

Minutes of the General Assembly of the Members of the Blue Shield

Tuesday 14 June 2022, 13.00 CET – 15.00 CET

On 14 June, the Blue Shield hosted its 2022 General Assembly online (hosted from our registered address in the National Archives in the Netherlands). We were delighted to welcome representatives from all our Blue Shield national committees, committees under construction, and the founding four organisations. Attendees are listed in Appendix 1.

The General Assembly was recorded and is available on the Blue Shield YouTube channel¹. Relevant comments from the Zoom chat are included in these minutes.

1. Welcome

The meeting began with a welcome from the President, Professor Peter Stone, who apologised for his connection, and brief housekeeping elaborating how the meeting would work. He reiterated that we are obliged to hold the General Assembly annually in the first half of the year under Dutch law². The Board propose that we hold virtual general assemblies for two years, and then in the third year when a new Board is elected, the Blue Shield should meet in person: this will next be in 2023. It is hoped to connect the 2023 General Assembly (and other in-person meetings) with either training, a conference, or a similar event to make it worthwhile for Members to travel and meet.

He thanks the Netherlands National Committee, and in particular Angela Dellebeke, for assisting with hosting, and the Czech National Committee for their work in planning to host the event in person, which has sadly not been possible.

2. Approval of Annual Documentation

All annual documentation is prepared according to the requirements under Dutch law. The President introduced the documents. Members were asked to approve the

2.1 Minutes of the General Assembly (2021)	Document 7
2.2 BSI Annual Report (November 2021 – May 2022)	Document 2
2.3 BSI Action Plan (June 2022-General Assembly 2023)	Document 3
2.4 BSI Financial Report of the Treasurer (Financial Year 2021)	Document 4
And Audit Committee Report (Financial Year 2021)	Document 5

¹ <https://youtu.be/HB001Tbw-B0>

[Technical difficulties encountered were edited out of the video. The full video is available on request].

² The annual accounts must now be audited within six months of the year end, so General Assemblies should be held on an annual basis in the first half of the year, to allow the Auditing Committee to report to the General Assembly in due time.

2.1. Minutes of the General Assembly 2021 (Document 7)

Emma Cunliffe (EC), part of the Secretariat, apologised for the delay in sending out the minutes of the 2021 General Assembly, which were not circulated until April 2022. She asked that voting relate to substantive matters; spelling or grammatical mistakes, or typographic errors can be corrected at any time by contacting her.

2.2. Annual Report Nov 2021-May 2022 (Document 2)

The President flagged that the Annual Report goes from the previous report end (November 2021) to this General Assembly (May 2022). He reiterated that, although it was slightly frustrating that it remains confidential, members of the Board and the Secretariat are working extremely hard in relation to activities in Afghanistan and in Ukraine but the work cannot currently be made public. He asked for the understanding of the Members that everything possible is being done in relation to those situations, and hoped it would be possible to make this work public in the future.

The President highlighted some key points from the Annual Report. These included:

- *Item 1.2:* Accreditation of new committees, welcoming Slovakia and Niger, with 6 committees more under construction. [Answering a question in the chat from Susann Harder, BS Germany, and Andrea Kiesamp, BS Netherlands, these are: Croatia; Armenia; Mozambique; and Canada; and Italy and Spain are renewing their paperwork after the existing committees lapsed. There are also several expressions of interest, but these may not be realised, e.g. Ivory Coast.]
- BSI wants to identify ways to better include national committees in future General Assemblies. Previously all national committees were granted five minutes each; but now with 30 national committees and more in creation, it is impossible to give everyone time to speak. One way that BSI has reduced the need for speaking during General Assemblies is by offering national committees a platform to speak at monthly meetings, recording the presentations and making them available on the Blue Shield website³. The President asked for any other suggestions regarding national committee participation in General Assemblies, emphasising BSI would be pleased to try any new process.
- *Item 1.4:* the next General Assembly in 2023 should be held in the first half of the year. Although BSI had hoped this would be hosted by the Czech National Committee, this is unlikely to be possible given their financial cycle. The President asked if any national committee were interested in hosting the 2023 General Assembly in person before the end of June 2023, to please get in touch with himself or EC for more information.
- *Item 1.8:* BSI continues to try and work hard to develop improved communications. If any national committees have any suggestions for improvement, please get in touch.
- *Item 2.5:* BSI are working with partners to develop collaborative training and educational materials with colleagues, and we hope to be able to update Blue Shield Members shortly.

