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Archives and Libraries in Times of War: The Role of IFLA and ICA within ICBS (International Committee of the Blue Shield)

"Lost Memory"

In 1996, in the framework of its "Memory of the World", programme UNESCO implemented a survey on libraries and archives destroyed in the 20th century. This survey was conducted in cooperation with IFLA and ICA and published under the title of *Lost Memory* by Hans van der Hoeven and Joan van Albada. The list of the libraries that have been totally or partially destroyed is appalling: to quote just a few

- 1923: an earthquake destroyed the Imperial University Library in Tokyo causing the loss of some 700,000 volumes.
- 1933-1935: the Nazis were ordered to prepare black lists of prohibited authors, which represented 10% of public libraries collections. Many of these books were burnt.
- Between 1939 and 1945: In Czechoslovakia, entire collections were confiscated, dispersed and destroyed, including card catalogues. Total losses were estimated at two million volumes. In Poland, the National Library in Warsaw was completely destroyed and 700,000 volumes lost. One-third of all German books were destroyed, although the most precious works have been preserved by storage off-site. One hundred million books have been destroyed in the Soviet Union.
- 1966: In Florence, nearly two million volumes were flooded, although an international rescue operation managed to salvage many of them.
- 1966-1976: In China, during the Cultural Revolution, all libraries were closed for various lengths of time. Some were burnt, others purged, only the books by Marx, Lenin and Mao were spared.

More recently we must recall the fire, deliberately set, which in 1986 destroyed the Los Angeles Central Library and caused the loss of 400,000 volumes, and the fire that devastated the Art Library of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad in 1988 and damaged 3.6 million books and 400,000 newspapers. We all remember the dramatic vision of the flames raging out of the windows of the National Library of Sarajevo, destroying 90% of the written heritage of the Bosnian Culture.

The UNESCO survey analyzes the various causes of destruction and damage. Apart from war, the ranking of significant dangers are: fire, accidental of criminal; water from outside or inside; earthquakes; civil disorders; and also insects and rodents, mold and humidity, poor storage, neglect, poor restoration, destruction by administrative order. An analysis of implemented and intended measures in the five continents to protect libraries from disasters complete this study.

The 1954 Hague Convention

Conscious of the extent and importance of the destruction that had affected the world's cultural heritage during World War II, UNESCO prepared a Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which was adopted in 1954 in The Hague. The 90 State Parties who have signed the Convention agreed:

- to adopt preventive measures to protect the cultural heritage not only during war time (it is too late then) but also during peace time;
- to protect and respect cultural heritage in case of armed conflicts (even when these are not international);
- to create mechanisms to ensure this protection (an international register of cultural items under special protection was created);
- to indicate with a special sign some important buildings; and
- to create special units inside the armed forces in charge of the protection of cultural heritage.

ICBS – International Committee of the Blue Shield

New kinds of conflicts which have broken out in the recent years (Czechoslovakia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, East Timor) and serious natural disasters (like the floods in Florence, 1996, Poland, 1997, or the fires in St Petersburg or Los Angeles, to quote just a few) have led four non-governmental organizations to found the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS). The Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. It is the symbol specified in the 1954 Hague Convention for making cultural sites to give them protection from attack in the event of armed conflict.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) covers museums and archives, historic sites and libraries. It brings together the knowledge, experience and international networks of four expert organizations: the International Council of Archives (ICA), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). These

represent an unrivalled body of expertise to advise and assist in responding to events such as war in former Yugoslavia and hurricane damage in Central America. ICBS is international, independent and professional.

The ICBS works for the protection of the world's cultural heritage, in particular by:

- encouraging safeguarding and respect for cultural property and promoting risk preparedness;
- training experts at national and regional level to prevent, control and recover from disasters;
- facilitating international responses to threats or emergencies threatening cultural property; and
- cooperating with other bodies including UNESCO, ICCROM and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

So far, the ICBS has concentrated on two main areas of activity: on training and on the revisions of international law for protecting cultural heritage.

Radenci Declaration

A seminar was held in Radenci, Slovenia, in November 1998 to train personnel to intervene following armed conflict or natural disasters. Participants from 12 countries, drawn from museums, archives, libraries and historic buildings, spent a week discussing strategies and tactics for dealing with disasters. Case studies were presented on war damage in former Yugoslavia, flood damage in Poland, earthquake damage in Italy, together with the experiences of military personnel for the seminar, which was targeted at personnel in eastern and southern Europe.

The seminar drafted a joint statement, to be known in Radenci Declaration calling for:

- the protection, safeguard and respect of cultural property (in both normal and exceptional situations) to be included in national policies and programmes;
- strategies to assess and reduce risk and to improve response capacity in the event of threat to cultural property to be developed; and
- institutions caring for the cultural heritage, to integrate risk preparedness and management within their activities.

