



Blue Shield - 2nd Statement on Syria

7 April, 2012

As the conflict in Syria continues to deteriorate, and following its first statement from May 2011, the Blue Shield reiterates its grave concern regarding the safeguarding of the country's invaluable cultural and historical heritage, and bemoans the great suffering and loss of life that the situation has engendered.

The recent events are great cause for apprehension for the world heritage community. Both the tragedies suffered by the people of the Syrian Arab Republic and the dangers faced by heritage sites and institutions give reason for distress.

Syria's cultural heritage is endangered on several levels. Information on the besieging of the ruins of Palmyra, recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980, alongside the numerous worrisome reports concerning other important sites and the alleged looting of museums in Daraa, Hama, Homs and Idlib, have rendered obvious the need for a greater commitment to heritage protection by all those involved in this conflict. This also highlights the necessity for more concrete and detailed information regarding the extent of the damages already incurred and the risks faced by the country's archaeological, architectural and urban heritage.

The Blue Shield's concern for Palmyra also extends to other Syrian World Heritage Sites, monuments, ancient cities, archaeological sites, museums and other important repositories of movable cultural heritage. These sites and institutions conserve and provide insight into the country's historical and cultural identity, introducing national and international visitors to Syria's cultural wealth. The destruction and disappearance of artefacts greatly impoverishes humankind's collective memory.

The escalation of the conflict situation gives reason for concern and anguish to all those involved in the protection of heritage, rendering evident the precariousness of the situation for collections of cultural institutions and dangers to the integrity of sites and monuments. The protection of cultural heritage is required by international law, in addition to being a shared responsibility. The Blue Shield urges all those concerned to act responsibly, safeguarding the testimony of Syria's unique history for the enrichment of future generations of its people and of all of humanity.

The Syrian Arab Republic was a signatory of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its First Protocol since 1958, and since 1975, of the 1972 World Heritage Convention. Signatories of these conventions acknowledge and commit to the necessity of protecting and preserving their cultural heritage in the case of armed conflict. The Blue Shield calls on all parties associated with the situation in Syria to fulfil their responsibilities in protecting the country's precious cultural heritage sites and institutions.

The Blue Shield also calls on the Syrian Arab Republic to abide by its Antiquities Law of 1963, which states that “The establishment of [...] military installations shall be prohibited within half a kilometre of registered non-moveable archaeological and historical property”.

The Blue Shield’s mission is “to work to protect the world’s cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict, natural and man-made disasters”. For this reason, it places the expertise and network of its member organisations at the disposal of colleagues working in Syria to support their actions in protecting the country’s heritage, and if necessary, in assessing subsequent recovery, restoration, and repair measures.

The Blue Shield

The Blue Shield is the protective emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention, which is the basic international treaty formulating rules to protect cultural heritage during armed conflicts. The Blue Shield network consists of organisations dealing with museums, archives, audiovisual supports, libraries, monuments and sites.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), founded in 1996, comprises representatives of the five non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in this field:

- The International Council on Archives (www.ica.org)
- The International Council of Museums (www.icom.museum)
- The International Council on Monuments and Sites (www.icomos.org)
- The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (www.ifla.org)
- The Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (www.ccaaa.org)

National Blue Shield Committees have been founded in a number of countries. The Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS), founded in December 2008, works to coordinate and strengthen international efforts to protect cultural property at risk of destruction in armed conflicts or natural disasters. The ANCBS has its headquarters in The Hague.

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