The Report ended with a summary of actions achieved from the previous Action Plan. No questions were received on the Annual Report before the General Assembly.

³ <https://theblueshield.org/what-we-do/national-committee-activities/>

The President opened the floor for questions. Angela Dellebeke, BS Netherlands, asked for elaboration on Blue Shield International's role in coordination in the Ukraine crisis, noting that with the number of parties involved, BSI could play a vital role in structuring and organising response. The President agreed that whilst the level of international support has been excellent he had also noted the lack of coordination. He cited the difficulties of coordination from a war zone from the Ukrainian perspective, but added that BSI had taken a step back from doing much coordination in Ukraine as so many others are involved, including Blue Shield's founding four organisations. BSI has offered its support to the Ukrainians: if they request anything specific BSI is trying to support the request, for example, EC created a tracking system to try and help coordinate shipments.

BSI is now offering support to countries who are specifically looking at the suitability of their safeguarding preparations. BSI is currently working with colleagues on preparing a set of guidance sheets on various aspects of safeguarding which summarise the Convention into easily accessible information directed at museum / gallery / library/archive staff, government staff, army personnel and so on. The aim is that anyone can read the short guides and action them. The President recently visited the Baltic States regarding safeguarding preparations – spending a day in each of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, talking to the Ministries of Defence and Culture, and major heritage institutions and organizations. The expectation that full safeguarding implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention would be lacking was proved correct. The meetings were useful, and BSI asked for feedback on the draft guidance documents which were viewed as helpful. Andrea Kiesamp asked if BSI if the guidance sheets were to be made public and whether BSI would inform the national committees if/when it happened. The President confirmed they would be made freely available online and circulated.

The President also informed the national committees that BSI is considering whether a team can go to Ukraine and look for evidence of deliberate targeting of cultural property at some unspecified future point.

2.3. Action Plan 2022-2023 (Document 3)

After some confusion between the Annual Report, the 3-Year Strategic Plan, and this annual Plan, The Board have agreed to name this document the Action Plan, which covers the time between General Assemblies when the new plan is agreed.

The President presented the draft 2022-2023 Action Plan. No questions were received by email or during the meeting.

2.4. Treasurer's Report for the 2021 Financial Year (Document 4, 5)

The Treasurer, Klaus Weschenfelder (KW), presented the Treasurer's Report for the 2021 Financial Year (a legally mandated period) (Document 4). For transparency, KW reiterated that BSI still has no bank account, or balance sheets. The current holdings (from our previous bank account) of €183 are still held by the National Committee of the Netherlands; Newcastle University pays BSI staff costs,

and some travel and website costs; the NGO Biladi paid the BSI website domain costs. KW has also been investigating banking options. Although BSI has no direct funding, some figures are included for transparency. The main goals for 2022 are to open a bank account and continue financial compliance.

KW also presented the report of the Audit Committee (Document 5), which confirmed the accounts.

No questions were received by email or during the meeting.

2.5. Voting

EC introduced the Election Runner online voting programme. 22 national committees were eligible to vote, and 8 Board members (including the FF); the President only votes in case of a tie. EC emphasised that although who has voted is publicly visible, what they have voted is *not* visible. Voting was opened on Monday 13th June. Once all votes were received during the Assembly, EC closed voting and displayed the results. Only 24 votes were received: 16 national committees and the 8 Board Members (excluding the President)⁴. Results are available online⁵.

