

SENADO NOTARY OFFICE TO CLOSE

# Marreiros says Holy House of Mercy victim of 'evil act'

Paulo Barbosa

**T**HE removal of the First Notary Office from the historical Holy House of Mercy building at Senado Square would represent "an evil act, revealing political myopia, an unspeakable act," Macanese architect Carlos Marreiros told the Times yesterday.

The former president of the Macau Holy House of Mercy (between 98 and 2000) was commenting on the government's decision to move the First Notary Office from its current location to the Northern district.

The plan was announced this week by Legislative Assembly committee spokesperson Kwan Tsui Hang, but has not yet been officially confirmed. However, there are clear signs that the decision has already been made.

Legal Affairs Bureau (DSA) director Liu Dexue said yesterday that the move would be a way to "manage the work in a more balanced way." The director added that moving the Notary Office to the Northern district would enable it to "provide a better service," and that the decision had not been made because of financial concerns. The government pays the Holy House of Mercy monthly rent of MOP 1.2 million for the Notary Office. The rental contract expires in December.

According to Carlos Marreiros, who is also a "brother" (the designation of members of Fraternity of the Macau Holy House of Mercy) and president of Albergue SCM (which is managed independently from the Holy House, despite renting its facilities), the move could be related to cronyism.

"Many Chinese friends of mine are speculating that the rental contract will be terminated because the Holy House of Mercy is not part of the group of [political] buddies. What matters is to rent low-quality buildings [to be used as government offices] at huge rents," he said.

"If the government 'dries up'

**The citizens feel that the government doesn't care about their concerns, instead seeks to benefit its buddies. This must be denounced.**

CARLOS MARREIROS



The historical Holy House of Mercy building

an income source of the Holy House of Mercy, it disadvantages the population. Most of the beneficiaries of the Holy House's action are Chinese, [such as] the elderly home, nursery and scholarships. [...] It seems that the government doesn't listen to the population and then it shows surprise when people criticize its actions. The citizens feel that the government doesn't care about their concerns, instead seeks to benefit its buddies. This must be denounced," Marreiros asserted.

There are also claims that the plan to remove the Notary Office from Senado Square may be linked to the fact that the Holy House of Mercy building displays Portuguese symbols.

The Macanese architect finds the explanation illogical:

"It's an absurdity and I find it hard to believe, also because the building is a wonderful example of hybrid architecture in Macau. The building is so valuable that it is listed as part of the world heritage sites by UNESCO."

Marreiros explained that the ancestral building does not even display colonial symbols, since the building's heraldry is linked to the Holy House of Mercy's history. The ancient institution's coat of arms features a skull, meaning that the

brothers have the right to a proper burial, and the Portuguese coat of arms.

The architect stresses that those symbols are not registered with the United Nations as Portuguese symbols, since the current Portuguese flag is republican. He adds that if someone in the local administration decided to move the Notary Office on those grounds, "that person should be fired, because we would have a diplomatic incident."

Regarding the potential consequences of the end of the contract with the government, Carlos Marreiros says that it would "cause a major blow to the Holy House of Mercy's revenue, because the Holy House is a charity and doesn't receive direct subsidies from the government." A significant part of the institution's revenue comes from renting its facilities, as well as from donations.

But the architect believes that these financial concerns may soon be addressed: "I have no doubts that if the government terminates their lease, there won't be a lack of parties interested in renting it. The location is privileged."

Originally called the "Confraternity and Fraternity of the Macau Holy House of Mercy," the institution was created shortly after the founding of Macau as a Portuguese settlement by Bishop D. Belchior Carneiro. The Bishop was a key figure in the early history of Macau, and was linked to the founding of the first local political institution, the Senate, in 1583.

Most of the house is closed off from the public. In December 2001, a section of its main building was opened as a museum. According to the institution's website, the museum houses "an invaluable collection of Macau's Catholic relics, which bear testimony to the history of Western culture that was introduced to China through Macau."

To Carlos Marreiros, the Holy House of Mercy is "the major representative" of Macanese culture.

"There is no other institution with higher dignity and ancestry," he says.

## FREITAS: 'VERY BAD NEWS FOR THE HOLY HOUSE'

**THE CURRENT** president of the Holy House of Mercy, António José de Freitas, reacted to the government's intention to end the

contract this week: "If confirmed, this would be very bad news for the Holy House. It would be a blow to our source of income."



Entrance of the First Notary Office

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**DIRECTOR AND EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** Paulo Coutinho paulocoutinho@macaudailytimes.com  
**MANAGING EDITOR** Paulo Barbosa paulo.barbosa@macaudailytimes.com  
**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS** Eric Sautedé, Leanda Lee, Severo Portela

**DESIGN EDITOR** Joljo Jorge Magalhães magalhães@macaudailytimes.com | **NEWSROOM AND CONTRIBUTORS** Albano Martins, Annabel Jackson, Daniel Bettler, Emilie Tran, Grace Yu, Irene Sam, Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, Jacky I.F. Cheong, Jenny Lao-Phillips, João Palla Martins, Joseph Cheung, Juliet Risdon, Renato Marques, Richard Whitfield, Rodrigo de Matos (cartoonist), Ruan Du Toit Bester, Sandra Norte (designer), Viviana Segal | **ASSOCIATE CONTRIBUTORS** J.M.L. Property, MacauHR, MdME Lawyers, PokerStars | **NEWS AGENCIES** Associated Press, Bloomberg, MacauHub, MacauNews, Xinhua | **SECRETARY** Yang Dongxiao amy@macaudailytimes.com

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**ADMINISTRATOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Kowie Geldenhuys kowie@macaudailytimes.com

**SECRETARY** Juliana Cheung juliana@macaudailytimes.com

**ADDRESS** Av. da Praia Grande, 599, Edif. Comercial Rodrigues, 12 Floor C,

MACAU SAR Telephone: +853 287 160 81/2 Fax: +853 287 160 84

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