

PRESS RELEASE: BLUE SHIELD LEADS WITH HUMANITARIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION COURSE



Yezidi shrine of Mame Reshan after its destruction by the Islamic State © Levi Clancy, Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

The protection of people is inextricably linked to the protection of their cultural heritage. Cultural heritage destruction, whether deliberate or unintentional, can have profound impacts on people affected by crisis, exacerbating the impact of an emergency and increasing other humanitarian needs, such as security and mental health. However, cultural heritage can also be an opportunity for the humanitarian ecosystem. If cultural heritage needs are included in a humanitarian response, research findings suggest that this helps build the capacity of affected communities to meet their own needs, contributes to durable solutions and supports reconciliation, peace, and security.

Blue Shield International (BSI), together with Swansea University and Newcastle University, has developed this brief 4-part online video series for humanitarian actors to

- demonstrate the links between cultural heritage protection and the humanitarian ecosystem,
- explain why cultural heritage protection is important to people affected by crisis and why it should be considered a humanitarian issue, and
- explore why and how it might be included in humanitarian response.

Each video in this series is presented by a different person connected to Blue Shield from around the world, showing the global impact of this vital issue. However, we understand the Humanitarian sector is pressed for time – each video is just 15-30 minutes long.

“Heritage is a part of all of us, it is part of our identity and sense of belonging ... By recognizing that culture is an extension of human beings, their dignity, their identity, and their history, we then understand the protection of culture as a humanitarian concern as much as education, shelter, and protection”.

Jennifer Price-Jones, the Blue Shield Humanitarian Consultant.

We know it is not the role of humanitarian ecosystem to engage with, or stop, or restore, cultural heritage at a political level. This would contravene the humanitarian principles. However, it *is* the role of the humanitarian ecosystem to meet the basic needs of crisis-affected people, which, we argue, can sometimes include cultural heritage protection. Blue Shield recognises the difficulties of taking on new issues: we argue cultural heritage should be viewed as an extension of the cultural sensitivity adaptations and frameworks humanitarians already use in all clusters, and have produced this brief video series to explain more about how humanitarians can approach this critical issue.

Watch the video series here: <https://theblueshield.org/resources/chp-and-humanitarian-videos/>

In 2020, BSI signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the ICRC, at which the (then) Director-General, Yves Daccord, said:

“Protecting cultural property and cultural heritage against the devastating effects of war unfortunately remains a humanitarian imperative, today perhaps more than ever. Joining forces with a partner like the Blue Shield through the signing of this MoU is therefore extremely important”.

BSI knows that the cultural needs of communities may be just as important to them as other concerns: the heritage and humanitarian sectors can best serve crisis-affected peoples together.

This series is supported by Swansea University and the UKRI Impact Acceleration Account, and has been researched and developed by Jennifer Price-Jones, the Humanitarian Consultant for Blue Shield International. Blue Shield International is based at, and is supported by Newcastle University, which also holds the UNESCO Chair for Cultural Property Protection and Peace.



The Blue Shield is an independent, impartial, neutral Movement of NGOs that 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”. The Movement is active across the crisis response cycle, from preparedness and risk reduction to response, and reconstruction. It has 31 national committees (with more under construction) across the world, working alongside Blue Shield International, the international Board (composed of elected members and representatives of the major international organisations responsible for all types of cultural heritage) and Secretariat. It is an expert advisory body to UNESCO on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, and is active in crises around the world, bringing together the heritage, humanitarian, and uniformed sectors, alongside governments, responders, and communities, strengthening the capacity of, and support for, affected communities in crisis. See <https://theblueshield.org/>

Contact: Dr Emma Cunliffe, Secretariat, Blue Shield International
blueshield.international@theblueshield.org

12 February 2024