Do you approve the Minutes of the 2021 General Assembly?

Yes	24	No	0	Abstain	0
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Do you approve the Nov 2021 – May 2022 Annual Report of the Board?

Yes	24	No	0	Abstain	0
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Do you approve the 2022 Strategic Plan?

Yes	24	No	0	Abstain	0
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Do you approve the Treasurer's Report for the 2021 Financial Year?

Yes	24	No	0	Abstain	2
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Do you approve the Report of the Audit Committee for the 2021 Financial Year?

Yes	24	No	0	Abstain	0
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All reports were therefore approved by the General Assembly.

3. Blue Shield Standards (Document 6)

As a result of technical problems, this Agenda item was presented out of order. The President noted that all National Committees had had time to read the document and summarised the rationale for it. As an independent, impartial, neutral organisation BSI aspires to work with all parties to a conflict,

⁴ Under Dutch law, the Board may not constitute more than 1/3 of all votes: the General Assembly was quorate.

⁵ <https://vote.electionrunner.com/election/qjDE4/results>

trying to reach the point where the protection of cultural property doesn't become an aspect of the conflict. As part of this, it is the Board's hope that national committees can adhere as far as possible to the triple standards of independence impartiality, and neutrality. However, as presented in the document, the Board understands that there may be times when a particular national committee feels that they need to make a stronger public statement. From the Board's perspective, if the national committee feels that they must do that, then, **so long as it is explicitly stated in writing on any document produced that the document does not reflect the views of BSI**, or the wider movement, then that is perfectly acceptable.

Andrea Kiesamp asked what the existing ethical principles were and asked for an example of an ethical statement that did not meet the standards. The President cited the 2000 Strasbourg Charter, with a link in the chat⁶, agreed by ICBS in the earlier days of Blue Shield, and later by all national committees, which includes the triple standards alongside other important elements, like being a not-for-profit organisation. However, it was expected that national committees would not find it difficult to meet these other elements, hence the focus here on independence, impartiality, and neutrality.

Using a theoretical example of a situation where a committee might want to make a statement the President explained: country A experiences an unprovoked attack from country B. The Blue Shield national committee of country A, or country C, might decide that they want to say that country A has been invaded for no reason and they may want to point a finger of blame for a conflict. So long as they caveat that statement with the fact that it is a national committee statement, and explicitly and in bold include the words that the statement does not reflect the view of Blue Shield International or the Blue Shield Movement, then that is fully understood by the Board as an expression of that particular situation for a national committee. If any national committee does find itself in that position, then the Board would also like to discuss it with them so the Board can see if they agree and understand the point of view of the national committee. There have been instances recently that the Board fully understands where national committees have (for example in relation to the conflict in Ukraine), publicly blamed the Russian Federation. BSI, however, cannot do that, and must retain its independence, impartiality, and neutrality, as that is what BSI's international credibility is based on. BSI needs to retain the flexibility through confidentiality and impartiality to talk to all parties involved in a conflict.

There were no further questions, and no dissenting opinions to this approach.

4. National Committee Report

As a result of technical problems, this Agenda item was presented out of order. EC gave a verbal report on highlights of national committee activity from the annual reports. As some annual reports came in late, the final written report will be circulated with the minutes of the General Assembly following the next Board meeting. Highlights included:

⁶ The Blue Shield ethical standards in the Strasbourg Charter are available here with more information (<https://theblueshield.org/about-us/approach-ethics-and-principles/>). There is also a link to the Blue Shield Approach at the bottom of that page.

