

NGO says Tyre reconstruction ‘mutilating’ historic port March 07, 2012

By **Mohammed Zaatari** -The Daily Star



The new structure is taking shape at Tyre’s port.(The Daily Star/ Mohammad Zaatari)

TYRE, Lebanon: The reconstruction of the Fishermen Union’s office building in the area surrounding Tyre’s old port has met with objections from an association dedicated to preserving the city’s historical heritage. The International Association to Save Tyre is protesting “mutilating the Phoenician port and bridging parts of it, which contradicts the principle of preserving heritage sites,” and has led to UNESCO threatening to take Tyre off the list of World Heritage Sites. Meanwhile, Tyre’s municipality is stressing the need to reconstruct the union’s building, which was built in the late 1980s. According to the construction manager at Madnat Contracting Company, Adham Mahmoudy, the new building is being constructed on the ruins of the old building according to standards that take into consideration the character of the place and the maritime facade.

“We are not going anywhere near the historical [heritage] site and we are not building on any heritage spot. We are only constructing a new building instead of the old one. We are not destroying ruins or digging any up,” Mahmoudy added. According to the head of the municipal union of Tyre, Abdel-Mohsen Husseini, “they [the association] are against development. We are the protectors of the city and its heritage. Where were they living when we protected Tyre from all the mutilation it underwent during the Israeli occupation? I regret that those who issued the statement are against Tyre. They increased destruction in Tyre.”

In light of the dispute, a meeting was held last week at Tyre’s municipality, which included Tyre Mayor Hasan Dbouq, and a number of figures involved in the project. In the meeting, it was decided that construction should continue, while making an amendment to reduce the size of construction and focus more on aesthetics. “The building will represent a professional and social front and show the city’s character and heritage by preserving the profession of fishing and fishermen’s tools which will be displayed to tourists and visitors in the lower part of the building,” Dbouq said. According to Dbouq, there is no alternative location for the facility, with the municipality unable to acquire any building in the area. “The building will take into consideration the aesthetic and heritage side and will be in harmony with the surrounding,” Dbouq said. Following an invitation from head of the heritage association, Maha al-Khalil Chalabi, Rodi Kratsa, one of the European Parliament vice presidents, and Marie-Therese Sanchez-Schmid, member of the European Parliament from the French city of Perpignan, twinned with Tyre, met over the weekend with Culture Minister Gaby Layyoun and Metn MP Ghassan Moukheiber. Following the meeting, according to a statement from the International Association to Save Tyre, Kratsa, a member of the Heritage Commission in the Mediterranean, has “committed to urgently address the issue of the disastrous works underway in the

Port of Tyre, by initiating a process of interpellation in the European Parliament.” Sanchez-Schmid also voiced her willingness to “cease any cooperation with the city of Tyre, if the project within the port is not canceled immediately.”