

COMITTEE: UNESCO

(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

QUESTION: Protecting cultural heritage in conflict zones: Strategies to prevent the destruction of cultural sites during armed conflicts

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Personal introduction

Dear Delegates,

My name is Vanessa Zarogianni, I am 16 years old, and I am a student of 1ère. I am extremely happy to be your president in this year's MUN session. I hope that on our committee you will have the chance to debate with passion and write resolutions on matters that affect our generation directly.

MUN sessions are a chance for us to deepen our knowledge about issues that we will soon face as young adults who will take the hand on our world's future. I believe that the three topics we will be discussing will be an amazing opportunity for you to represent a country that may go against some of your beliefs, but which will allow you at the same time to develop some essential diplomatic skills.

The first topic you will be debating and writing resolutions on is the protection of cultural heritage in conflict zones. This is a particularly important issue because conflicts often target culture, which has a consequence to weaken peace but also to promote division. The truth is that during an armed conflict, the protection of cultural heritage may seem to be of secondary importance, but it is actually a matter that represents a country's history and culture and that can often have a significant role towards its citizens.

I hope this study guide will help you understand our topic so you can write your resolutions. If you have any questions do not hesitate to ask me for some help. Hope you enjoy the reading, and I wish you good luck for the session!

Introduction

Cultural heritage sites such as ancient monuments, religious buildings and museums filled with pieces of art are very important because they represent the past of a nation, a country, and even humanity as a whole. It shows us what people have done in the past and who they were. It is a key for understanding from where we come, and at the same time, it is an indication demonstrating how we should move forward.

But in wars, these sites are often destroyed or damaged, and sometimes this is done intentionally. This means that we can never get back the cultural treasures that are lost. When cultural heritage is destroyed, it leads us to losing knowledge about the past, which can make people feel like their identity is being threatened. Their connection with their past is in some way taken away from them.

Targeting cultural heritage is intended to be a way of attacking the communities for which it is an essential part of their unique cultural identity. Usually, its goal is to deprive a nation of its knowledge, its identity and its history. It can actually be described as "stealing the soul" of society.

It is perhaps the case that the most significant development in the protection of cultural property under international law occurred in the period following the Second World War.

The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (hereinafter referred to as the "1954 Hague Convention") was adopted in 1954, on the basis of earlier texts drafted in the aftermath of the First World War. This was followed by the adoption of the First Protocol in 1954, and the Second Protocol in 1999.

Key words

Armed conflict: A conflict in which armed force is used by at least two States against each other even if one of the States does not recognize that it is at war.

Blue shield: Emblem which was created in order to distinguish units of military personnel who were not involved in hostilities. The flag under consideration consists of a shield with a pointed base, divided into blue and white sections, in a saltire pattern. The purpose of the blue shield is to facilitate the recognition of cultural property by parties in armed conflict.

Cultural heritage: Cultural heritage includes things like artefacts, monuments, buildings and sites, but also museums. These have many different values, including symbolic, historical, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It encompasses both tangible heritage, which can be seen and touched, including underwater heritage, and intangible cultural heritage, which forms part of cultural and natural heritage artefacts, sites and monuments. However, the definition does not include intangible cultural heritage related to other cultural domains, such as festivals and celebrations. However, it does include industrial heritage and cave paintings. Cultural heritage belongs to a specific state and is considered its property. "Cultural property" is defined in Article 1 of the 1954 Hague Convention and means all property "of great importance" to a particular state's cultural heritage. Whether a specific structure, site, centre containing a large amount of cultural property (referred to as 'centres containing monuments'), object (or object storage facility) is of such importance is first and foremost a question for the State on whose territory it is situated. It is for the State to determine, in good faith, whether particular movable or immovable property is of great importance to its cultural heritage and deserves protection.

Culturicide: The term 'cultural genocide', used to describe the intentional destruction of the cultural heritage of a people or nation for political, military, religious, ideological, economic, ethnic or racial reasons, is given legal recognition in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Destruction of cultural sites: (Also known as cultural genocide) The action of destroying a targeted group's history and symbols, and undermining their culture, may be an attempt to erase any evidence of their existence.

Hague Convention (1954): The first and the most comprehensive multilateral treaty dedicated exclusively to the protection of cultural heritage in times of peace as well as during an armed conflict. The first international legal framework entirely dedicated to the protection of movable and immovable heritage.

Heritage: A property that is or may be inherited, valued things such as historic buildings that have been passed down from previous generations and relating to things of historic or cultural value that are worthy of preservation.

Heritage preservation: To conserve and enhance heritage places of cultural significance.