New Hague Protocol

The second area of activity of the ICBS has been in the forum of the revision of the Hague Convention. The Convention of 1954 is the main international instrument for protecting cultural heritage in armed conflict, and is based on the idea that the preservation of the cultural heritage is not only a matter for the state in which it is located but is of great importance for all peoples of the world. Since 1954 it has been gradually codified by UNESCO, the UN agency charged with responsibility for cultural matters, and it has also become linked to the development of humanitarian law initiated by the Red Cross.

The Convention reflects the experience of the World War II, a total war between nation states. The majority of conflicts since 1945, which have ravaged cultural property have, however, been of a different type and have often taken place at a sub-national level.

Recognizing the damage to cultural heritage which has taken place despite the existence of the 1954 Convention, a revision process has been underway since 1933, coordinated by UNESCO and with the active participation of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross). The culmination of this process was the March 1999 Diplomatic Conference in The Hague, which agreed a new Protocol giving increased protection and sanctions.

The 1999 Protocol defines clearly the occasions in which "imperative military necessity" can be claimed as a reason for attacking cultural sites. It redefines the obligations on occupying powers regarding cultural property. It creates a new category of exceptional protection to be given to the most important sites and institutions. It introduces a range of new and specific war crimes for breaches, and includes provision for universal international jurisdiction, meaning that such crimes can be prosecuted in any country that signs the Protocol. For the first time, the most serious crimes will be extraditable.

The new Protocol also establishes an inter-governmental committee of states to monitor and review the operation of the Convention. The ICBS, together with the ICRC and ICCROM, is given a specific advisory role to this new committee. The recognition of ICBS in the new protocol is unprecedented, and adds weight to its work in national and international circles.

National Blue Shield Committees

It is vital that the international initiative is taken up and supported by local initiatives. Blue Shield Committees are being formed in a number of countries.

Belgium was the first to do so, and discussions are currently underway in a number of other countries including France, Poland, UK, the Netherlands and Costa Rica. We must note that similar initiatives already exist in Italy, Switzerland, in the USA and the Caribbean.

National Committees can multiply effectiveness by bringing together the different professions, local and national government, the emergency services and the armed forces. They can provide a forum to improve emergency preparedness by sharing experiences and exchanging information. They can provide a focus for raising national awareness of the threats to cultural heritage. They can also promote the ratification and implementation by national governments of the Hague Convention and associated protocols.

The great strength of Blue Shield is that it is cross-sectoral, bringing together professions and institutions across the cultural spectrum. By pooling their expertise, and drawing in military authorities and emergency services, the Blue Shield is a potentially powerful model for managing disaster risks at a national level.

Archives and Libraries Emergency Programmes

Blue Shield is not just an initiative for politically troubled regions of the world. It is highly relevant to the situation we face in relatively stable democratic states. Because armed conflict is deliberate, it may be more damaging to cultural property than natural or accidental damage, but the difference is one of degree and not of principle. The widespread flooding in Poland in 1997 that affected one-third of the country resulted in severe damage to archive and library material and almost overwhelmed the ability of archives and libraries to react. Moreover, steps to mitigate the effects of armed conflict and to protect archives materials, are virtually the same as those to mitigate the effects of other disasters from fire or flood. Studying the problems faced by archives that have experienced armed conflict can help to re-evaluate and improve disaster planning.

In 1997, ICA worked with UNESCO to develop an emergency programme for protecting archives in the event of armed conflict. The programme was based on case studies in three countries in different continents with quite different experiences: Costa Rica, where the constitution forbids an army, the Gambia, where there has been some sporadic armed conflict in the past and Croatia, which experienced severe fighting in 1992.

The emergency programme came to a series of conclusions. The first was that archive institutions must define those of their records (typically 2% to 7%) which are vital and which will receive special attention in protection and salvage. These should normally include all the finding aids. The vital records should also be the subject of special copying programmes and the copies stored remotely.

The second conclusion was that an assessment of risks, based on potential threats, should be at the heart of institutions' policies and programmes. The risk assessment must consider all threats, and balance the seriousness of their impact against the probability of their occurring.

The third conclusion was that protection in situ should always be considered first, and only when it is not possible or appropriate should evacuation of archive material be considered.

The fourth conclusion was that all institutions should establish written emergency policies, fully supported by senior management, with the provision of appropriate materials and equipment. One aspect of the policy must be how to react and survive in conditions where there is little or no infrastructure: in other words, how to be self-sufficient for at least a time.

The final conclusion of the programme was to emphasize the central importance of the archives building. It is the first (or last) line of defense for the archive material and is crucial to the success of any protection programme. The characteristics of the building, its location and construction type need to be examined, its weaknesses need to be analyzed and measures to reduce or overcome them must be devised. Equally, the strengths of the building need to be identified, and exploited.

