
About the Blue Shield: Factsheet

Who are we?

The Blue Shield is an independent, neutral, non-governmental, non-profit, international organisation which strives to protect heritage during armed conflicts and disasters across the world. We are

“committed to the protection of the world’s cultural property, and is concerned with the protection of cultural and natural heritage, tangible and intangible, in the event of armed conflict, natural- or human-made disaster”.

This includes all forms of cultural property including museums, monuments, archaeological sites, archives, libraries and audio-visual material, and significant natural areas, as well as intangible heritage. We believe that the protection of people is indivisibly intertwined with the protection of their cultural property.

The Blue Shield was founded in 1996 by the four major international cultural heritage organisations:

- International Council on Archives (ICA) -
- International Council of Museums (ICOM) -
- International Federation of Library and Information Associations and Institutions (IFLA) -
- International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) -

Today, we have 29 national committees operating across the world, with more under construction. These national committees are coordinated by the Blue Shield International Board, which is composed of an elected President, 4 elected members and representatives of our four founding organisations.



The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property designates an emblem for cultural property that should be protected, and for identification of those working to protect it – the blue shield. The Blue Shield organisation took up the emblem of the Convention as a symbol of their protective work, set in a blue circular background.

Our Work

Our work is underpinned by international law – in particular, the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999), which are part of international humanitarian law (IHL). IHL, also known as the Law of War or Law of Armed Conflict, is a set of rules which seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict on people and property. This primary context is also informed by other international legal instruments, by the UN and UNESCO’s international cultural protection agenda, and by international environmental disaster initiatives, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The Blue Shield is an advisory body to UNESCO on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict with a legally granted mandate under the Hague Convention’s 1999 Second Protocol. Our key goals are to:

- protect tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage from the effects of conflict and environmental disaster;
- promote ratification, respect, and implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols;
- raise awareness of the importance of protecting cultural heritage in emergency situations;
- promote and provide relevant training for those preventing, mitigating, or responding to cultural heritage damage during conflict and disasters, and those involved in preventing the illicit trafficking of looted objects (including heritage professionals, the armed forces, other emergency responders, and those preventing illicit trafficking);
- promote widespread engagement with, and participation in, protecting cultural property;

- encourage co-operation with, and between, those involved in emergency situations.

If cultural property is to be protected in conflict and following disasters it is essential that adequate preparations are made in peacetime, prior to conflicts breaking out and before disasters strike. The Blue Shield aims to be proactive, wherever possible developing knowledge and coordinating measures that prevent or mitigate damage before it can occur. In order to do this, we champion the significance of cultural heritage, raising awareness of its importance for local communities and for all humanity, to demonstrate that it is not a luxury, and its protection should be given full consideration in line with its place in international law.

Our work is delivered through six areas of activity:

- 1) Proactive protection and risk preparedness;
- 2) Emergency response;
- 3) Stabilisation, post-disaster recovery, and long-term/ongoing support activities;
- 4) Legal compliance, policy, and their implementation;
- 5) Capacity building activities, and education and training, and;
- 6) Co-ordination – of Blue Shield members and *with* partner organisations.



Top Left to Right: Blue Shield International (BSI) Supports NATO Exercise ARRCADe Globe 2019; BSI Supports NATO Exercise Trident Jaguar 2018; UK Blue Shield Supports British Army Cultural Property Protection Unit training 2019.

Bottom Left to Right: BS Lebanon volunteers support after the Beirut Explosion 2020; BS Argentina place blue shields with Motivados - Fuente Television Publica Argentina, 2017; BS France conduct cultural property protection response training 2019.

Our Ethics

The Blue Shield's commitment to protect cultural property is framed in the context of the ethical principles set out in the Blue Shield Strasbourg Charter.

- Joint Action -
- Professionalism -
- Independence -
- Respect for Cultural Identity -
- Neutrality -
- Not for profit -

Contact Us

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