Hostility against cultural property: To commit any acts of hostility directed against the historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples.

Iconoclasm: The action of attacking or asserting the rejection of cherished beliefs and institutions, or of established values and practices.

International law: A body of rules established by customs or treaty and recognized by nations as binding in their relations with one another.

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham

Looting: The action of stealing goods during a war.

General Overview

The importance of cultural heritage

A relationship with a wide history

The relationship that exists between cultural heritage and wars is not something new. In fact, its official acknowledgement dates to the Napoleonic Wars, when the Congress of Vienna recognized the enormous scale of pillage and destruction.



It is interesting to note that the development of nation states during the nineteenth century appears to have reinforced this concern, perhaps by strengthening their sense of identity through reference to a national past. This may have led to a growing awareness of the national ownership of cultural heritage, and as a result, the notion of national cultural property has become increasingly important in defining

identities, belonging and borders. This national reinterpretation of heritage was accompanied by various attempts to draw up formalised and binding legal instruments, including some relating to cultural property in wartime. These were not heritage laws as such, but rather regulations included in the rules of war. The Lieber Code of 1863, which was drafted during the American Civil War (1861-1865), is often seen as a significant step in this process (Schindler and Toman 1988). It outlined the conduct of Union soldiers, emphasising their responsibility to protect art, libraries, scientific collections, and instruments 'from avoidable injury', and to acknowledge and safeguard 'cultural objects and sites in occupied territories'. It is widely acknowledged that the Lieber Code played a significant role in the subsequent formulation of the Hague Conventions on Land Warfare of 1899 and 1907, as well as other international treaties. In the present day, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its subsequent 1999 Protocols are considered to be essential instruments. The principles relating to cultural property set out in these conventions have become part of customary international law.

Cultural heritage and its means

Cultural heritage is a timeless treasure that connects individuals with their roots, forms and identity, and provides a lens into shared history. It embraces the tangible and intangible elements of cultural identity, including historic buildings, monuments, traditions, languages, art, music and folklore. Cultural heritage is a reflection of society, and its preservation is essential for preserving cultural diversity, creating a sense of belonging and passing on knowledge to future generations. It plays a crucial role in life and history, influencing values, beliefs and a sense of belonging. It is a source of inspiration and creativity, providing a place for artistic expression and cultural exchange.

The concept of identity and belonging is intricately linked to cultural heritage, which serves as a defining element of one's sense of self and a source of a profound sense of connection to one's heritage. Cultural heritage provides a cultural framework that facilitates a deeper understanding of one's place in the world.

From a historical perspective, cultural heritage plays a significant role in preserving historical narratives, offering a valuable learning opportunity that enables individuals to draw lessons from the past, avoid repeating historical mistakes, and appreciate the progress that has been made as a society.

In addition, the impact of cultural heritage on tourism and economic growth is indisputable. The presence of cultural heritage sites and traditions serves as a major attraction for tourists, thus stimulating economic growth and generating employment opportunities within the tourism industry. Furthermore, cultural diversity, which is a fundamental aspect of human societies, is significantly influenced by cultural heritage. It serves as a reminder of the importance of respecting and celebrating different cultures and traditions.

It is of great importance that cultural property is respected in view of its character and role in society. It is understood that damage to cultural property may cause damage to the cultural heritage of all humankind **since each individual/person contributes to international culture**. In practice, cultural property, its immediate surroundings and appliances in use for its protection are not to be used for purposes that may expose it to destruction or damage in the event of an armed conflict. It is also important to refrain from any act of hostility against cultural property. However, it should be noted that these obligations may be waived in case of imperative military necessity. It is also necessary to prohibit, prevent and, if necessary, put a stop to any form of theft, misappropriation and vandalism against cultural property; to prohibit reprisals; and to not requisition movable cultural property situated in the territory of another State party to the Convention.

It is important to note that these obligations remain in place even in situations where military necessity might be a factor.

Causes of the destruction

Why is cultural heritage targeted?

It is important to consider the various reasons why actors in conflict, ranging from large states to lone wolf terrorists, may choose to attack cultural heritage. Attacks on tangible heritage and intangible heritage are not only forms of propaganda through action but also have the potential to deprive people of their identity and sense of self.

It has been posited by various commentators that the targeting of cultural heritage is intended as an attack on the communities for which the heritage is an essential part of their unique cultural identity. Such actions are often described as "cultural cleansing",

but also as "culturicide" and said to be intended to "deprive people of its knowledge, its identity and history".

