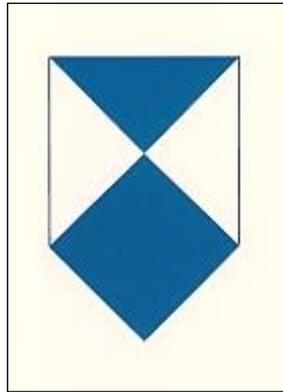


**Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS)**



**Mission Report**

**Civil-Military Assessment Mission for Malian Heritage**

**January 13 to 19, 2014**

**January 23, 2014**

## 1) Objective

The objective of the mission was to evaluate the current situation of Cultural Heritage (including monuments, archaeological and historical sites and archives) in Northern Mali after the recent armed conflict. Especially possibilities to establish contacts with the Malian Armed Forces resulting in support for their eventual endeavors to help protecting Cultural Heritage following international legal obligations had to be assessed. The latter should preferably lead to military participation in a, yet to be created, National committee of the Blue Shield in Mali.

Different accounts and statements regarding iconoclasm, looting and vandalism were published regarding locations in Northern and Central Mali that were, until recently under control of Jihadist forces. Sometimes such reports were contradictory and vague therefore it was necessary to send a mission, especially to those sites that were reportedly affected by both criminal and supposedly military "justified" acts. Aim was to **document** the situation, to **state** damages incurred and to **encourage and motivate** the parties involved, especially the Armed Forces of Mali, to further efforts to protect the invaluable Cultural Heritage of Mali.

The team took advantage of their former experiences during **Civil-Military Assessment Missions on the status of Egyptian and Libyan Heritage**.

The **objectives** of the Malian mission went beyond mere damage assessment. Considered were also typical post war problems such as illegal digging, looting and illicit traffic of cultural property. An international, timely and independent fact finding mission generally provides support on a wide (international) level while at the same time giving perspectives, at least for the mid-term. In addition signs of international concern and solidarity can encourage those Malians who protected their heritage under difficult and dangerous conditions during the recent occupation. It was of vital importance to make contacts, or stay in contact with those, currently responsible for Mali's heritage, especially in the Armed Forces. This way it will be possible to assist with raising awareness on the protection of cultural property while stimulating potential international professional support to be offered and also discuss issues on a personal and direct level.

## 2) Composition of the Mission

### **Karl von Habsburg, LL.M.**

**President of the 'Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield' (ANCBS)**

He is a former Member of the European Parliament for Austria and has specialized in International Humanitarian Law and Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection. A former Air Force pilot, he is still serving in the reserve of the Austrian armed forces as Cultural Property Protection Officer. He is vice president of the Austrian Society for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and a founder member of Blue Shield Austria. Karl von Habsburg is frequent lecturer and author of several publications on the subject of Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection and Military Cultural Property Protection.

### **Dr. Joris Kila**

**Chairman of the 'International Military Cultural Resources Work Group' (IMCuRWG).**

He is a researcher at the Kompetenzzentrum Kulturelles Erbe und Kulturgüterschutz of the University of Vienna in Austria. He has been acting chairman of the cultural affairs department at the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Group North in the Netherlands, and in that capacity he undertook several cultural rescue missions in Iraq and FYROM (Macedonia). He is Editor in Chief of the Peer Reviewed series Heritage and Identity at Brill Academic Publishers (Leiden-Boston) and author and co-author of many academic publications on the subject of cultural property

protection in times of armed conflict utilizing militarized experts. Joris Kila holds degrees in Art history and Classical Archaeology and a PhD in Cultural Sciences. He is a reserve Lieutenant Colonel and is regularly asked to advice on Cultural Property Protection issues.

### **Siratigui Sogoba**

#### **Research Fellow at the Musée des Armées, Bamako.**

He holds 2 diplomas of the Université Senghor in Alexandria, Egypt, regarding organization and operation of Cultural Heritage entities. He was director of the monument department at the Direction Nationale du Patrimoine Cultural de Mali (2005-2006). He is associate Professor at the University in Bamako and has published several works on cultural tourism and involvement of the military in Cultural Property Protection.

### **Christo Grozev, LL.M**

Investor and operator of media companies since 1991, including publicly traded companies (1996-2004). He holds degrees in Media & Mass Communications, Law and Law & Economics. His special interests are in international litigation (tort) law and international criminal law. He is founder and member of LUR, a Bulgarian-based academic think-tank specializing on assessment and prevention of international political and economic risks.

## **3) Political Situation**

Mali has been struggling for decades in a conflict with Tuareg rebels in its northern territories. Since also neighboring countries were coping with similar situations, Mali, Mauritania, Algeria and Niger set up a joint command in 2010 to deal with the threats.

