



**Statement by the International Committee of the Blue Shield on threatened cultural property
in the Middle East conflict
July 20th , 2006**

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) deplores the unacceptable loss of human lives, the considerable suffering, the rapid displacement of entire communities, and the destruction that are currently taking place in areas administered by Israel, the Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority. It is also extremely concerned by the threat that the present conflict could escalate still further.

ICBS, founded in 1996 'to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by wars and natural disasters', now calls on all parties to be respectful of the cultural property in the region. In making this statement, ICBS takes no position on any other issue relating to conflicts in the region.

Cultural property is priceless and irreplaceable, of vital importance not only to each community, but also to humanity. Historical sites and monuments, paintings and museum artefacts, books and libraries, manuscripts and archives all recount the history of the communities affected and of mankind as a whole. They are extremely vulnerable to attack during armed conflicts and, if they are damaged or destroyed, it is always difficult and often impossible to replace them or to restore them to their former condition. If the cultural heritage does not survive intact, then present and future generations in the region will not be able to appreciate their cultural identity in the fullest sense. Media and ICBS network reports indicate that there is a considerable risk that the cultural heritage of the various peoples in the region will suffer permanent losses.

It is universally recognized that this region has an extremely rich cultural heritage, which has had a profound and lasting influence on peoples throughout the world. This is demonstrated by the significant number of sites in both Israel and Lebanon inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. The total or partial loss of cultural properties in the area would seriously impoverish the collective memory of mankind.

It would be a great tragedy if this is allowed to happen. ICBS therefore calls on all parties to take the greatest possible care to protect the rich cultural heritage of the region and to take the necessary preventive measures to ensure that it is not damaged in any way during the present conflict.

While ICBS is keenly aware that there are other compelling concerns at times of armed conflict, not least the loss of human life, it wishes to stress that international law prohibits the use of cultural property for military purposes or to shield military objectives. It urges all parties

concerned to respect the provisions of The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols, as well as the 1972 World Heritage Convention, which calls on countries 'not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage' in the territory of other countries that are party to this Convention. Israel and Lebanon have ratified both of these Conventions.

ICBS is willing to respond to any requests for technical assistance and co-ordination which may be required, insofar as its resources permit.

Finally, once again ICBS calls upon all governments which have not yet ratified The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols to do so as quickly as possible.