This loss is of particular concern as cultural heritage occupies a central role in the formation of a sense of belonging and attachment to a place. It serves as a fundamental aspect of how a person or community sees and situates itself in time and space. The destruction of cultural heritage can therefore be considered a significant cause of psychological dislocation and emotional desolation for the victims.

It has been suggested that financial motivations may be a factor in the targeting of cultural heritage. Highlighting the high commercial value of many cultural objects in international markets and suggesting that non-state actors exploit this to raise funds. It is important to note that states may, on occasion, find themselves in a position where they may inadvertently or otherwise come into conflict with cultural heritage, whether for financial gain (through looting and trafficking) or to the extent of seeking to systematically erase a community's collective identity.

It is also worth bearing in mind that such actions may be used as a means of subjugating a society and rewriting its history. Ultimately, however, it is about power.



(Left): Al Qahirah Castle, a monumental architectural landmark, towered over the city of Taizz, Yemen, (2013)

(Right): Smoke rises over al Qahirah Castle in Taizz, Yemen, after airstrikes by the Saudi and UAE-led coalition, (2015)

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/04/18/destroying-cultural-heritage/explosive-weapons-effects-armed-conflict-and>

How is cultural heritage destroyed?

The examples of this type of destruction are numerous, but they consistently illustrate how heritage can be used to support political claims, legitimize power or harm opponents. The destruction can take many forms such as deliberate targeting, misuse, looting, vandalism, and iconoclasm.

Furthermore, explosive weapons' blast, fragmentation, and secondary fires have been proven to inflict direct effects on the full range of cultural heritage sites at the time of attack. The blast produced by such detonations can bend and break the structural elements of a cultural heritage building, even concrete and steel, and this can ultimately lead to the collapse of part or the entirety of an edifice. Another thing that is important to note, is that damage to nearby civilian infrastructure has the potential to indirectly impact cultural heritage through the release of noxious materials. In an article on the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict, US Army Colonel Andrew Scott DeJesse explores the risks associated with the utilisation of explosive weapons in populated areas. He elucidates that during the US army's invasion of Iraq in 2003, even missiles that 'hit the targets cleanly' resulted in the flooding of adjacent buildings housing cultural heritage due to the damage inflicted upon nearby water pipes.

Consequences of the destruction

The physical threat to cultural heritage posed by the utilisation of explosive weaponry extends beyond the immediate act of attack, persisting in its detrimental impact. The structural integrity of a building may be compromised by initial attack damage, potentially weakening walls or foundations, which can result in the subsequent collapse of the structure.

It is widely acknowledged that the destruction of civilian infrastructure resulting from the utilisation of explosive weaponry in populated areas has the capacity to disrupt healthcare, education and other essential services. Moreover, the impairment of infrastructure also serves to compromise the safeguarding of cultural heritage. The loss of electricity or water, for example, has the potential to disrupt climate control or fire suppression systems, which are vital for the preservation of fragile cultural heritage, often centuries old, including structures as well as works of art, artefacts and archives. This disruption will also prevent the continuation of pre-war conservation efforts. In addition, security systems, which are important in preventing looting, may be disabled. A further potential consequence of damage to the Internet infrastructure is the loss of digital cultural heritage databases, such as collections of scanned manuscripts, which are not backed up. Explosive weapons have the capacity to destroy both the original and digital versions of manuscripts, works of art, buildings or monuments, which will make it more difficult to recover losses. As digital versions rely on electronic storage, servers, networks, and power sources (all of which are vulnerable), explosions can cause the inaccessibility of some contents, destroy data centres, external hard drives, or computers holding digital backups or archives, but electronic devices and storage media are also susceptible to fire or heat-related failure, just like physical documents.

Case study: Ukraine

The UN and other international agencies are closely monitoring the damage caused by the war to Ukrainian heritage sites. Despite the difficulties, the Ukrainian professionals themselves have been constantly updating their documentation of the damage since the invasion in February 2022.

As of 19 February 2025, UNESCO has verified damage to 485 sites since 24 February 2022 - 149 religious sites, 249 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 33 museums, 33 monuments, 18 libraries, 1 archive and 2 archaeological sites.

“History and culture are paying a heavy toll for the war, and it is no coincidence that they are being attacked because it is Ukraine’s very identity and nature that are being attacked through them,” said The Minister of Culture and Strategic Communications of Ukraine, Mykola Tochytskyi.

On 19 October 2022, the martial law introduced by Vladimir Putin in the annexed Ukrainian territories “legalised” the looting of works of art by Russian troops. These works are supposed to be ‘preserved’ thanks to their “evacuation” by the Russian army. The Russian evacuation plan was known before martial law was promulgated and as early as 15 October; the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture had already told UNESCO that the transfer of the most precious objects from museums in Crimea and other occupied territories was a flagrant violation of the Hague Convention. But Russia considers that the regions annexed on 30 September are Russian territories governed by local legislation and not by international treaties.

