirely passed into public ownership. This also means that the residents of these quarters will most probably not be able to return.

Map 5 : Map of the expropriation. Red indicates the parcels marked for expropriation. Blue indicates those parcels that are not included.

Revision of the Plan for Conservation:

In 1988, Sur was registered as an Urban Conservation Site. In keeping with national and International law, in 1990 the first conservation plan was drawn up, and then revised in 2012. All the stakeholders in the city were able to participate in the work leading up to this revision by the Greater Diyarbakir Municipality. This revision was based on the 1952 cadastral map details. With the cooperation of the Diyarbakir Museum Directorate, all the historical buildings in the area were re-assessed and the records of the registered buildings were brought up to date. Furthermore, landmark buildings in the city scape were designated as “buildings of contextual value” and were included in the conservation plans as protected buildings. This citizen-oriented conservation plan, prioritizing conservation theories and regulations, became an important document in the UNESCO application procedure.

However, in the course of the demolitions which were started in February 2016 and which have been continuing non-stop since March 2016, the conservation plan was revised by fiat by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization in December 2016, without even seeking the consent of the Greater Diyarbakir or local Municipalities, with the purpose of implementing an “urban renewal” project in historical Sur, with a high priority given to “security.” This new security minded “conservation plan,” intends, in effect, to drape a mantle of respectability and legality over the demolitions, the different functionalisation imposed on the neighbourhoods, the widening of the streets and similar undertakings. Accordingly, schools have been turned into police stations, but no alternative educational areas have been set aside. The streets connecting the police stations to each other have been widened enough to allow the passage of military vehicles, and tanks. On Yenikapı street, a street thick with registered buildings and originally 7-8 m wide, demolitions were carried out in order to widen it to 15 m.

The revised plan has been examined by the Diyarbakir branch of the Chambers of Architects and Engineers of Turkey (TMMOB). The report has found 17 different violations of urban and conservationist norms. (http://www.dimod.org.tr/mimarlarodasi/haber_detay.asp?id=314) A sample of the criticisms put forth by the TMMOB Diyarbakir branch, is provided below.

Item 3: The changes introduced in the said “Conservation Plan Revision” (KAIPD) are all justified on grounds of security, and thus planning is reduced to an instrument of “defence.” This security-centred approach ignores all other considerations and violates the principles of urban planning, the basics of interdisciplinary planning and public benefit.

Item 4:

An examination of the plan revision justification report reveals that the justification consists only of security considerations, and that it takes no account of Sur as a World Heritage Site where any interventions to the urban fabric will give rise to irreversible losses. The plan report is therefore ridden with inconsistencies. While in the preamble, the unique values of the city are extolled, in the rest, measures are proposed for defending the city against its inhabitants, who are first and foremost the creators of those values. In order to build the structures for this purpose, the unique assets of the city are being impaired, and an area which is (the buffer zone of) a World Heritage Site is being treated in a way totally out of keeping with its universal designation.

Item 7:

In Article 3.15 of the KAIPD, it is stated that in the planning area, the “urban design projects” which will be carried out in the areas indicated by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization (CSB) are annexes of the plan revision, and be subject to the guidelines foreseen for Urban Design Projects. In two articles 3.31.1 and 3.31.2, it is said, first, that “the size, situation and function of buildings outside of the registered parcels may be decided without needing any plan revisions,” and secondly, that “The implementation of all the closed and open spaces designated by the Ministry (CSB) will be according to the Urban Design Project annexed to the plan revision.” Thus, projects which do not even exist at the moment, and have not been through any approval process, are to be considered annexes to this revision plan. This means a totally unsupervised set of projects to be implemented in Sur, a situation totally contrary to any planning principles.

Item 15:

No global decisions have been taken in the KAIPD regarding the “Urban Design Projects” so that the integrity of the revision plan is very much in question. Furthermore, the traditional urban structure will be freely tampered with under these conditions.