- **Coordination:** National committees are engaging with their military and military academies, including building some new connections, such as in Denmark; as well as with international organisations such as the Calamities' Think Tank of the Faro Convention; UNESCO and its national commissions; National disaster management agencies of Curacao; Global Policy Project UNESCO memory of the World; European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM); and UNITWIN Chairs of UNESCO that deal with the issues of natural disasters; as well as a massive number of local NGO partners and institutions and governments, including, for example, the French Federation of Firefighters (FNSPF). Various manuals have been translated into international languages, such as a *Manual on preventive measures and rescue work in emergency and afterward* from Polish to Czech; ICCROM's *First Aid To Cultural Heritage In Times Of Crisis Handbook* and *Toolkit* into Georgian; the ICCROM / UNESCO Manual *Endangered Heritage* into German. There is good support between national committees, such as the assistance given by the Czech committee to the Slovak committee when forming, and Austria to Armenia. The German Committee has been working with the African National committees to do a brochure about the work of the Blue Shield in Africa (available on the BSI website in English and French).
- **Education, Training and Capacity-Building:** National committees have been involved in, or have directly organised, a large number of webinars, conferences, workshops, and summer academies on heritage protection, disaster prevention, world heritage, and information and awareness raising, covering not only their own areas, but all the way over to Mongolia. The work has great global reach. Many of the conferences attended and organised are not only heritage protection conferences, but disaster conferences, and conferences on, for example, religious freedom, highlighting the diversity of areas heritage protection should be incorporated into. As two examples, the Hellenic Committee has been organizing cultural property protection webinars, available online, and the Georgian Committee co-organised a conference on heritage protection in occupied areas, also available online. The Georgian National Committee participated in "Paldo-2020"- a joint field exercise by the Georgian National Guard and the Emergency Management Agency of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. As part of the exercise, the team coordinated the emergency protection and evacuation of an imaginary cultural heritage (archaeological) site and the evacuation of movable cultural property by the participants during a simulated forest fire.
- **Proactive Protection and Risk Preparedness:** Training courses, exercises, and workshops have included emergency planning in libraries, museums, crisis management, flood response, and object evacuation. In Curacao there is an initiative to include "Cultural Heritage" as an Emergency Support Function (ESF) in the National Disaster Plan of Curacao, along with updating national plans of various institutions (e.g., national archives). Denmark's Heritage Friday series explored "Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property and the 1970 UNESCO Convention". Committees are also working to draft practical guides and collate web resources on topics such as fire risk mitigation, security measures, and supporting surveys on the status of emergency care for cultural property. There have also been appeals launched to protect heritage at risk.
- **Stabilisation and post-disaster recovery:** Work has included flood response by the Belgian, German, Netherlands and French national Committees, response to the fires in Turkey, Georgia's work to map heritage damage in occupied areas; and providing conservation advice on damage to buildings and repositories caused by volcanic ashes (in cooperation with CARBICA CHEN) following the volcanic eruption St Vincent and the Grenadines.
- **Law, policy development and implementation:** There are many excellent examples, of which these are a small selection. Several committees provided input into their national Periodic Report to UNESCO in the implementation of the Hague Convention; Australia is advocating to their government about ratification of the Second Protocol; Belgium is part of

a working group for the protection of cultural property within the Interdepartmental Commission for Humanitarian Rights (ICHR). The UK Committee has been looking at the problems caused by the repeal of the EU Illicit Trafficking legislation, and how to tackle that with practical measures.

- **Challenges:** The challenges for national committees are common. Most members are volunteers, and lack of capacity is a constant challenge. Funding remains an ever-present challenge, and COVID has continued to impact travel, the ability to hold events and income. There are also problems with for example, political issues, where government collaboration is not possible or is made extremely difficult.

EC thanked the national committees for their reports, which are extremely useful to the Board. She highlighted that the reports informed the content of the national committee training course, which is available online in English, with subtitles in French, Spanish and Arabic (albeit relying on Google Translate). All the transcripts of Block 1 are also now available, so the written transcripts can also be translated into any language using Google Translate to make it as accessible as possible. The President also thanked all the committees for their hard work.

No questions were received.