Since February 2022, Russian shells have hit over 400 sites and buildings, including Odessa Cathedral. Many museums have been attacked or are at risk, endangering their collections and staff.



Church personnel inspect damages inside the Odesa Transfiguration Cathedral in Odesa, Ukraine, Sunday, July 23, 2023, following Russian missile attacks
<https://ru.usembassy.gov/protecting-ukraines-invaluable-heritage/>

Several Ukrainian members talked about the destruction of their cities, and Ukrainian youth delegate Sofiia Bohdanova also mentioned the millions of books that were burnt and the school textbooks that were replaced by ones that praise the Russian "special military operation." She finished off by saying that "if we lose our identity, our nation will disappear".

Case study: Syria

The conflict in Syria has resulted in the destruction of a considerable number of cultural heritage sites in the country. The destruction of numerous ancient monuments, relics, and sites was caused by warfare, artillery bombardment, and bombings. In addition to the cultural heritage destroyed because of warfare, many millennia-old historical and archaeological sites and relics have been deliberately targeted by ISIS. It is evident that a significant proportion of Syria's World Heritage sites, including the ancient city of Palmyra, have been subject to substantial damage. Furthermore, several of the nation's most prominent mosques, such as the Umayyad Mosque of Aleppo and the al-Omari Mosque of Daraa, have been severely impacted.

John Kerry, the former US Secretary of State, has described the destruction of cultural heritage in Syria as "a purposeful final insult". He also claimed that Daesh was stealing lives in the country, and even "stealing the soul of millions". Italy-based academics Paolo Foradori, Serena Giusti and Alessandro Giovanni Lamonica have also pointed out that Daesh used the destruction of cultural heritage as a means of control, claiming that the group used iconoclasm to "assert their absolute domination over the population [...] including the social and cultural context in which that population lives". Moreover, Noelle Higgins also said that Daesh's actions weren't random or illogical, but actually part of a planned strategy to expand.

Concerned countries and organizations

Countries

Countries Leading International Initiatives:

France: France is a leading force in protecting heritage in conflict zones, having co-founded the ALIPH Foundation with the UAE. It also supports UNESCO initiatives and actively funds restoration and emergency measures for endangered sites.

United Arab Emirates (UAE): The UAE partners closely with France through ALIPH and funds major heritage restoration projects, particularly in the Middle East. It aims to position itself as a global protector of cultural heritage. The UAE has also committed to donate \$20million to the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas.

Both nations co-founded ALIPH (see more below).

Italy: Italy created the "Blue Helmets of Culture," a specialized task force under UNESCO's framework, to intervene rapidly and safeguard cultural property during emergencies and conflicts. They provide both expertise and physical protection teams.

Countries Providing Funding and Expertise:

United States: The U.S. runs the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, providing grants for the protection of heritage in countries affected by conflict or disaster. It sees heritage protection as part of its broader diplomatic mission.

Germany: Germany funds many cultural preservation projects in conflict-affected areas, especially in the Middle East. It combines cultural protection with development goals, supporting local employment through heritage reconstruction.

Japan: Japan finances numerous UNESCO projects aimed at preserving World Heritage sites at risk. Through its "Funds-in-Trust" program, it offers technical and financial support for cultural safeguarding efforts worldwide.

Countries Advocating for Legal Protection and Policies

Belgium: Belgium is an advocate for cultural protection under international law and promotes safeguarding intangible heritage through UNESCO initiatives. Its efforts focus on legal standards and raising global awareness.

Poland: Poland uses its experience rebuilding post-WWII Warsaw to help other countries restore war-damaged heritage sites. It promotes international cooperation for the reconstruction of destroyed historic areas.

Netherlands: The Netherlands actively supports international conventions protecting cultural property and fights the illegal trafficking of artifacts. It integrates cultural heritage into its broader foreign policy and legal frameworks.

Switzerland: Switzerland supports legal frameworks like The Hague Convention and helps fund international efforts to protect heritage, especially through contributions to ALIPH. It emphasizes humanitarian and cultural preservation during armed conflicts.

Conflict-Affected Countries Working to Protect Their Own Heritage

Iraq: Iraq, after suffering massive destruction of its heritage under ISIS, is working hard to restore key sites like Mosul and Erbil. It cooperates with international partners for technical support and staff training.

