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November 18, 2023

Director-General Audrey Azoulay
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
7 place Fontenoy, 75007 Paris, France.

Dear Director-General Azoulay,

Subject: Urgent Appeal for UNESCO's Intervention in Protecting the Lalibela Churches in Ethiopia

The Amhara Association of Oregon expresses its profound concern over the destruction and damage inflicted on the historic Lalibela rock-hewn churches in Ethiopia, a UNESCO World Heritage site, by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces. This distressing situation signifies a loss of cultural heritage not only for Ethiopia but for all of humanity.

Confirmed news reports reveal that the ancient monuments have sustained damages from the use of heavy weaponry by the Ethiopian military in the ongoing conflict in the region, which erupted after the federal government deployed its army. The revered Lalibela churches, celebrated for their historical, cultural, and architectural significance, now face the threat of irreparable damage. This critical situation not only jeopardizes these invaluable structures but also undermines the cultural identity and heritage they represent.

We urge UNESCO to:

1. Publicly condemn the damage caused to the Lalibela churches and highlight the need for their immediate protection.
2. Urge the Ethiopian government to withdraw its forces from the region to ensure the safeguarding of these historical sites from further damage.
3. Deploy a team of experts to assess the extent of the damage and develop a restoration plan.
4. Provide technical and financial support for the restoration and conservation of the Lalibela churches.

5. Facilitate international collaboration to preserve this World Heritage site, emphasizing its universal value.

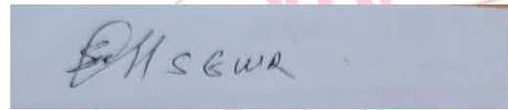
The loss of the Lalibela churches would be an irreversible detriment to world heritage. As a community with close ties to the Amhara region and Ethiopia, we implore UNESCO to take swift and decisive action to protect these iconic structures.

We are committed to supporting UNESCO's efforts in any way we can and look forward to seeing proactive measures taken to preserve this irreplaceable part of our world heritage.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We eagerly await your response and the actions you will undertake to protect the Lalibela churches.

Sincerely,

Sileshi W Rufael



President, Amhara Association of Oregon

CC: General Secretary António Guterres

U.S. National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites
World Heritage USA