In 2011 the situation in Mali, especially in the north, became very volatile. After the defeat of the Libyan dictator Gaddafi, some of his armed fighters escaped southwards and joined forces with rebels in Mali. In addition radical forces in Mali were supported with substantial funding of Wahhabi origin, fueling again radical Islam.

In March 2012, the political situation in Mali deteriorated even more when the then acting President Touré was deposed by military officers ahead of presidential elections. Touré was accused of not dealing effectively with the threats in the north. All of this resulted in Tuareg rebels seizing the north of the country and declaring independence. In May 2012 the Tuareg MNLA (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad) and the Islamist Ansar Dine declared northern Mali an Islamic state, imposing Islamic Law in Timbuktu. Al-Qaeda in North Africa endorsed Ansar Dine, and together they overtook the northern towns of Kidal and Gao. The position and consequently influence of the Tuareg MNLA was later pushed back by the two more radical groups, Ansar Dine and AQIM (Al Qaeda in Maghreb).

In autumn 2012 Islamist forces overtook the strategically important town of Douentza and started their move towards central- and western Mali. Although the West African group ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States) decided in November 2012 on a joint military action to retake the north of Mali, the political situation in the capital Bamako continued to deteriorate. When Islamist fighters conquered the strategically important town of Konna and threatened to proceed towards the capital in January 2013, President Traore asked France for help. The French and Malian troops reconquered Timbuktu and Gao within a few weeks. Kidal, the last major rebel stronghold resisted until the end of the month.

In April 2013 France started to withdraw its troops, nevertheless a sizeable element stays in Mali until today in order to support the Malian national forces. After a peace deal with the Tuareg nationalist rebels in June 2013, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita won the presidency of Mali in national elections.

In September 2013 Malian forces clashed with Tuareg rebels for the first time since the peace accord. In December an alliance of parties supporting the president won the parliamentary elections. The situation in the north remains tense until today.

#### 4) Preparatory Work

Resolution 2100 of the UN Security Council, adopted on April 25, 2013, deals with the creation of the MINUSMA mission in Mali. Paragraph 16f of the resolution stipulates that it is inter alia a mandate for the mission '*To assist the transitional authorities of Mali, as necessary and feasible, in protecting from attack the cultural and historical sites in Mali, in collaboration with UNESCO*'.

Based on that, several visits and activities such as workshops were undertaken by NGO's and IO's to assess the situation of Mali's museums, archives and libraries, as well as protected sites like mosques and mausoleums.

Some workshops were also organized abroad for Mali's armed forces and representatives of ECOWAS to raise awareness for Cultural Heritage under threat; for example in December 2013 at the Austrian Staff College in Vienna a special course in Cultural Heritage Protection for African armed forces took place.

Nevertheless it still seemed advisable to assess the situation of Cultural Heritage Protection Readiness of national armed forces located in the north of Mali, lead by the military commander of Timbuktu, Colonel Kèba Sangaré. He extended an invitation to a Blue Shield Team to visit Timbuktu and participate in a workshop for officers on the topic of Cultural Property Protection following national and international obligations. A date was set for January 2014.

All team members were aware of the difficulties to reach Timbuktu by land (the only modus operandi to get a real sense of the situation) and of the sometimes insecure situation. Consequently it was decided that the mission should be small, flexible and conducted by Cultural Heritage Experts with military and legal expertise.

#### 5) Short Description of the Mission

On January 12, the team arrived in **Bamako**.

On January 13, the team visited first the Musée des Armées, since its Research Fellow Siratigui SOGOBA is a Cultural Heritage Protection specialist, who participated in the workshop held in Vienna in December, and who would be part of the Blue Shield assessment team. At the museum, a meeting with the director, Colonel Djibril SAMASSA, took place.

From there the team visited the office of 'Patrimoine Culturel' of the Malian Ministry of Culture. There they met with the Assistant National Director for Cultural Heritage, Moulaye COULIBALY, who often represents Mali at meetings of UNESCO in Paris. After that a meeting took place with the head of the department, Lassana CISSÉ, to talk about future Blue Shield activities in Mali.

The office of 'Patrimoine Culturel' is housed in the National Museum where the team met the museum's vice-director Salia MALLÉ, and then with its, internationally well known director Samuel SIDIBE to talk about the situation in Timbuktu.

The next day, January 14, the team left early in direction Timbuktu. Shortly before the town of **Ségou** the car broke down (due to the very bad roads) and a replacement had to be organized. It was important to reach Sévaré the same evening in order to join the military convoy, provided by the Malian military the next morning to protect the team while travelling through some problematic parts of military area 5. This area is the biggest in Mali with 420.000 km/sq (this roughly equals the size of Germany and Austria combined) and has Timbuktu as its capital. The team reaches the town of **Sévaré** at 23.30.