Ukraine: Ukraine is actively documenting war damage to its cultural heritage and pushing for international protection under enhanced UNESCO measures. Efforts also include emergency measures to prevent further losses during the ongoing conflict.

Syria: Syria's government and international agencies are trying to document and restore historic sites like Palmyra and Aleppo, which suffered from extensive war damage. Emergency stabilization efforts are ongoing despite the fragile security situation.

Yemen: Yemen's ancient cities, many of them UNESCO sites, are under threat due to ongoing conflict. UNESCO and its partners support emergency repairs and training programs for local conservation workers. They have mobilized funds and expertise to safeguard Yemen's cultural heritage, including emergency interventions in historic cities.

Organizations

UNESCO: UNESCO leads global efforts to safeguard cultural heritage, especially during conflicts and disasters. It designates World Heritage Sites, provides emergency assistance, and coordinates international responses to protect cultural property.

G20: The G20 Declaration says that protecting cultural heritage is one of its most important principles. This is a positive step in the right direction, because it shows that we need to do more to protect our cultural heritage. There are a lot of threats out there, like looting and illegal trafficking, as well as damage and destruction during conflicts and economic development.

ALIPH (International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas):

ALIPH formalized a partnership with UNESCO to strengthen cooperation in protecting cultural heritage in conflict areas. The alliance funds and supports urgent restoration and protection projects for heritage sites endangered by conflict. It brings together governments and private partners to act quickly in emergencies.

ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross): The ICRC advocates for the protection of cultural property under international humanitarian law during armed conflicts. It integrates cultural protection into its broader mission to protect human life and dignity during war.

ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property):

ICCROM specializes in providing training, research, and technical advice for heritage conservation worldwide. It helps countries build local capacity to protect and restore cultural property, especially after crises.

ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites): ICOMOS is an expert advisory body to UNESCO that assesses the condition of cultural sites and advises on best preservation practices. It supports emergency missions to evaluate and protect monuments in danger.

Blue Shield International: Often called the "cultural equivalent of the Red Cross," Blue Shield International works to protect heritage sites before, during, and after conflicts and natural disasters. It partners with military, humanitarian, and cultural institutions to safeguard endangered heritage.

World Monuments Fund (WMF): The WMF identifies at-risk cultural sites and mobilizes funds and expertise to save them. It focuses on preserving monuments, historic cities, and cultural landscapes through community-driven restoration projects.

Global Heritage Fund (GHF): The GHF protects cultural heritage by empowering local communities and funding conservation projects at endangered sites. It combines preservation with sustainable development to ensure long-term protection.

UN involvement

UN Security Council Resolution 2347 (24 March 2017)

The International Criminal Court, which for the first time convicted a defendant for the war crimes of intentionally directing attacks against religious buildings and historic monuments and buildings,

1. Deplores and condemns the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, inter alia destruction of religious sites and artefacts, as well as the looting and smuggling of cultural property from archaeological sites, museums, libraries, archives, and other sites, in the context of armed conflicts, notably by terrorist groups;
3. Also condemns systematic campaigns of illegal excavation, and looting and pillage of cultural heritage, particularly those committed by ISIL, Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities;
4. Affirms that directing unlawful attacks against sites and buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, or historic monuments may constitute, under certain circumstances and pursuant to international law a war crime and that perpetrators of such attacks must be brought to justice;

[https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2347\(2017\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2347(2017))

UNESCO

The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (14 May 1954)

Article 4 - Respect for cultural property

1. The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect cultural property situated within their own territory as well as within the territory of other High Contracting Parties by refraining from any use of the property and its immediate surroundings or of the appliances in use for its protection for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict; and by refraining from any act of hostility, directed against such property.

2. The obligations mentioned in paragraph 1 of the present Article may be waived only in cases where military necessity imperatively requires such a waiver.

3. The High Contracting Parties further undertake to prohibit, prevent and, if necessary, put a stop to any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of, and any acts of vandalism directed against, cultural property. They shall refrain from requisitioning movable cultural property situated in the territory of another High Contracting Party.
4. They shall refrain from any act directed by way of reprisals against cultural property.
5. No High Contracting Party may evade the obligations incumbent upon it under the present Article, in respect of another High Contracting Party, by reason of the fact that the latter has not applied the measures of safeguard referred to in Article 3.