5. Election of the Auditing Committee for financial year 2022.

The President then introduced the two people standing for the Audit Committee: Dr Ömer Dabanli (ÖD) of Blue Shield Turkey, and Gerrit de Bruin (GdB) of Blue Shield Netherlands, who both stood last year. Both candidates circulated a biography and statement in advance and presented themselves to the General Assembly. The President thanked them both for standing and for their work to date. No questions were received for either candidate.

Voting took place via the online system Election Runner: EC reiterated that all Members could vote for 2 candidates and that two members were needed for the Audit Committee. Results are available Election Runner⁷.

Election of Candidates to the Auditing Committee of Blue Shield

Voters are required to select a minimum of 1 option(s). Voters can select up to 2 options.

Gerrit de Bruin	52%	22
Ömer Dabanli	45%	19
Abstain (0 candidates)	2%	1

[The percentages are irrelevant in this situation and a bug in Election Runner. 22 of 24 people voted for Gerrit de Bruin, and 19 of 24 for Ömer Dabanli. One person abstained. They are both elected by the majority of Members.]

⁷ <https://vote.electionrunner.com/election/EXAqa/results>

Both candidates were elected to the Auditing Committee. EC and the President congratulated the candidates.

6. Update on Illegal Trafficking Working Group

EC presented a report written by the Illegal Trafficking Working Group (WG) on behalf of Professor Patty Gerstenblith, the Coordinator of the group. The written report will be circulated with the Minutes of the General Assembly.

The Working Group (WG) is currently composed of the following individuals: Patty Gerstenblith (USCBS) (WG Coordinator), Neil Brodie (UKBS), Joanne Farchakh-Bajjaly (Blue Shield Lebanon), Eleni Korca (Hellenic Republic Blue Shield), Fionnuala Rogers (UKBS), Maria Luisa Russo (Netherlands). The primary activities are focused on law enforcement, presentations and awareness-raising, and acting in an advisory role.

Law enforcement activities include continuing to advise the UK Metropolitan Police Art and Antiques Squad in London on live investigations and prosecutions, acting as a source of referrals, and co-ordination with experts and countries of origin, relating to, for example return of seized looted objects. The WG supported the Esterdad Training Group in achieving funding to document and upload images of 400 looted objects from Lebanon onto the Art Loss Register.

The WG has given 9 different presentations on illegal trafficking and how to prevent it, including a webinar presentation following the publication of a Policy Brief for the UK's repeal of the *Cultural Goods Import Regulation* in partnership with the Antiquities Coalition: the policy brief is available on the Antiquities Coalition and the UK Blue Shield website. Other presentations included Leiden University; ChangeNow; preparation for the EU Global CFT Task Force Conference in Cairo; American Association of Law Schools and the American Society of International Law; American Center of Research (Amman); and Sothebys; and the Victoria and Albert Museum's Culture in Crisis program.

Advisory activities have included, for example, a study commissioned by the UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport for the Commission for International Justice and Accountability to carry out a Feasibility Study "Examining the Prospects for Criminal Prosecutions in Response to Antiquities Smuggling from Syria"; preparing a paper for conference organised in partnership with Blue Shield Austria on the legal issues surrounding protection of cultural heritage in Nagorno Karabakh; supporting various national illicit tracking working groups; responding to calls for evidence (CfE), such as to the EU CfE on the EU Trafficking in cultural goods – EU action plan; and providing legal expert analysis in the investigation into Michael Steinhardt, which concluded with the restitution of 180 artifacts worth \$70 million dollars to 11 different countries.

EC also thanked the WG for their support in preparing videos for Block 3 of the Blue Shield National Committee Training course, which will be available shortly, and in preparing some of the guidance sheets (discussed in 2.2 BSI Annual Report).

