

Committee issues final decision: Townhouse building to be restored

Wednesday, April 13, 2016 - 16:04

By: [Mada Masr](#)

The demolition of the partially collapsed building in downtown Cairo that houses the Townhouse gallery, six families and several workshops was halted on Wednesday afternoon after a specialized committee issued a decision declaring the building safe and approving its restoration.

The decision is final, said Ashraf Mohamed, a lawyer working on behalf of the tenants, and lawyers will obtain a license to begin restoration on Thursday.

The southeast corner of the late-19th-century building had [collapsed on April 6](#), with no lives lost or anyone seriously injured. Despite the involvement of the National Organization for Urban Harmony, which protects heritage sites, municipality workers started destroying the building's interior on Monday under the protection of security forces.

Pursuant to an official appeal made by the tenants' lawyers, a committee arrived Wednesday morning to inspect the building and issue a final decision, said Reham Samir, a lawyer who is also working with the tenants. The committee consists of a judge, two engineers and a representative from the municipality, she explained.

"They looked everywhere, and went into all the apartments and rooms, unlike the municipality committee that came to inspect on Saturday," former Townhouse employee Mido Sadek told Mada Masr, referring to another committee that had previously issued a memo saying the building in its current state endangers people's lives. According to Sadek, the first committee did not really inspect the five-storey building, but just took a look from the entrance.

"The committee that came today are experienced engineers and assessed the entire building," said Youssra Mounir, 30, who has lived in the building for five years. "They told us that it's stable."

The committee told the municipality representative, who has been in charge of carrying out the pre-demolition clearing since Monday, that the building is not in a dangerous state and that the demolition was illegal because they did not have an official demolition license, according to Sadek.

"After this conversation the police and municipality left the area," Sadek said, adding that the judge from the committee will sign an official documentation of the decision tomorrow so that the application for the restoration license can go ahead.

According to Mounir, the partial collapse was due to plumbing issues and the fact that a tenant had been using steel construction material, although the building is built with wood and stone.

Omar Nagati, architect and cofounder of downtown-based Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research ([CLUSTER](#)) told Mada Masr on Wednesday afternoon that, in his opinion, the building does not need to be demolished.

Nagati had supported the tenants (and the volunteer group assisting them) in reaching out to Sohair Hawas, the previous head of the National Organisation for Urban Heritage and now the Cairo governor's consultant on urban heritage, prompting Deputy Governor Mohamed Amin Abdel-Tawab to [visit the building on Sunday](#).

Nagati explained that most downtown Cairo buildings are not listed as monuments but as buildings with architectural heritage value under the mandate of the National Organization for Urban Heritage.

"Even though [the Nabrawy building] is not listed yet we wanted to see if it would be eligible," Nagati explained. "Before demolition there should be a proper assessment of not only its architectural but cultural value as well."

A stand-off had taken place on Saturday between tenants and municipality representatives after the initial demolition memo was issued, as the tenants refused to accept a legally non-binding memo or an inadequate assessment of the building.

On Sunday, the deputy governor assured tenants that the governorate would send a new committee to carry out a proper assessment in two days, and the building would not be demolished until due process was carried out.

In spite of the fact that the tenants had a document from NOUH saying that the building was being considered for heritage site status, the municipality sent armed police to the site on Monday, forcing remaining tenants out of the building, causing damage to floors and removing doors and windows.