Article 5 - Occupation

1. Any High Contracting Party in occupation of the whole or part of the territory of another High Contracting Party shall as far as possible support the competent national authorities of the occupied country in safeguarding and preserving its cultural property.
2. Should it prove necessary to take measures to preserve cultural property situated in occupied territory and damaged by military operations, and should the competent national authorities be unable to take such measures, the Occupying Power shall, as far as possible, and in close co-operation with such authorities, take the most necessary measures of preservation.
3. Any High Contracting Party whose government is considered their legitimate government by members of a resistance movement, shall, if possible, draw their attention to the obligation to comply with those provisions of the Convention dealing with respect for cultural property.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-protection-cultural-property-event-armed-conflict-regulations-execution-convention>

Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (14 May 1954)

1. Each High Contracting Party undertakes to prevent the exportation, from a territory occupied by it during an armed conflict, of cultural property as defined in Article I of the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, signed at The Hague on 14 May 1954.
3. Each High Contracting Party undertakes to return, at the close of hostilities, to the competent authorities of the territory previously occupied, cultural property, which is in its territory, if such property has been exported in contravention of the principle laid down in the first paragraph. Such property shall never be retained as war reparations.

4. The High Contracting Party whose obligation it was to prevent the exportation of cultural property from the territory occupied by it, shall pay an indemnity to the holders in good faith of any cultural property which has to be returned in accordance with the preceding paragraph.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/protocol-convention-protection-cultural-property-event-armed-conflict?hub=66535>

Second Protocol to the Hague Convention (26 March 1999)

Chapter 2: General provisions regarding protection

Article 5: Safeguarding of cultural property

Preparatory measures taken in time of peace for the safeguarding of cultural property against the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict pursuant to Article 3 of the Convention shall include, as appropriate, the preparation of inventories, the planning of emergency measures for protection against fire or structural collapse, the preparation for the removal of movable cultural property or the provision for adequate in situ protection of such property, and the designation of competent authorities responsible for the safeguarding of cultural property.

Article 6: Respect for cultural property

With the goal of ensuring respect for cultural property in accordance with Article 4 of the Convention:

(a) a waiver on the basis of imperative military necessity pursuant to Article 4 paragraph 2 of the Convention may only be invoked to direct an act of hostility against cultural property when and for as long as:

- i. that cultural property has, by its function, been made into a military objective; and
- ii. there is no feasible alternative available to obtain a similar military advantage to that offered by directing an act of hostility against that objective;

(b) a waiver on the basis of imperative military necessity pursuant to Article 4 paragraph 2 of the Convention may only be invoked to use cultural property for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage when and for as long as no choice is possible between such use of the cultural property and another feasible method for obtaining a similar military advantage;

(c) the decision to invoke imperative military necessity shall only be taken by an officer commanding a force the equivalent of a battalion in size or larger, or a force smaller in size where circumstances do not permit otherwise;

(d) in case of an attack based on a decision taken in accordance with subparagraph (a), an effective advance warning shall be given whenever circumstances permit.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000130696>

Latest Developments

2015	With the backing of UNESCO, some fifty countries adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2199, which prohibits the trade of cultural property originating from Iraq and Syria. At the time, Irina Bokova said: "This resolution acknowledges that cultural heritage is at the heart of today's conflicts, and it should be at the forefront of the security and political response to the crisis".
24 March 2017	Resolution 2347 of the UN Security Council formally recognises the imperative of defending cultural heritage for security purposes. It was adopted unanimously and establishes an international fund and a safe-haven network, while also linking cultural property trafficking with the financing of terrorism. This text outlines two key operational outcomes of the international conference in Abu Dhabi: the establishment of an international fund and the organisation of a network of safe havens for endangered cultural artefacts. It also emphasises the connections between the trafficking of cultural artefacts and the financing of terrorist organisations, as well as the links between terrorism and organised crime. Notably, for the first time in history, a UN resolution addresses the entire spectrum of threats to cultural heritage, irrespective of geographical location or the perpetrators' affiliation, whether they are listed terrorist groups or other armed groups.
2017	At the request of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict granted 'enhanced protection' status to Angkor, a cultural World Heritage Site, during a meeting at UNESCO Headquarters. This status is a mechanism established by the 1999 Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention and is aimed at ensuring the full and effective protection of specifically designated cultural property during international or non-international armed conflicts. Angkor now joins twelve other properties in Azerbaijan, Belgium, Cyprus, Georgia, Italy, Lithuania and Mali which benefit from high-level immunity and rigorous legal protection, ensuring they cannot be targeted, attacked or used for military purposes.
2022	At the 17th meeting of the UNESCO Committee, protection measures for cultural property were reviewed, including the

