

Barcelona - Perpinyà, July 1st, 2008

**Attn: Ms Lidia Klupsz**  
President of ICOMOS

Dear Ms Klupsz,

Your opinion within ICOMOS (International Committee for Monuments and Sites) with regards the French government proposal to include the fortifications of Vauban in the World Heritage List, and more particularly the ones in Mont-Louis and Villefranche, Northern Catalonia, (France, *Département des Pyrénées Orientales*) will be decisive.

As a member of the association "*No a Vauban a la UNESCO*" formed in January 2007 and as a Councillor of "Catalonia Action", I am able to let you know the opposition to this project of a part of the population. The constitution of a large dossier (articles, interviews, leaflets and stickers), a demonstration of 800 strong on the streets of Perpignan, region capital in November 2007 and the publication of hundreds of letters rejecting the project sent from several European countries to Mr Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, show it. Weekly magazine *La Semaine*, head lighted in front page (num. 716: 28.02/05.03.08): "Classification at UNESCO, Vauban controversy" and a whole page of the folder "A language and cultural genocide".

The association "*No a Vauban a la UNESCO*" and "Catalonia Action" denounces that the two main objectives of the French government masked behind an apparent promotion of the architectural patrimony. First, to obtain support from UNESCO to credit the positive aspects of colonization with regards to promoting a "genius", but even more serious, as "humanist", a soldier responsible for repression. Second, as internal French politics, enrich French nationalism by creating a new myth by justifying forgery of History imposed to Catalan territories conquered in XVII Century.

### **Mystification of Vauban in France**

Following the promoters of the candidature "the most representative sites of Vauban adhere to UNESCO's requirements" because "they represent a masterpiece of the human genius. The sites would clarify one of the most significance periods in human History. His work has international value".

But we feel it is unacceptable and unthinkable that Vauban has been presented for more than a year in all French media as a "humanist". He was military engineer, Deputy General to the Armies to absolutist king Louis XIV and General Fortress Commissioner, responsible of the defensive system and, therefore, repressive. He was 53 years in service of a despot whose armies plundered several European countries before conquest. He built 151 fortresses and participated in 50 sieges, not precisely on benefit of the besieged territories and the defeated populations, victims of fierce repression. His pretended "universal value" falls, then, in glorifying the Army and the defence of imperialism, and we do not think that these are main objectives of UNESCO.

## **The conquest of Catalonia**

With the Treaty of Pyrenees (1659) Louis XIV completed the annexation of the Northern counties of Catalonia, already desired and assaulted by the French monarchy since the XIII Century. He had to suppress, since 1661, Catalan national commotion, as testified in the work of Historian Professor A. Marcet-Juncosa, specialist in this period. This commotion finalized in Villefranche in 1674. The creation and imposition of an artificial border, the beginning of a draconian political and economical repression in the North would allow Franco-spanish troops the conquest of the rest of Catalonia a few years later (falls of Almansa and Barcelona 1707/1714), the eradication of Catalan constitutions and, Louis XIV, to put his grandson, Philip V in the Spanish throne. Three hundred years later it is the same Borbon dynasty which sits still there.

So they begin, as well as in the North as in the South of the Pyrenees, genocide politics based on the repression of millennial language and traditions and the dismantling of one of the oldest institutions in Europe.

Nowadays, the territories conquered by Louis XIV, that we call Northern Catalonia, have become one of the poorest regions in France. Usage of Catalan, which is not recognized as a language by French Constitution, is in danger of becoming extinct.

The population, deprived from Historical memory, suffers a process of acculturation from 349 years ago, reinforced by the mystification of the conquerors and glorification of militarization.

## **Historical forgery and manipulation**

Media campaign orchestrated by the highest political institutions in Northern Catalonia: Regional Council and General Council, has been from amplitude without precedent and widely funded. Specific jobs have been created for a maximal spread of official propaganda, generating a real media bombing: sumptuous posters and publications, TV and radio programmes, promotion of accomplice authors' work... school rewards and prizes, grants, organization of shows and even tablecloths for restaurants. All this evidence the intention of mystification of the "genius" Vauban and the shameful forgery of our History. In any of these costly panegyrics distributed by the Tourism Office, nothing is said about destruction of castles, convents, entire towns, plunders and tortures... corollaries of any military conquest. The indoctrination consists to making believe the population that was "French" and that the fortifications of Vauban protected it of the incursions of the "Spaniard" invader. Only by looking to a map, one may realise straight away that Vauban's fortresses in Villefranche and Mont-Louis, far from the new border, do not guarantee French security; they were military bases in strategic corridors to hinder Catalans' union and make front to invaders.

