

## Interview with Professor Peter Stone, 2021

### Transcripts of audio clips

#### **001 Professor Peter Stone discusses the effects of COVID**

“Museums have been closed globally for probably at best half of last year, if not longer. That's had a knock-on effect of not only museums, galleries art galleries, that whole side, libraries of having staff laid off and losing jobs. But globally the impact has been closure, the impact has been on reduction of staff, reduction, or limitation of movement, which is a critical one. And there are sadly increasing numbers of partially anecdotal, partially verified, examples of where staff haven't been able to get out to remote areas in countries where the amount of looting has gone on, on remote sites. So, you've got a pretty bleak sort of scenario there. The issue with tourism, and the collapse of the tourism industry, pretty much globally has had an exponentially larger impact on poorer countries that it has on richer countries as will be expected. The impact on those sites and those organisations has been massive. And it's at the sort of level about whether they will be able to, you know, continue in the same way that they are so there is there is real concern globally about that, that impact of COVID.”

#### **002 Peter Stone discusses 2020s disappointments**

“The year started off on February the 13th with a great high, where Karl Habsburg and I were in Geneva to sign the MOU with the International Committee with the Red Cross, and I had planned a series of follow up visits to Geneva. Sadly, the signing of the MOU overlapped with the changeover of Director Generals of the ICRC and so I haven't been able to build the relationship with new DG [Director General] as I had with the old DG. We had also planned a similar strategic document with NATO, which we've now had to do remotely. So, we've got that, but again, it's a remote package and we haven't been able, really, to do the follow up. And I suppose the biggest disappointment of last year was the cancellation of the face-to-face General Assembly in Prague and the huge amount of work that Emma [the Secretariat] and a couple of others had to put in to change a face-to-face General Assembly to a much-restricted agenda virtual General Assembly. One of the fall outs of that on a personal level was my election as President, and while I've been working with Karl, supporting him a lot on the sort of day-to-day administrative side of things, there is a difference between being a Vice-President and being the President. So that's been a step change for us. We carried on with the normal monthly meetings of the Board and planning for the future, and especially trying to begin to plan for a fundraising campaign.”

#### **003 Peter Stone discusses BSIs successful collaborative work in Beirut**

“Nearly every museum in the blast area had lost all of [their] windows and most of [their] doors. So just buying the boards and the - you know - the plastic sheeting to cover those, and to organise an astonishing bunch of young volunteers who appeared on the doorstep, almost the next morning, you know, saying, what could they do. That was a fantastic opportunity for showing what Blue Shield can do, given a strong local presence and we're

very lucky that Lebanese National Committee has got some very good and enthusiastic members, but also supported by local volunteers. But also supported by a local population who value their cultural heritage enormously. And they were all wanting to lend a hand.

The other thing that was really interesting in the Beirut situation is we have been working in Lebanon since 2013, helping to train the Lebanese armed forces and the UN peacekeeping deployment in the south of the country in terms of CPP [cultural property protection]. That was astonishingly successful. And one of the things that we always say is you have to do this work long term. And it was because we've been working with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and UNIFIL since 2013 - not on an absolutely annual basis, but almost - that we had the confidence in them, and more importantly, they had the confidence in us, that they were willing to deploy personnel and equipment to work with some of the biggest problems, or one of the biggest problems; in particular of the historic buildings, the old palace where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs works. About two thirds of the roof of that had been lost. So, one of the things that [we] were able to do with LAF and UNIFIL working together was to put a temporary roof back on and then pull the walls back together that were already beginning to pull apart. And so that was an astonishing three-way partnership, or four-way partnership, because of course the DGA were there as well. They simply didn't have the personnel or the capability that LAF and UNIFIL had got with engineers on site and everything, working with our architects and the DGA architects to secure and preserve that building.

And it's a really lovely bit that we were given a special commemorative thank you from LAF for that work. And that's what really shows can be done if you build relationships over a long time. And that's one of the things that we need all National Committees to be doing over the coming years.

My only, well my first and only trip last year following the lockdown of COVID-19 was to Beirut, and I was there a couple of weeks after LAF and UNIFIL had begun to work on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one of the best sites I saw, if I can describe it that way, was one large room full of material that had been identified and conserved. So there were window frames, there were doors, which normally would have been thrown away because they were all damaged, but because they were the historic fabric – the guys on site had maintained and saved them. So, before they actually started working, the Lebanese National Committee in collaboration with the NGO Baladi, had done a day's training with them saying “This is what you've got to be careful of, this is stabilising a building, but it's stabilising a particular type of building that we're going to ask you to do things that normally you wouldn't bother doing”. And they got it. They understood it, you know, very quickly. And part of that as I, as I say, is that long term relationship.”

#### **004 Peter Stone reflects on 25 years of the Blue Shield**

“I mean, we're still working that out a little bit. But obviously we need a sort of retrospective view of where we've come over 25 years, and I think we've come an awful long way. So, I think that's a key part. I think one key element to get across is that while Blue Shield was created by four international heritage, NGOs and the Blue Shield is essentially more than just a heritage organisation. It has to be an organisation that, I mean, I describe it

as a triangle – and the three points of the triangle being their heritage sector, the humanitarian sector, and the uniformed sector – and the space in between within the triangle is effectively the safe space that those three different groups can work together and build that relationship; so that when there is another explosion or another armed conflict or whatever, we are ready, and we know the language that each other is talking, and the constraints each group works under, but also the opportunities for working together that such things deliver. As I say, we will be running a few events that will look at the past and the journey, and the plan is to bring that all together, as I say, in Prague in September, where we will have (I hope, but this is still to be confirmed) part of the General Assembly will be handed over to, let's call it, a mini-conference within the General Assembly, that will not only look backwards but look forwards to where we want to be in 25 years time. And I constantly say to those who say the Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross, I say that's our aspiration, but not yet. And it may take 50 or 100 years, so what we are doing at the moment is laying the foundations for that, and let's hope that in 25 years we will have got some, or my successors will have got some walls half built of that analogy.

The pressures don't go away because we are still now - I mean for the last six weeks or so, much of my time has been dominated by Nagorno-Karabakh, and increasingly, of course, by Ethiopia and Tigray. It's an indication that the amount of work out there is almost exponential and that we cannot deal with it with the tiny group of people that we've got working at the moment. And it's probably one of the worst times in recent, you know, history – the last 500 years – to have tried to go out and find, you know, significant sums of money for the core element of an organisation. Project funding is, I won't say easy but relatively easy, to find funding for; finding funding for that long term planning, and preparation, and education, and liaison with the other elements is something that people find less attractive to fund, and yet which is absolutely fundamental because [if] we don't have that, then you don't have that relationship built as we had in Lebanon between the key partners.”