

## Cultural Heritage Protection and the Humanitarian Ecosystem Video Series

### Script: What is the Blue Shield Presentation

**Slide 1:** Welcome to the second presentation of the video series on cultural heritage protection and the humanitarian ecosystem. My name is Professor Peter Stone, and I am the President of the Blue Shield and the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection and Peace at Newcastle University in the UK.

I've worked in cultural heritage protection for over 20 years and before that my career included spells as a history teacher, working for English Heritage, and, since 1997, as a member of staff at Newcastle University. I have worked extensively overseas in heritage education, interpretation, and management. For 24 years, starting in 1984, I helped establish the World Archaeological Congress, which prioritises an understanding of the social impact of archaeology, and between 1998 and 2008 was its honorary Chief Executive Officer.

**Slide 2:** The purpose of this presentation is to introduce the Blue Shield Movement in its different forms to a humanitarian audience. We will discuss the

- The Blue Shield emblem
- The overall goal and mission of Blue Shield
- Blue Shield as the cultural equivalent of the ICRC
- Blue Shield's structure, National Committees, and areas of activity
- Blue Shield working in conflict and disasters, and
- Blue Shield's aspirations for working more closely with the humanitarian ecosystem

I hope after this presentation you should have a fairly comprehensive overview of the Blue Shield and our aspirations.

**Slide 3:** The Blue Shield is actually two things that are related, but different. You can see two blue shield emblems on the slide. The blue shield emblem, on the left, is a distinctive protective emblem, specified in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to facilitate the identification of cultural property protected under that Convention, and the personnel engaged in its protection. The Blue Shield logo, on the right and with the emblem in a light blue circle, is the logo of a worldwide movement of NGOs dedicated to the protection of heritage from conflicts and disasters, known as the Blue Shield Movement. The Movement's work is strongly related to the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, and it is named after the emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention. However, our work includes disaster as well as conflict, and as mentioned in the previous introduction presentation by Nigel Pollard, the Blue Shield's working definition of heritage goes beyond the 1954 Hague Convention of cultural property to include all forms of heritage.

**Slide 4:** As noted in the last slide, the Blue Shield emblem is specified in the 1954 Hague Convention, and the High Contracting Parties to the Convention are recommended to mark their important cultural property with this distinctive protective emblem.

The Blue Shield emblem has 3 different forms, denoting different levels of cultural importance and protection. These 3 different forms are shown here on this slide. This image is taken from a UNESCO and Blue Shield Guide to the Distinctive Marking of Cultural Property: Rules and Practice, a link to which is available in the additional resources.

The blue shield emblem used alone marks cultural property under general protection, or indicates personnel engaged in its protection or overseeing the Convention's implementation. Its use is optional - not all protected cultural property displays the symbol.

The blue shield emblem repeated three times in a triangular formation is recommended to be used to mark cultural property under special protection – property of very great importance. It can be placed on immovable cultural property (for example, buildings or monuments), as well as refuges to store moveable cultural property, or transports taking cultural property to safety.

The blue shield emblem outlined by a detached external red border is the distinctive emblem for cultural property under enhanced protection. This is cultural property designated as of the “greatest importance to humanity”.

Blue shield emblems can only be placed by designated state authorities, and special and enhanced protection can only be granted by specific international authorities. The use of the emblem is protected under international law, and its misuse is a crime.

**Slide 5:** And here we can see some examples of each of the different blue shield emblems in use on British military personnel, important cultural buildings and on refuges for movable cultural property, all identified by the Blue Shield emblem.

Slide 6: And for more information you can see this UNESCO and Blue Shield Guide to the Distinctive Marking of Cultural Property: Rules and Practice, by following the link in the Additional Resources.

**Slide 7:** That was the blue shield emblem. The Blue Shield Movement, on the other hand, is an international movement dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage from conflicts and disasters.

The Blue Shield organisation is identified in the 1999 Second Protocol to 1954 Hague Convention as an advisory body to the international Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and is named after the emblem.

The Blue Shield Movement comprises national committees around the world, which work at their local and national level, and Blue Shield International – BSI - which works at the

international level. BSI is made up of an international board composed of representatives from Blue Shield's four founding organisations. These are the International Council of Archives (ICA); the International Council of Museums (ICOM); the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS); and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). These four organisations sit on the Board alongside 4 representatives elected from and by the national committees, along with a small Secretariat.