At 07.00 the next day the convoy that consisted of armed pickup trucks with Malian military, left the military camp at Sévaré for Douentza. In the morning the convoy crossed the town of **Konna**, where the first real battle for the French Forces took place during the recapturing of northern Mali. Destructions caused by this battle are still very evident. At 1100 the convoy reached **Douentza** and prepared for the long stretch through the desert without any normal roads. At 12.30 the convoy departed, and after passing a formation of battle tanks in ready position drove into the desert. At 17.30 the convoy reached the **Niger River** and headed for the ferry to the northern shore. This transfer by boat takes 1hour 30 since the river currently carries a lot of water. From the northern shore it is 15 km to **Timbuktu** where the team met with Colonel Kèba SANGARÉ, the commander of military section 5 and the man who has commanded the Malian troops in the recapturing of Timbuktu and the north. The team stayed at a hotel next to the military camp where they were the only guests.

Early the next day, January 16, the team took a walk through the old town of Timbuktu and visited, amongst others, the peace monument that was severely damaged during the Jihadist occupation. The walk towards the military camp also lead past a huge signpost that used to read 'Timbuktu, city of the 333 saints'. The Jihadists however scratched out the 333 and replaced by it by a 0. A more modern monument in front of the city hall was bulldozed down during the Jihadist occupation.

In the military camp '**Fort Cheikh Sidy Bekaye**' the team got military transport to get around town. The first place to visit was the **Sidi Yahya** mosque, where a 'sacred door' was demolished by the Jihadists to provoke the local population who believe that opening of this door would bring bad luck to the city. During the tour the mission members were accompanied by the local Imam.

Next, the team drove by the places commemorating the explorers Heinrich Barth and René Caillé. Both their exteriors seemed untouched and in order. It was not possible to go in.

The following visit was the **Grand Mosque**. There the team met the Imam and got an extended tour. From the roof of the mosque a grand view can be taken of the town. It becomes immediately evident that the fact, the mosque is directly bordering the military camp (where the last defensive actions of the Jihadists took place), posed a great problem. Although extensive fighting happened in its immediate vicinity, damage to the mosque is minimal. Some parts of the mud brick covering of the walls had fallen down through vibrations caused by nearby explosions. The south-eastern corner suffered some more structural damage, but repairs are already in preparation. Several tombs of Sufi saints are embedded in the outside wall of the mosque. These have been vandalized by the Jihadists, but luckily they were not suffering the same fate as some neighboring tombs that were booby trapped or filled with feces after desecration. The tombs of the saints inside the mosque were not touched.

Upon inquiry whether the mosque was used for military purposes, information given shows that in the end phase of intense fighting in the World Heritage Site Timbuktu the mosque was also used as an observation post by the French troops.



From the Grand Mosque the team moved on to the **Institute Ahmed Baba**. There a tour was given by the institute's Vice Director CISSÉ. He showed the location where the Jihadists burned the manuscripts they found (on display and to be worked on) in the restoration studio. The studio itself is almost empty, apart from several unfilled boxes originally containing specific documents or books that were burned by the Jihadists. The team then visited the vaults that were broken open. In this location, currently an intense effort is going on to save those documents that have been only partially burned. A visit to the storage room followed. Apparently, the Jihadists had overlooked more the 10.000 documents due to lack of lighting in the vaults as the team could confirm.



Later the team returned to the military camp, where a presentation was given to an audience of more than 30 officers of the Armed Forces, the National Guard, the police and the fire department during a workshop on Cultural Property Protection. The presenters were the Commander of military region 5, Colonel Kèba SANGARÉ, Karl von HABSBURG for Blue Shield and Siratigui SOGOBA as Cultural Heritage specialist. Following the presentations a debate took place in which all team members participated. After the presentations Colonel Kèba SANGARÉ gave a guided tour to one of the places, where the Jihadists had their last stronghold during the recapturing of the town. The building the rebels withdraw themselves into is adjacent to the Grand Mosque. After

some deliberation the “allied forces” decided that an airstrike had to be excluded because of the danger of damaging the mosque. A 122mm howitzer had to be brought in and directed to a very complicated position where it could effectively take out the house, while not inflicting any damage to the mosque. This was successful, but the battle cost a lot of casualties.

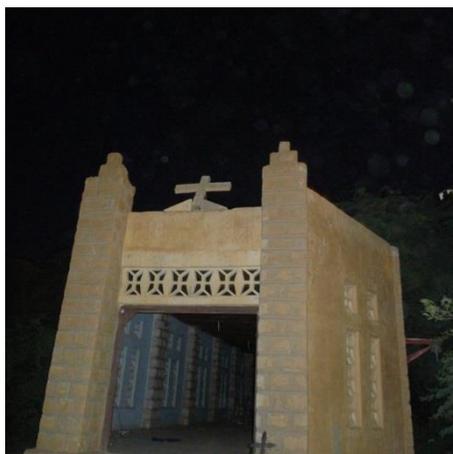


After the workshop, the presenters got interviewed for National Television.