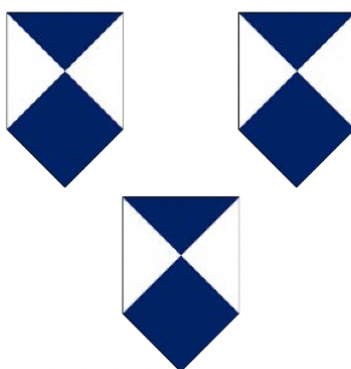
	possibility of enhanced protection status, a fundraising strategy and proposed amendments to the guidelines. The Committee also discussed the protection of cultural property in Ukraine and the implementation of the Second Protocol of 1999.
2024	UNESCO organised the International Conference “Cultural Heritage and Peace: Building on 70 Years of the Hague Convention”, which took place in The Hague from 13 to 15 May 2024. The conference was hosted by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and saw the launch of new initiatives to protect cultural property. (see point 4 of the previous attempts)

Previous attempts to solve the issue

- In addition to the establishment of the Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in the event of hostilities, which was designed with the aim of restricting the conduct of hostilities to protect cultural property, the Convention also led to the creation of a distinctive emblem: the blue shield (see key words).



Blue shield emblem
used alone



Blue shield emblem
repeated three times in
a triangular formation
(one shield below)



Blue shield emblem
outlined by a detached
external red band

Use of the emblem according to the 1954 Hague Convention.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380180>

The distinctive emblem of the Convention is employed in three different forms:

1. The blue shield emblem used alone: The blue shield emblem can be used on its own to mark cultural property that is protected by the Convention, or to indicate personnel engaged in its protection or overseeing the implementation of the Convention. When used on its own, the distinctive emblem indicates the level of general protection afforded to all qualifying cultural property under international law.
 2. Blue shield emblem repeated three times in a triangular formation: A triple Blue Shield arranged in a triangle indicates that the property has been granted 'Enhanced Protection' status under the Second Protocol (1999) of the Hague Convention. This means that the property must:
 - Be of the greatest importance to humanity.
 - Not be used for military purposes.
 - Be protected by adequate national legal and administrative measures.Once granted, these sites are immune from attack under international law and any intentional attack on them is considered a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) since 1999.
 3. Blue Shield emblem outlined by a detached external red band: The blue shield emblem outlined by a red band is the distinctive emblem for cultural property under enhanced protection. This mechanism was established by the 1999 Second Protocol to provide immunity and protection to a limited amount of cultural property of "greatest importance to humanity". The Protocol itself does not contain any provision for distinctive marking of cultural property under enhanced protection. The distinctive marking was developed by the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and endorsed by the 6th Meeting of the Parties to the 1999 Second Protocol in 2015. The Guidelines for Implementation of the Protocol detail the use of the emblem. The emblem is intended to ensure the recognition and identification of cultural property under enhanced protection, particularly during armed conflicts. It can ensure the effectiveness of the Protocol, promoting the immunity of such property. The marking of cultural property under enhanced protection with the emblem is not mandatory, but it can be an effective measure to ensure better protection. The decision to place a distinctive emblem on a cultural property under enhanced protection, and the extent of its visibility, is determined by the concerned State authorities.
- The 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (also called the World Heritage Convention) protects sites that are 'of outstanding universal value'. These sites are inscribed on the World

Heritage List and have a distinctive emblem, the World Heritage Emblem. This was created in 1978 by the World Heritage Committee.

The emblem symbolises the interdependence of cultural and natural properties. The central square is a form created by humans and the circle represents nature, the two being intimately linked. The emblem is round, like the world, but it also represents protection. The World Heritage Committee is in charge of deciding how the emblem is used. You can find the rules for this in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. It is protected under the international World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Act. States Parties must make sure that the emblem is not used for things that the Committee has not said is allowed.



World Heritage Emblem

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/emblem/>

- Since the start of the war, UNESCO has been working in Ukraine to protect heritage by:
 - preventing destruction and looting
 - assessing damage to raise awareness in the international community
 - fighting the illicit trafficking of cultural property.

According to stories and testimonies from Ukraine, UNESCO has been supporting the digitisation of museum collections and documentary heritage in Ukraine.

- To mark the 70th anniversary of the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, UNESCO has announced three new initiatives to Protect Heritage, which are in line with current needs and technical resources.

1. An international training programme for judges and prosecutors
2. A civil-military alliance for the protection of cultural property
3. Training for site managers and military personnel in cutting-edge technologies.

