

Mexico: Builders bulldozing outskirts of Teotihuacan ruins

May 26 2021



In this March 19, 2020 file photo, the Pyramid of the Moon, left, and the Pyramid of the Sun, back right, are seen along with smaller structures lining the Avenue of the Dead, in Teotihuacan, Mexico. The Mexican government said Tuesday, May 25, 2021, that a private building project is destroying part of the outskirts of the pre-Hispanic ruin site of Teotihuacan, just north of Mexico City. Credit: AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell, File

The Mexican government said Tuesday that a private building project is destroying part of the outskirts of the pre-Hispanic ruin site of Teotihuacán, just north of Mexico City.

The Culture Department said it has repeatedly issued stop-work orders since March but the building crews have ignored them. The department estimated at least 25 ancient structures on the [site](#) are threatened, and it has filed a criminal complaint against those responsible.

Apparently, owners of farm plots are trying to turn the land into some sort of amusement park. The area is just outside and across a road from the site's famous boulevard and pyramid complex.

The U.N. international council on monuments and sites said bulldozers threaten to raze as many as 15 acres (7 hectares) at the site, which is a protected area. The council also said looting of artifacts had been detected.

"Teotihuacán is an emblematic site declared as World Heritage by the UNESCO, that represents the highest expression of the identity of the people of Mexico," the U.N. council said in a statement.

Mexico has long been unable to enforce [building codes](#) and zoning laws or stop illegal construction, in part because of the country's unwieldy, antiquated legal system.

The destruction so close to the capital raises questions about Mexico's ability to protect its ancient heritage sites. Teotihuacan is the country's most visited archaeological site, with over 2.6 million visitors per year, and it has hundreds of smaller, more remote and often unexplored sites.

Teotihuacan is best known for its twin Temples of the Sun and Moon, but it was actually a large [city](#) that housed over 100,000 inhabitants and covered around 8 square miles (20 sq. kilometers).

The still mysterious city was one of the largest in the world at its apex between 100 B.C. and A.D. 750. But it was abandoned before the rise of the Aztecs in the 14th century.

Even its true name remains unclear. Its current name was given to it by the Aztecs.

But the Aztecs may have in fact called the city "Teohuacan"—literally "the city of the sun"—rather than Teotihuacan, which means "city of the gods" or "place where men become gods."

The Pyramids of the Sun or Moon used to draw tens of thousands of visitors for the spring and fall equinoxes each year, before the coronavirus pandemic hit.

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Citation: Mexico: Builders bulldozing outskirts of Teotihuacan ruins (2021, May 26) retrieved 20 September 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2021-05-mexico-builders-bulldozing-outskirts-teotihuacan.html>

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