

Blue Shield Statement on Conflict in Ukraine

As the conflict in Ukraine continues to devastate the lives and livelihoods of individuals and families on all sides of the conflict one year on from the start of the fighting, the widespread destruction of tangible and intangible heritage only adds to the loss and tragedy engendered by the war.

Heritage is an integral part of people's identity, belonging, and sense of wellbeing the world over. Communities' connection to their sacred monuments, places, landscapes, artefacts, archives, libraries, dance, music, and other artistic endeavours helps build safe, secure, and cohesive societies. When that heritage is damaged or denied, it destroys not only knowledge and memory of the past, but the building blocks of peace for the future. We are heartened by people's efforts, within and outside the country, to provide heritage protection, amidst the many other pressing and urgent needs.

As a neutral, impartial, and independent NGO, Blue Shield International (BSI) reiterates that under International Humanitarian Law and other relevant legal instruments, including Human Rights Law and UN Security Council resolutions, all parties involved in the fighting in Ukraine must take measures to protect moveable, immovable, tangible, and intangible heritage at risk.

The Blue Shield stands in solidarity with all civilians, including ex-combatants, affected, or displaced by the conflict, whether they be in Ukraine, Russia, or elsewhere. We ask all those involved to abide by all relevant international law and to protect the civilian population and their heritage wherever and whenever possible. We stress in particular the responsibilities of all belligerent parties involved under the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols of 1954 and, if relevant, 1999. The Convention was adopted as part of international humanitarian law nearly 70 years ago, in recognition of the devastation caused to populations and states by loss of cultural property during two world wars.

We hear regular reports of damage to all types of heritage from shelling and looting. We are concerned that fighting in urban settings entails particularly grave risks for civilians and their heritage. We ask all combatants to remember their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructures, including cultural property; not to use any cultural property or its immediate surroundings, and to avoid attacks against it unless military necessity *imperatively* requires it. Parties to the conflict must do everything feasible to verify that the objectives to be attacked are not cultural property; must take all feasible precautions to minimise damage; and must refrain from launching attacks which may be expected to cause excessive damage. We particularly highlight the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which have a high likelihood of indiscriminate effects, directly risking civilians and their heritage. Further, as High Contracting Parties to the 1954 Hague Convention and its First Protocol, those involved in the conflict have agreed to prevent pillage, looting, and vandalism, not to requisition cultural property, and not to conduct reprisals against it.

The Blue Shield stands ready to assist anyone involved in the conflict to protect heritage in Ukraine, and to provide any assistance possible towards a resolution to the conflict.

Peter Stone
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For more information, please contact: blueshield.president@theblueshield.org

The Blue Shield is an international advisory body to UNESCO on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict. It has 31 national committees (with more under construction) across the world and an international board composed of elected members and representatives of (the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Council on Archives (ICA), and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the major international organisations responsible for cultural heritage. The Blue Shield is *“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”*. See <https://theblueshield.org/>