Possible solutions

Emergency planning

Firstly, many interventions aimed at protecting cultural heritage during a conflict require significant planning and timely action. Immovable objects, such as historic buildings, monuments and statues, must be protected on site with sandbags or brick walls to minimise blast damage. Moveable objects, such as museum collections, must be inventoried and protected from potential harm. Sometimes, they must be hidden from view or carefully relocated to safer locations. Emergency plans for safeguarding cultural heritage have enabled cultural workers to evacuate museum collections safely during the Second World War, as well as sheltering collections in place in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Sector support

Secondly, even the best emergency plans are sometimes overwhelmed when conflict escalates. Explosions can damage sandbags protecting historic buildings and shatter museum displays. This damage is not necessarily caused by something else. However, international humanitarian law protects cultural sites and archival repositories except in limited cases of military necessity. Those fighting in wars have targeted cultural sites as a weapon of war, as seen in Georgia, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. From the point of view of those who want to harm civilians, targeting culture shows an intention to disrupt civilian life, question identity and destroy physical evidence of a community's history. The cultural sector needs support to become stronger. When fighting stops, cultural workers can use this time to repair buildings and restore damaged collections. However, war can disrupt economies, access to funding, and regular staff salaries. Often, people working in cultural organisations feel they must stay with the collections, even when it is no longer safe to do so. We can support cultural workers by providing them with funding, scholarships or training. This ensures the sector continues and that workers and their families can earn a living. Regular support also prevents cultural workers from taking unnecessary risks, as they won't feel pressured to endanger their lives for a special project. Strong working relationships are needed between cultural workers and international cultural organisations that are willing to consider the long term. Other problems can also happen as conflicts carry on. War and political instability create opportunities for people to steal works of art and cultural artefacts, as well as to loot archaeological sites. The looting of museums and Jewish families by Nazi Germany during the Second World War is still causing problems today. People working in the

cultural sector need to be aware of thefts and collect the basic documents that will help to find missing collections in the future. There are reports of Russian forces stealing museum collections in Ukraine. This is why, it is particularly important to find evidence of this in the war.

As the cultural sector is trying to recover quickly from conflict. It is important to document the damage so that we can show that damage was caused on purpose and that there has been theft. When a country is in conflict, it is often the government that oversees rebuilding the cultural sector. This is because the international community often doesn't have enough money to help. It is very important to work with more partners, especially "friendly" international organisations, cultural institutions in "twin cities", and academic partners. This will help us to make the best use of limited resources and expertise for reconstruction.

Resettlement

In some situations, it may be necessary for cultural workers to move to a new location. Cultural workers are not "first responders" whose job is to save lives and protect property. Instead, they are "second responders" who help with cleaning up, fixing civilian infrastructure and getting social services back up and running again.

International humanitarian law says that cultural workers are neutral professionals, but they are at greater risk because they are targeted because of their culture. As keepers of the collective memory, their work is not in line with the efforts of the war to make people question their cultural identity.

War has had a big effect on people who work in the arts. In 1992, Aida Buturovic, a librarian at the National and University Library of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was killed by sniper fire while she and her colleagues were trying to save books from the flames. But it was the Syrian war that made people sit up and take notice of the risks. In 2015, ISIS killed archaeologist Khaled Al-Assad, who had been director of the Palmyra Museum for forty years. His workmates at the Palmyra Museum left to get to safety in Turkey, where they could be helped by people from other countries for a short time. But it was not possible to guarantee them even short-term museum jobs, even though they brought important documents about the ancient city and they knew about ISIS activities.

Finally, resettlement may be necessary for cultural workers in the event of conflict.

Emergency relocation of cultural workers at risk is a logistical challenge. Even though the issue is becoming more urgent, there are not many organisations that focus on the legal problems involved in moving cultural workers. The Artistic Freedom Initiative is one of these few organisations. Its project to protect Afghan artists has been very important in helping cultural workers whose lives have been threatened because of their work and who they know. Karima Bennoune, who used to be a UN expert on cultural rights, asked the international community to react, saying: "We must not wait to show

that we care about the loss of cultural heritage before we do something about it." We need to do more to support cultural workers who have to move and start again.

Strengthen International Law Enforcement

International agreements such as the 1954 Hague Convention and its protocols establish legal frameworks for protecting cultural heritage during armed conflicts. However, enforcement remains weak in many regions. It is vital to strengthen international cooperation and ensure that countries integrate these laws into national legislation. Holding perpetrators accountable through the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other legal mechanisms acts as a deterrent against intentional destruction. Therefore, imposing targeted sanctions on individuals, militias or organisations involved in the looting or destruction of cultural property can be an effective measure. Additionally, integrating specific protections for cultural heritage into peace agreements, military rules of engagement and UN peacekeeping mandates helps ensure that safeguarding heritage becomes a mandatory consideration during military operations. This proactive legal step compels armed forces to take concrete measures to avoid damaging cultural sites during conflicts.

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