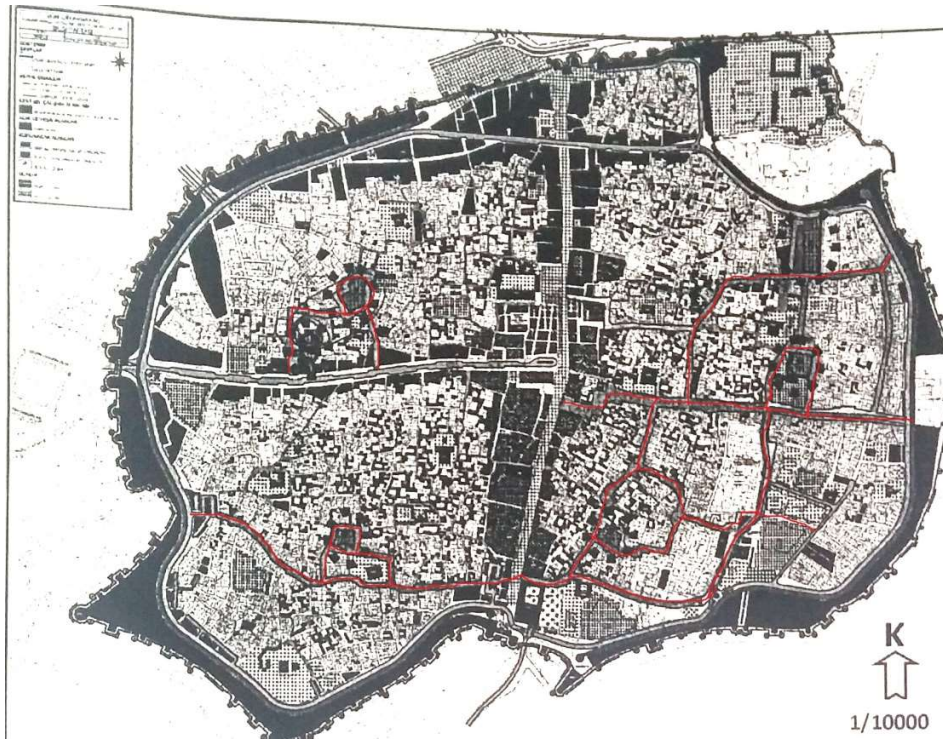
Item 16:

In the KAIPD explanatory notes, as a justification for the demolition of buildings in order to widen streets and make way for new roads, it is said that “roads to facilitate the passage of vehicles for

security and other services, fire fighting equipment and ambulances, are not available.” However, in the revised conservation plan (KAIPD) it is clearly seen that the new roads serve only the "Security Service Areas" foreseen in the plan revision. Moreover, in a city like Sur, with an ancient urban fabric, public services such as firefighting or ambulatory services could very well be met by modern technological innovations; , instead, what is being done in the KAIPD decisions is to try to legitimize demolitions clearly in conflict with conservation principles, by putting forward certain public needs.



Map 6: 2012 Revised Conservation Plan



Map 7: December 2016, Revised Conservation Plan

Harmful projects which have been resuscitated:

1. Urban renewal and the Tigris Valley Project:

On the 22nd of October 2012, Sur was declared, by Ruling No. 3900 of the Council of Ministers, an area under “disaster risk” according to the Law No. 6306, dealing with the “Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk.” In this way, Sur was included in the areas to undergo Urban Renewal. In order to provide housing for the residents of the buildings to be demolished as part of this process of urban renewal, it was decided to create a reserve housing construction area. Studies were undertaken and the **Tigris Valley was chosen as the area where new housing would be built.**

However, the fact that the execution of the “urban renewal” plan in Sur would harm the Urban Conservation Area and the unique cultural fabric of the city, as well as considerations regarding the UNESCO World Heritage candidacy of Diyarbakir Fortress (city walls) and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape, the city decided to cancel the Tigris Valley project. The Greater Diyarbakir Municipality and the Chamber of Architects of Diyarbakir took the designation of the Tigris Valley as a reserve building area to court, and obtained an annulment of the decision. In the same context, the urban renewal project was suspended, thanks to the efforts of the Area Conservation Administration and various civil societal organizations.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the demolitions and the requisitioning of the land, both the urban renewal project and the Tigris Valley Project were once more put into effect. The first stage of the Tigris Valley Project has started right next to the Bridge with Ten Arches (spanning the Tigris), which is right inside the World Heritage area. The Project includes the building of a mosque, a car park and restaurants.



Photo. 23 : Work being conducted on the Bridge with Ten Arches, part of the Diyarbakir World Heritage Cultural Landscape (26 March 2017).



Photo. 24: Tigris Valley Project first stage (22 May 2017).

2. The construction of new houses:

Reinforced concrete housing, which in complete dissonance with the historical city fabric and the traditional Diyarbakir houses, is being built in areas which have been razed and turned into construction lots. These houses clearly violate norms of the Urban Conservation Plan; the situation of the buildings, the dimensions of the courtyards and the walls do not respect the street and parcel proportions. Instead of basalt blocks, the traditional building material in the city, thin slabs of basalt are being used to dress the concrete walls. The exterior appearance of the buildings has nothing to do with the traditional street view of Diyarbakir. Moreover, the forced eviction of the inhabitants, the demolition of thousands of houses and the expropriation clearly indicate that the true owners of Sur will never be allowed to return to their homes again. But who, then, will be living in these new houses? It is obvious that the aim is to transform the political and demographic structure.



Photo. 25: New houses being built in Sur.