7. Any Other Business

Angela Dellebeke asked for an update on the Working Group on Emergency Response. The President explained that the work is going slowly and little progress has been made as the focus has been on responding to the situation in Ukraine. A paper is in preparation for the Board with an action for the Board to endorse. Susann Harder (Blue Shield Germany) noted that after last year's flooding events in Germany, she was very interested to cooperate with other national committees, learn about their experiences, and see how structures can be improved. She noted that that the working group has focused on Lebanon so far, but hoped and encouraged that in the future this would be a forum where all national committees could exchange skills and information

On behalf of the national committees Susann Harder noted that national committees are very active, and the list is impressive, and she was very happy to be amongst so many motivated and engaged individuals and committees, but that a lot of the work and cooperation would not be possible without Emma and Jessica [Barry, communications volunteer] responding to communications and circulating updates so promptly, for which she thanked them. The President also thanked Emma and Jessica for this work, and also for the work Emma does on Blue Shield's various projects in different countries, along with Michael Delacruz of the Secretariat for his hard work.

The President closed by thanking the national committees and reiterating that one of his main aspirations and goals over the next 18 months or so is to try and find some substantive funding for the Blue Shield.

Thanks were also received in the chat from:

Inkyung Chang and Kidong Bae, BS KOREA; Ömer Dabanli, BS Turkey; Zoë Reid, BS Ireland, Andrea Kieskamp, BS Netherlands; Samuel Franco, BS Guatemala; Lisa Mol, BS UK; Elena Korcka, BS Greece (Hellenic); Anna Puhr, BS Austria; Emilie Leumas and David Fricker, ICA; and Claire McGuire, IFLA.

The President thanked everyone again and closed the meeting with a group photo (screenshot).



Appendix 1: Attendees and Voting Members

Blue Shield Board:

President Peter Stone (did not vote)

Representatives of the Founding Four Organisations:

ICA Emilie G. Leumas

ICOMOS Bijan Rouhani

ICOM Sophie Delepierre

IFLA Claire McGuire

Elected Members

Korea Bae Kidong (Vice President)

Germany Klaus Weschenfelder (Treasurer)

Senegal Hamady Gaye

Poland Lidia Klupsz

Secretariat (non-voting)

Emma Cunliffe, Michael Delacruz

Representatives of the Founding Four Organisations (non-voting):

ICA David Fricker

ICOM Peter Keller

Representatives of National Committees:

Austria Anna Puhr

Belgium Christina Ceulmans; Lucas Verhaegen

Czech Republic Jana Souckova

Denmark Peter Pentz

France Marie Courselaud

Germany Susann Harder

Georgia Manana Tevzadze; Tamar Sopromadze

Greece (Hellenic) Elena Korka

Guatemala Samuel Franco Arce (unable to vote)

Ireland Zoë Reid; Elizabethanne Boran; Patrizia La Piscopia

Korea Inkung Chang; Sunghee Park

Norway Håkon Roland (unable to vote)

Netherlands Andrea Kiesamp; Angela Dellebeke

Pasifica Meretui Ratunabuabua

Poland Krzysztof Salacinski

Senegal Babacar Diouf; Ria Gaye; Amadou FAYE

Turkey Ömer Dabanli

UK Lisa Mol

USA (USCBS) Corine Wegener; Brian Daniels.

Representatives of National Committees Under Construction (non-voting)

Italy Adele Compagna

Remote Voting

Votes were received from National Committees who were unable to be present in person:

Australia Kathryn Dan

Macedonia Olivera Djartovska Tachevska

Mali Mamadou Samaké submitted proxy votes via Corine Wegener

UK Fionnuala Rogers

USCBS Patty Gerstenblith

Votes were not received from:

Curacao Max Scriwanek

Denmark Søren la Cour Jensen

Peru Luis Martin Bogdanovich

Niger Adamou Danladi

Senegal Babacar Ndiaye

Slovakia Zuzana Menzlová

Other

Prince Claus Cultural Emergency Rescue, and Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative; Tanios Abou Khalil, who assisted BS Lebanon and BSI following the explosion in Beirut, and who is currently applying to join the new BS Spain; and Debbie Ford, who is supporting BSI in a training course, were invited to watch as observers.