The campaign has reinforced colonization by concealing resistance to French occupation.

## **The case of the two Northern Catalonia fortresses**

**Villefranche:** the fortification was not built but reinforced by Vauban. The responsible military engineer J. de Borelly demolished a magnificent Franciscan convent (XII-XIV centuries) with 44 marble columns to make space for a glacis to exercise the troops, as it is highlighted by Professor G. Mallet in the article "Essay of reconstruction of a cloister victim of the Treaty of Pyrenees": that this convent "was demolished because it hindered fortification works projected by Vauban, but the essential reason was to displace the monks for a better surveillance, because there were suspicions that they were hostile towards French crown", ("Le Roussillon, from Marca Hispanica to Pyrenees Orientales", 1996).

All of the official documents fail to mention this destruction.

**Mont-Louis:** for the construction of this fortress (1681), named after the conqueror king Louis XIV "the Sun King", the town and castle of Ovança were demolished. The objective of the fortresses was to control the communication pathways between high and medium lands, respectively Cerdanya and Conflent and stop the junction of troops of liberation. All the published documents fail to mention this demolition.

Since then, Catalan presence within French Army is constant. The citadel has preserved its military objective until today, it has even increased its meaning since 1964 by being "CNEC" or "National Centre for Training of Commandoes", where 3000 troops are trained yearly in extreme combat conditions.

The association "*No a Vauban a la UNESCO*" and "Catalonia Action" are infuriated with the application of Mont-Louis to the List alongside 13 other fortresses made by French government. In fact, even French Army was against this citadel nomination and the one in Bayonne, because of the presence of a special operations commanding unit in each one and against nomination of fortress in Lille, the so-called "queen of fortresses" by Vauban himself because is host to a NATO commanding centre, considered incompatible with UNESCO policies.

The Army is "willing to protect their buildings without limitations" and opposed initially to the nomination though finally gave up to that in front of the pressure by Mayor of Mont-Louis, former soldier, who closely intervened with French Minister of Defence Herve Morin. He was invited with great pomp, presence of USAP players (the most significant sports team in the region) disguised as soldiers. The Minister of Defence qualified the fortress as "mythical place for the French Army" (*l'Indépendant* 21.07.08) local most read local press. The Mayor of Mont-Louis had to make use of his best discernment to convince the Minister of Defence that the inclusion of the fortress in the List will not have any consequence over the Special Operations National Training Centre.

In addition to that, in summer 2007 he started a campaign to gain popular support. Incredible: make people laugh at spilled blood.

## Conclusion

The inclusion of Vauban's work to World Heritage List allows French regional and departmental authorities to glorify imperialist Louis XIV politics, to pretend that Vauban was "genius" and "humanist", but who was, in fact, architect of military repression and who modernized the design of bayonet and was responsible of multiple sieges and plunders around Europe for 50 years.

This candidature also justifies French presence, 350 years after conquest, at the Royal Castle in Perpignan, the most representative remains of our sovereignty. In a wider ideological framework, it promotes military defence "as one of the essential principles of citizenship" (leaflet freely distributed in High Schools).

It is a media to assimilate conquest wars to humanitarian missions, idolize State borders and in our case, perpetuate the hiding of Catalanian's own History, hiding it to the thousands of tourists that will be shamefully manipulated instead of being properly informed. Without memory there is no identity.

As the association "*No a Vauban a la UNESCO*" and as "Catalonia Action", we require respect to the right to recover Catalan historical memory, tarnished in the name of UNESCO in the mark of France's "Vauban year campaign".

We wish the formation of a Commission for the Truth similar to Valencia (February 2007) in which Federico Mayor Zaragoza, president of the Foundation for Culture and Peace and Director-General of UNESCO 1987-1999 declared: "Truth, and only truth, makes free and complete citizens, not spectators. Ignorance makes them captive and subject. Now it is time of citizens and not subjects", (Supplement *El Temps* magazine, number 1184).

We are convinced that "democracy will never be constructed under accomplice silence with the executioners", as said by Professor of University of Valencia J. L. Barona, and please do not hesitate to contact us should you require further information regarding our sources.

We are pleased in advance of a voting that will take into consideration the ideals promoted by UNESCO and respectful with legitimate rights of Catalan people, still denied by French Constitution.

Yours faithfully,

Daniela Grau  
Councillor of Catalonia Action  
Member of "No a Vauban a la Unesco"  
(Northern Catalonia)  
Catalonia