“We are also committed to preserving the former concentration camps which have become memorials of Humanity from oblivion, banalisation and destruction; we take inspiration for that work from the Resolution of the European Parliament of February, 11, 1993 «on the European and international protection as historic monuments of the places of the former Nazi concentration camps.» We are outraged by the recent attacks against the memorials in Mauthausen and Flossenbürg.”

Milano Appeal, 1 July 2018

Signatories:
Associazione Nazionale Ex Deportati Nei Campi nazisti (ANED)
International AUSCHWITZ Committee
International BUCHENWALD-DORA Committee
International DACHAU Committee
Association des déportés et familles des disparus du camp de concentration de FLOSSENBURG et Kommandos
International MAUTHAUSEN Committee
International NATZWEILER-STRUTHOF Committee
Amicale Internationale de NEUENGAMME
International RAVENSBRUCK Committee
International SACHSENHAUSEN Committee

Mauthausen Concentration Camp

THE STAIRWAY OF THE WIENERGRABEN QUARRY

In the History of the Concentration Camp

This quarry was the main purpose for the camp’s localisation. The decision was taken as early as March 1938; the first detainees arrived in August.

It had been the largest granite quarry of the Austrian empire. It was the main labour Kommando of Mauthausen until 1942.

Thousands of men climbed these steps day after day, zu fünf [five at a time], with a granite block on their shoulders. Thus were the walls of the camp erected.

The “Stairway of Death”, this monumental construction, had as its primary function to exhaust the detainees, in the words of one of the accused at the Mauthausen trial (Dachau, 1946). Massacres on these steps happened daily, as men were pushed into the abyss, or forced to throw themselves down. It was thus also a macabre place of spectacle.

Historian Michel Fabréguet described the quarry as “a human slaughterhouse”.

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In the memory of Mauthausen

Since the end of the 1940s, thousands of people from all over Europe have descended and ascended these stairs, at first in the company of survivors. Scaling these 186 steps is the core act of commemoration in Mauthausen. It harbours a symbolic force, which has not dwindled with time.

In the survivors’ stories, the quarry occupies a central place. It also does in the Czechoslovak movie by Vojtech Jasny, Prezil jsem svou smrt – I survived my own death (1960), a work of great documentary value.

This place has such an evocative power that it has become the emblem of Mauthausen among the Nazi camps: in numerous education documents, in many public and private libraries, in the public understanding of the camps. The quarry and this stairway have a heritage value which goes far beyond Austria.

Pretending to “secure” the 186 stairs is useless and would be destructive

Instead, it matters greatly to PRESERVE not only their general context, but also their use. One must avoid any actions which would banalise them, under the pretext of trying to avoid accidents or falls, none of which have been reported in the 70 years of commemorative use of this place.

The quarry and the stairway must be SANCTUARISED, instead of being handed over to developers of fitness trails for carefree walkers! The only thing asked of every visitor to the Mauthausen Memorial is that they know why they are there and what they are there for, as has been done since 1945.

NEITHER PROHIBIT NOR DISFIGURE!
The Mauthausen quarry is not an amusement park.