Photo. 26: In spite of the stipulation by the conservation Plan, that concrete houses with a deceptive thin stone facing are not to be allowed, the picture shows new reinforced concrete houses coated with basaltic slabs.

3. The Inner Fortress recreational area project

According to a project started in 2000, it was decided that the Inner Fortress, which is an integral part of the city walls now designated World Heritage, would be dedicated to cultural and touristic activities. It was planned that in the first stage of the project, the part of the Inner Fortress encircled by walls from the Artuklu (medieval) period would be a museum area. In the second stage, the part encircled by Ottoman walls would be cleared of modern makeshift buildings and would be turned into an Archaeological Park, together with the Amida (ancient name of Diyarbakir) Tumulus, with the intention of eventually unearthing the much earlier layers and structures, whose existence within the fortress have been ascertained. This functionalization and conservation plan was included in the UNESCO candidacy folder as well as the Area Management Plan. What we see today is that a registered building within the area

intended for the second stage has first been de-registered and then demolished, the cleared space has been designed as a modern park. Meanwhile heavy machinery have been used to excavate and level the are, and many trees with extensive roots have been planted. All of these interventions have a high probability of damaging the archaeological remains.



Photo. 27: View of the registered building still standing next to the Inner Fortress (Ickale) Mosque.



Photo. 28: The modern park in the Inner Fortress. The registered building next to the mosque (Photo. 27) has been torn down.

CONCLUSIONS:

Sur has been inhabited uninterruptedly for eight millennia and was the centre of production and the commercial life of the city. It was the place where traditional products brought from rural areas were sold as well as being the centre of artisanal production of jewellery, copper working, forging and silk weaving. Sur is the collective memory of Diyarbakir. In the 1990's, a huge number of people fleeing from the persecution of Kurdish villages flooded Diyarbakir, and Sur in particular. A decade later, from 2000 on, new attitudes, pursuits and an urban life style were already established; interest in and desire for the protection of cultural heritage was on the rise in Sur and this reactivated the socio-economic and cultural life. Municipalities, public institutions, NGOs, and private entrepreneurs led the restoration and functionalization of cultural heritage sites. The awareness for preserving the historical

city gave rise to many projects developed concordantly with Sur's registration as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015.

The Area Management Plan, and the Conservation Plan revised in 2012, and which were submitted to UNESCO together with the World Heritage candidacy documents, however, have never been put into effect. We also have doubts that the December 2016 revision of the Conservation Plan, intended to legitimize the damage that has been done to the city, has ever been submitted to UNESCO.

Freeholders in Sur are being forced into selling their properties through expropriation threats violating their property rights and their right of choice regarding where to live. Damage assessment of the registered structures heavily damaged as a result of conflict in Sur needs to be conducted by a team consisting of representatives of the people living in Sur, scientists, the Area Management Department for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Diyarbakir and municipal experts. This has not been done. Moreover, the principle of participation by the inhabitants has been totally disregarded in the re-planning of Sur, and decisions are being made in a highly centralized manner.

With the latest armed conflict and subsequent deliberate devastation of the walled city, the original street fabric and the integrity of the city block- parcel structure have been irretrievably erased. The expropriation by government decree, and the subsequent forced exodus which have taken place, threaten to change the social, economic and demographic structure, break the cultural continuity and wipe out the collective memory of the city formed over thousands of years

URGENT MEASURES NEEDED IN SUR

1. Ground-based and aerial land surveys, with up to date technology, should be conducted in the area, in order to collect reliable data.

2. The "urgent requisitioning (expropriation) decision" should be immediately rescinded. The many millennia-long, uninterrupted habitation of Sur should be respected and restored, by conserving the demographic structure through ensuring the return of the city dwellers, who are the current transmitters of the cultural accumulation, and undertaking human-oriented measures to raise the living standards.

3. The implementation of the strategic Area Management Plan, which was designed in order to conserve the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and approved by UNESCO.

4. The Conservation Plan adopted in 2012 should be put back into effect. This Conservation Plan is based on cadastral maps from 1952 and was drawn up with the intention of recovering the original physical structure of Sur, respecting the original street, block and parcel delineations, and in this process rehabilitating and transforming, *in situ*, low-quality urban growth, and reducing traffic and other congestion. By preserving the traditional street, parcel and block dimensions, it will be possible to reconstruct the traditional urban plan which existed ever since Roman times, in the areas which have been totally demolished.

5. Human-oriented rehabilitation plans should be elaborated for the remaining part of Sur, rather than "Urban Renewal Projects."

6. Measures should be undertaken for the re-vitalization of the socio-economic and cultural life of the city.

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7. The destruction and devastation of Sur should never again be repeated. For this, concerted efforts should be made to contact, inform and cooperate with such international organizations as the United nations, UNESCO and ICOMOS.