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Ms. Berta de Sancristóbal
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Dear Ms. de Sancristóbal,

We are writing to you as concerned citizens of Sweden playing an active role in protecting Sweden's first World Heritage site in the area known as Drottningholm. We have chosen to write to you as, from the UNESCO World Heritage Center's web pages, you, as Head of Unit for Europe, seem responsible for European World Heritage matters. We are also copying Mr. Assomo, the Director of UNESCO World Heritage, the Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Sweden to UNESCO, the Swedish National Commission for UNESCO, The Swedish National Heritage Board, The Royal Court of Sweden, and the Ministry of Finance of the Government of Sweden for reasons that we will explain, below.

Since 2004, our family has owned a house (Drottningholm 1:57) built during the 1740s that is part of the Drottningholm World Heritage complex, which includes Drottningholm Palace, the current home of the King and Queen of Sweden. The house was initially known as "Snickarbostället" or The Carpenter's House, later renamed as "Lilla skolan" or "Little School" as Queen Desideria of Sweden established a school here during the 19th century. Our house is one of the oldest in the Drottningholm World Heritage complex, apart from the Palace itself. We lease the land upon which the house is built and the surrounding garden from a public sector agency known as the National Property Board (SFV), which falls under Sweden's Department of Finance.

During the years that we have lived here, we have invested considerable private resources for the upkeep of the house and the land, respecting its World Heritage status. Thus, SFV effectively benefits from cost-free maintenance of an important site that visitors to this area enjoy stopping to peruse, as it is included in guidebooks of the area.

The land lease renews on a 10-year basis. Unfortunately, since 2013 SFV has been increasing the rates by levels previously unheard of, which, according to Article 6 of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, can be considered deliberate damage to cultural heritage, as we will explain below.

In October 2022, we were issued a court summons by SFV which demanded a 234% increase in the land lease from an already high level (it was increased by 85 % a decade ago). After that, we approached SFV requesting the opportunity to purchase the land. This was refused because the land is part of World Heritage. SFV's approach will lead to the degradation of a UNESCO World Heritage site by burdening the leaseholders of the land with rental rates that no private actor can or will want

to sustain, irrespective of their financial resources. By making the house virtually unsellable, they make the conservation of the property ever more unlikely over time. We have informed the Ministry of Finance, but they do not seem to understand the grave problem.

We want to highlight two further problems this raises for UNESCO World Heritage. One is that, in this case, SFV, a public sector agency that should be engaged in the conservation of World Heritage sites, is weaponizing World Heritage to extract damaging leases from private individuals who are doing their part to conserve a site. We believe the term weaponize is appropriate as SFV uses our home's World Heritage status as its primary argument for why the land is not available for sale, thus trapping the leaseholder in a situation where they are forced to pay a dramatically higher lease with no viable exit.

The second problem relates more generally to the ways in which SFV's behavior, in this case, works against the principles upon which the UN system overall is based; the principles of non-discrimination and the rights of the individual are both seriously threatened. SFV manages other World Heritage properties in the Drottningholm area and applies radically different criteria to them, resulting in dramatically lower costs to the leaseholders than we are required to endure. SFV argues that these other properties, including our neighboring property, fall under different paragraphs in the land law. Still, all the properties are World Heritage and part of the same complex, making the discrimination particularly glaring. SFV's discriminatory treatment of lessees has recently been highlighted by a respected investigative journalism program entitled *Uppdrag Granskning*. Furthermore, the substantial capital we have invested in purchasing the house and maintaining the entire property is indirectly being confiscated, which is an infringement of human rights, based on Article 17 of the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Human Rights.

Our case has already been highlighted by Sweden's two largest daily newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*; in the former publication, it was front page news and thus now widely discussed in the Swedish public space. The case is set to receive more media attention, partly as it has been well-known for many years that Sweden's laws concerning land leases are inadequate, allowing abuses by agencies such as SFV, and urgently need reform. A 2012 evaluation concluded that changes were required, but none were made to avoid intervention in the affairs of municipalities, also leasing agencies. In the event, municipalities have become self-regulating because the public elects their officials. SFV, on the other hand, has no such pressures. It claims to be market-oriented, but if it were, the increase would be a fraction of what they demand from us, commensurate with the system used by 90% of other public sector leasing agencies. So far as we know, ours is the only case highlighted by the media that is a World Heritage property, but sadly, it is also regarded by Swedish legal experts as the worst shock increase they have seen. In short, this is not good for UNESCO World Heritage.

According to your website, UNESCO World Heritage relies on citizens to play an active role in conserving and maintaining World Heritage sites. We have willingly played that role for eighteen years with no outside contributions. But, unfortunately, the Swedish government, which takes no financial responsibility for our property and seems intent only on profiting from it, is making it increasingly difficult for us to do that. Therefore, we are appealing to you to intervene so that the Swedish agencies concerned can be reminded of their responsibilities and that World Heritage will continue to be respected.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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