Although no similar emergency programme has yet been developed between UNESCO and IFLA, the same conclusions can be applied to libraries. IFLA has therefore published a leaflet covering four stages: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Libraries and Archives in Kosovo

Through its constituent organizations, the ICBS has already been active in Kosovo:

- A mission to the national museum of Kosovo in Pristina, jointly mounted by ICOM and "Patrimoine sans frontières" in November 1999.

- A mission to the archives of Kosovo, mounted by ICA in association with UNESCO and the Council of Europe in December 1999.
- A conference of the national directors of archives of former Yugoslavia and neighboring countries, organized by the European Board of ICA in November 1999, which produced a joint declaration.
- Financial assistance was pledged by IFLA to salvage rare manuscripts in December 1999.
- From 25 February to 5 March, 2000 an expert mission mounted by IFLA, UNESCO and the Council of Europe was sent to the main cities of Kosovo in order to prepare an assessment of the situation concerning libraries and to establish rehabilitation guidelines.

A full report on the mission including suggestions for rehabilitation guidelines in short and medium term will soon be available. However a brief report already stated that: "The National and University Library and other special libraries are in decay, the preservation of cultural heritage in terms of printed materials endangered and the national systems to record and disseminate documents are practically out of function. Large parts of the valuable collections in the National and University Library have been removed and probably destroyed during the period 1990-1999."

Many public and school libraries especially in the countryside have been totally burned down, others have had their book collections removed or destroyed, and those which are still functioning suffer from the effects of almost 10 years of neglect in acquisitions. Equally many library books have been burned along with the homes of users. An estimated total of almost half the stocks of all the public libraries are lost. A great part of the remaining books are either outdated or irrelevant to local inhabitants due to their ideological, linguistic or ethnic character. Practically all equipment has been removed and most of the present staff needs training after a long period without professional practice and systematic education.

There is no cooperation or even contact between professionals of the ethnic Albanian majority and professionals in ethnic Serbian enclaves.

In general there is a heavy need for reading rooms, children's literature, current professional literature and access to new technology. International support in terms of funding and professional assistance is now needed to reconstruct libraries and a functioning library network.

Furthermore, an action plan for Kosovo has been drawn. It consists of five main elements:

Assistance with recovery work, both short and long-term:

- compile inventories of cultural property at institutional, regional and national level;
- assess the condition of the different services, their staff, buildings and equipment;
- provide reports on priority needs of each sector;
- identify short term projects for emergency protection of property at risk and for confidence building; and
- develop long term recovery strategies for each sector and for the territory as a whole;

Empowerment of Kosovan institutions and their staffs to improve emergency preparedness and recovery capacity:

- set up mechanism for dialogue between cultural heritage institutions and the military and civil administrations in Kosovo;
- provide cross-sectoral training in risk preparedness and recovery, possibly following the model used in Radenci, Slovenia, in November 1998; and
- encourage the setting up of a Blue Shield Committee in Kosovo, bringing together staffs from the different sectors to promote exchange of experiences and pooling of resources.

Development of staff of cultural heritage institutions and their re-integration into the international community:

- establish dialogue between professional staffs in Kosovo and in neighboring countries;
- encourage attendance of Kosovan staff at international conferences; and
- identify training opportunities for staff, both in Kosovo and abroad.

Promotion of the implementation of the Hague Convention and the new Protocol by all parties involved in the region:

- establish dialogue between proposed national Blue Shield Committee and KFOR; and
- provide specialized training for military and police commanders in Kosovo on the international rules governing protection of cultural property and on their importance of such property.

Raising awareness of the international community of the importance of cultural property and the need to protect it:

- identify potential donors among aid agencies, governments and private foundations;
- establish collaborative partnerships with other concerned organizations, including Patrimoine sans Frontières and the Packard Foundation;
- provide information on protection of Kosovan cultural property through the ICBS Web site; and
- publicize project successes.

It is clear that this action plan will be implemented only if adequate funding is found.

To Mark or Not to Mark?

Last but not least, one question arises frequently in discussion: does using the Blue Shield symbol help to protect the building or site, or does it, as some recent experience indicates, mark it out as a target for hostile forces? The following comment was made by Croatian archivists in 1997: "During the war in Croatia it was obvious that cultural objects were deliberate targets in spite of distinct signs of the Hague Convention. This is an open international problem that calls for changes to the Hague Convention".

Whilst recognizing the danger, the ICBS is strongly in favor of marking, since without it the full protection of international law will not be available to cultural sites and their contents. After all, the Red Cross symbol has on occasions been attacked in 20th Century conflicts, yet there is no suggestion that it should not be used.

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