



**Statement by ICBS on the impact of a war on cultural heritage in Iraq  
March 7th 2003**

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) expresses its profound concern about the potential damage to, and destruction of, cultural heritage in the event of war in Iraq.

Whilst the ICBS is keenly aware that there are other compelling concerns at times of armed conflict, not least the loss of human life, the Committee urges all the governments concerned to work within the spirit of The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to protect archives, libraries, monuments and sites, and museums, if war breaks out in Iraq and in the region.

The ICBS believes that, access to authentic cultural heritage is a basic human right. Damage to, and destruction of, cultural heritage represents an impoverishment, not only of the cultural life of the community directly concerned, but of humanity as a whole. This belief is expressed in several international conventions.

Iraq is universally recognized to be especially rich in cultural heritage. The area is often described as the 'cradle of civilisation'. The loss of parts of that heritage would certainly represent a loss to all the peoples of the world.

The ICBS wishes to stress that international humanitarian law prohibits the use of cultural property for military purposes or to shield military objectives.

In the aftermath of any war in Iraq, the ICBS calls upon all governments in a position to act to provide the necessary resources, human and financial, to assess the damage caused by the conflict to cultural heritage and to implement plans for the necessary repairs and restoration.

In the case of looting of cultural property, detailed plans by trained experts should be prepared for the repatriation or restitution of the property concerned, with the involvement of Iraqi scholars and heritage professionals.

The ICBS is willing to respond to requests for technical assistance and co-ordination which may be required by providing advice and assistance within the resources available.

Meanwhile, the ICBS calls upon all governments which have not yet become party to The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols to do so.