Two more destroyed grave sites were visited which are both within the grounds of the military camp.

In the afternoon another meeting took place with Colonel Kèba SANGARÉ to discuss the creation of a Blue Shield Committee in Mali.

In the evening some team members visit the **Catholic Church** of Timbuktu. The church was completely devastated and a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary was found lying on the altar, the statue’s face has been totally scratched out. A clear demonstration of iconoclasm.



On the next day, January 17, the team left Timbuktu to start the long way back to Bamako. After the usual problems with cars in the desert, the team reached **Douentza** in the early afternoon. Two hours later a visit was paid to **Koona**, where a new monument, in fact a lieu de memoire is in the process of being completed to honor the first fallen French officer. In the evening the team visited the Grand Mosque of **Mopti**, The night was spent in Mopti.

On January 18, the team visited the town of **Djenné** and was taken around by Mamadou SAMAKE, a guide for the ‘Mission Culturelle’. First the overwhelmingly beautiful Grand Mosque was visited,

together with the Imam. From there the library opposite the Mosque was visited, where the team met librarian Garba YARO. In the library a program, supported by the British Library, is implemented aiming at registering all historic manuscripts and documents, also those privately owned. If a private family is willing to let their historic documents being handled by the library, they are entitled to store their priceless possessions into a small cupboard in the library to which only they have a key. Currently the library is in charge of more than 10.000 documents dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the objects get delivered in boxes and are in a very bad state due to unintended bad maintenance and preservation by their private owners.



The team visited the tomb of Tapama Djenepo, a young Bozo virgin that was bricked alive into the city walls during the construction of Djenné. Around her grave near the banks of the river, the difficult situation of a badly working sewage system becomes clearly evident.

After that the team visited the archaeological site of **Djenna-Djenné**. Research by archaeologist McIntosh has brought up settlement sites reaching back to 200BC. A lot of grave sites from different periods can still be found in situ. The team discussed security questions with the local specialists, apparently incidental economically motivated looting still takes place. In the evening the team drove via Ségou to Bamako, where it arrived at midnight.

The following day was used for a visit to the National Museum before the return flight to Paris.

## 6) Lessons Learned

The mission was necessary and very well received as was demonstrated by the encouragement of the Military, Cultural Heritage officials and local staff on site.

The mission would not have been possible with the same results without the specialized knowledge and contacts of Siratigui SOGOBA and his communication with specialists and academics in situ.

A basic condition for the success of the operation was the willingness of the participants to go and take certain calculable risks without waiting for insurances.

## 7) Suggestions for the Future

It is important to plan in the near future follow up activities in Mali, but also in other training centers of ECOWAS troops in order to encourage further training on issues concerning international humanitarian law (IHL) that comprise legal obligation to safeguard cultural heritage and cultural heritage protection (CPP). Military contacts and training for protection of cultural property are indispensable; this is also mandatory under IHL (example 1954 Hague Convention and Protocols) and is still not put into practice in many countries. Also recent developments on International Criminal law that provide for possibilities to prosecute Cultural Property Crimes following the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute of 1998 should be researched and discussed and underpinned with evidence. Mali ratified the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols and is a State Party to **the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court**.

Mali has to be supported in publishing stolen Cultural Heritage objects in order to stop illicit trade.

It is strongly suggested by the mission that a conference in Mali is planned for the near future to analyze the cultural property security situation including World Heritage Sites, archaeological sites, archives, museums and monuments, and provide strategies on how to deal with emergency situations while creating contingency plans using Malian examples and cases.

Once again the importance of Cultural Heritage to restore national identity and to function as a binding factor for all tribes and factions became apparent. Malian cultural heritage experts and political authorities confirmed this on more occasions.

## 8) Acknowledgements

The mission would like to recognize the support they got from the Armed Forces in Mali in these difficult and tensed times.

The mission would also like to recognize the outstanding help by the commander of military area 5, Colonel Kèba Sangaré, and his staff in the Timbuktu area. It was impressive to see the determination of the military and civilians to protect the integrity of all cultural heritage sites against any intruders and abuse.

The personal support of Siratigui Sogoba and his great passion for the cultural heritage of his homeland was a great encouragement. His engagement and contacts helped to make the mission a success.

The help of many individuals that the mission met in Mali, especially the clerics of the different mosques that were visited, as well as of those helping with information from abroad, made the success of the mission possible.

