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November 6, 2023

Scientific Basis of ICOMOS Heritage Alert issued on Sept. 7, 2023
– Urban Forest of Jingu Gaien, Tokyo, Japan

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The President of ICOMOS, the President of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes and the President of ICOMOS Japan, jointly issued Heritage Alert for Jingu Gaien, Tokyo, Japan on September 7 in 2023. On September 29, developers posted "Developers' Position" on the internet, and ICOMOS Japan released the scientific basis of Heritage Alert on Oct. 4. <https://icomosjapan.org/work4/> .

This Heritage Alert became a significant social issue in Japan. On October 31, in response to an urgent request from the Diet Members Caucus and the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Members Caucus, ICOMOS Japan held a briefing session on the scientific basis for the Heritage Alert at the House of Representatives building. This session was posted on the web, giving many people the opportunity to learn more about ICOMOS Heritage Alert. The contents are as follows.

First, developers stated that the forest to be cut down is only 5,000 square meters. Therefore, there is no problem.

However, developers had not prepared an "existing vegetation map" as required by the environmental assessment. This does not allow for an accurate assessment of forest conditions and the impact of development. Therefore, ICOMOS Japan took the academic survey and made the "existing vegetation map" in May 2023, and explained the characteristics of the forest ecosystem and clarified that the forest would be completely destroyed by the development (Ref 1).

Second, developers mentioned that it was not possible to identify which trees were more than 100 years old. In other words, it became clear that the plan was to construct sports facilities without taking care of the age of trees. Based on records of the founding of Jingu Gaien, photographs, data from the current tree surveys, ICOMOS Japan compiled a list of trees estimated to be 100 years old or older.

As an example of the historical tree, a detailed description of the Hitotsubatago (*Chionanthus retusus*), which existed in Jingu Gaien since Edo era (1800's), and designated as natural monument in 1924. *Chionanthus retusus* is a delicate tree, and breeding methods had developed in the 1920's, and continued through the second and third generations until today. The current *Chionanthus retusus* is officially listed as the third generation, since the second generation died in 2015.



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However, scientific research conducted by ICOMOS Japan in May 2023 has revealed that the second generation is growing in the forest which will be cut down for the rugby stadium. This tree is important enough to contribute to the designation of a natural monument, and it is a serious case that demonstrates the inadequacy of the environmental assessment (Ref.2).

Third, developers claim that the number of trees to be cut is 743, not 3000. But, the number of 3,000 is the official one which developers applied for and received permission to be cut down on February 17, 2023, in accordance with Scenic District Ordinance. Developers also admitted in the document on September 29 that the number of trees cut down was 3,000.

It is important that 3,000 trees are the number only in the first phase only. The total number of trees cut during the 10-year construction period has not been presented at all. ICOMOS Japan has again requested that the total number should be made public (Ref. 3).

Fourth, developers presented in the report of the Environmental Assessment that all of the ginkgo trees which symbolize Jingu Gaien were healthy. The evaluation rank was the highest "A" based on the survey from 2018~2019. It was the survey conducted 4 years ago. ICOMOS Japan was deeply aware of the decline of the ginkgo due to excessive commercial uses and the climate change. We took an extensive tree-by-tree survey of 146 ginkgo trees, continuously since November 2022. It has revealed that there are significant damages in the ginkgo trees which have not occurred in 100 years.

The fact reveals the fundamental problems in the Environmental Assessment Report, presented by developers (Ref. 4).

Fifth, developers state that the open space area is currently 21% and will double to 44% with the redevelopment. But the current area where developers counts, does not include the lawn area used as a softball field and athletic events. The lawn area is an open space where camping and other activities are held. If this is included, the current area would be about 41%, and under ICOMOS Japan's proposal, it would be more than 60% in the future (Ref. 5).

Sixth, developers state that the construction of a high-rise building is legal. They said that Jingu Gaien was private property and not a place to build a park.

Historically, Jingu Gaien was positioned as a "quasi-park" in the reconstruction plan after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 and had been carefully protected until the end of the 20th century. In 2013, "Park and Community Development System" was created and the exceptional deregulation was introduced. Also, ICOMOS Japan explained how cities around the world have protected their commons (Ref. 6).

Seventh, developers have stated that the purpose of the redevelopment is to "create an urban complex". ICOMOS Japan explains that Jingu Gaien is an outstanding Cultural Heritage that combines Tokyo's garden culture with the modern park system (Ref. 7).

Eighth, ICOMOS Japan explains the alternative proposal, which would be cut down only



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two trees (Ref. 8).

Ninth, ICOMOS Japan explained Heritage Alert of Takanawa, and proposes the creation of a forum for open discussion among the developers, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Minato City, Shinjuku City, the national government, local residents, and ICOMOS Japan (Ref. 9).

This is the current situation in Japan since the Heritage Alert was issued on Sept 7, 2023.

We would like to represent that Japanese people have responded to ICOMOS Heritage Alert with the deepest respect that the conscience of the world is focused on Tokyo.

ICOMOS are deeply aware of our pride and social responsibility as a professional group that protects cultural heritage, and we are committed to making every effort.