



OPEN LETTER TO THE BELGIAN MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR REGARDING ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

30/01/2022

Dear Minister Verlinden,

Since December 31, 2021, the Belgian federal police has not one detective to fight against illicit trafficking of cultural heritage. From then on, our country does no longer respect the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property that Belgium ratified on March 31, 2009.

Blue Shield, an international, independent and non-governmental organization, strives to protect cultural heritage during armed conflicts and disasters across the world. The main objectives include supporting actions to prevent and combat the illicit trafficking of looted objects. As an advisory body to UNESCO, the organization is legally mandated under the Second Hague Protocol of 1999 to these

For several years, the Belgian Blue Shield Committee, created in 2000 with as founding members* ICOM, ICOMOS, IFLA and ICA, has observed that the attention paid to the police departments involved in this fight against the illicit trade has increasingly faded, especially after the suppression of the ART unit at the end of 2015. Since that date only one detective and an assistant remained to manage the database of stolen works of art linked to INTERPOL, and to find these stolen or looted works of art.

From December 2015, letters were sent to the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Justice, the Director General of the Belgian Federal Judicial Police and the Head of the Belgian Federal Police to draw attention to this negative and extremely damaging development.

In November 2016, Blue Shield launched a petition in 8 languages which received over 6,000 signatures. The association was also heard in a senatorial session on the subject and participated in the drafting of the Senate Information Report: *La lutte contre le vol d'œuvres d'art* (June 15, 2018). In the meantime, several conferences and articles have also been devoted to the same subject.

In its struggle for cultural heritage, the Belgian Committee of the Blue Shield wants more than ever to express strongly its indignation at the disinterest of the different levels of Belgian power and the lack of attention and concrete resources made available to fight against the illicit traffic of works of art in our country.

Artistic objects looted in war zones end up illegally on the Belgian market and it is not uncommon that the profits are used to finance international terrorism. In addition our own cultural heritage is victim of the actual situation. The illicit trade of stolen art objects extends beyond the limits of the competences of local services who currently have to deal with these issues, and even beyond our borders.

The Belgian Blue Shield to the Minister of the Interior appeal to the Minister of the Interior and members of the Federal Government of Belgium to adopt a firm policy against these criminal actions.

The 1970 Convention must be respected!

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the Board,

Gustaaf Janssens, PRESIDENT
Christina Ceulemans, SECRETARY
Britt Claes, TREASURER

***ICOM** International Council for Museums
ICOMOS International Council of Monuments and Sites
IFLA International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
ICA International Council on Archives

blueshieldbelgium@gmail.com
NE-ON 0475.135.791
IBAN BE82 9730 80038168 • BIC ARSPBE22
Website : blueshieldbelgium.be
Facebook : belgian committee of the blue shield

blueshieldbelgium@gmail.com
NE-ON 0475.135.791
IBAN BE82 9730 80038168 • BIC ARSPBE22
Website : blueshieldbelgium.be
Facebook : belgian committee of the blue shield