**Slide 8:** The Blue Shield Movement is similar to the Red Cross Movement. The Blue Shield ethical charter, the Strasbourg Charter of 2000, is modelled on the ethical charter of the Red Cross. The principles included in both charters underline the synergy between the Blue Shield and the Red Cross Movements. Today, we are increasingly working in partnership at the national and international levels.

The Blue Shield is independent, neutral, and impartial. We work professionally. We have respect for cultural identity, and we are a registered not-for-profit organisation under Dutch Law.

**Slide 9:** The Blue Shield Movement has national committees around the world, with more under construction all the time. National committees and the international Board contain representatives from the founding international organisations - ICA, ICOM, ICOMOS, and IFLA - to ensure representation and coordination of many types of cultural heritage of national and international importance.

**Slide 10:** There is no standard composition of a National Committee in terms of membership, although ideally it includes representatives from the sectors you can see on the slide, including humanitarian colleagues from the Red Cross, UN agencies, and others. Together, all these members work to ensure that all cultural heritage is represented in all Blue Shield national committees, and that, as a result, the committees can contribute to protecting heritage from conflict and disasters.

**Slide 11:** As mentioned in the introduction presentation, the overall goal of the Blue Shield is the establishment of healthy, peaceful, secure, stable, and sustainable communities. This is a goal which we believe aligns closely with that of the humanitarian ecosystem, as well as those of our partners in the uniformed sector. We are all working towards this goal, albeit with different, language, approaches, and starting points.

**Slide 12:** The Blue Shield is sometimes referred to as the 'cultural equivalent to the ICRC'. This was actually the original intent in 1953/4 amongst those who were drafting the Hague Convention - to create a "red cross for culture property". In 1955, one year after the drafting of the Convention, the ICRC legal team commented:

"In the future, the Red Cross should no longer be alone in its campaign against indiscriminate methods of warfare; in any case, it should be able to count amongst its most

faithful allies all those who work to establish the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property, and all those who consider it to be a valuable acquisition. May all the efforts pursued, both under the Red Cross, and under the blue and white shield, be mutually upheld in order that the aim in view may be more easily attained."

Unfortunately, although the aspiration was originally there in 1954, it did not translate into practice. The distinction was soon made between "people" and "things". As such, much of ICRC activity was based on the premise that cultural heritage would be a distraction to the end goal of protecting people. We now have a better understanding of the relationship between people and their heritage, and we are now working to realise that original aspiration.

**Slide 13:** Today, we are pleased to have a close relationship with the ICRC. We have an MoU in place to formalise our partnership, with the goal of protecting the world's cultural property (the term cultural property is used here, to be consistent with the 1954 Hague Convention on which our MOU with ICRC is founded).

Yves Daccord, the previous ICRC Director General, was very supportive of the goal of the Blue Shield and pledged ICRC's support. He tweeted at the time of signing the MoU in 2020 that: "Protecting cultural property and cultural heritage against the devastating effects of war unfortunately remains a humanitarian imperative, today perhaps more than ever".

**Slide 14:** Along with the ICRC, we have partners across different sectors, reflecting the fact that protecting the world's cultural heritage is a multi-sector responsibility. The Blue Shield works in peacetime, during conflict, and post conflict with:

- the Uniformed sector (the military, customs and border forces, the police, and other emergency services),
- the Humanitarian sector, and
- the Cultural/Heritage sector.

To formalise these partnerships, we currently have MOU's in place with, among others, the ICRC, NATO, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and a formal partnership is in process with UNESCO.

The Blue Shield envisages our partner relationships and external contexts in this diagram, with the triangle in the middle representing the Blue Shield. The three points of the triangle represent the sectors (cultural and heritage, humanitarian, and uniformed), with the safe space inside available to mediate and to work through how we come from different starting points, but all with a similar end aspiration of those healthy, peaceful, secure, stable, sustainable communities. Those communities are at the bottom of the wider circle of influence and context. At the top is the political context, the legal context, and the media, including in particular, and increasingly important, the social media context.

**Slide 15:** To explain a little more about the different external contexts, the primary Blue Shield context is the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols, but this is underpinned by wider international law, and the UN and UNESCO strategic agendas, for example, in UN Security Council resolutions and UNESCO's cultural conventions. We're also conscious, though, of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and, for example, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction relating to natural and human-caused disasters. We see cultural heritage protection as a multi sector responsibility and opportunity for the wider objectives of our partners, including the humanitarian sector.

**Slide 16:** In order to achieve our mission and goal, the Blue Shield focuses on six areas of activity:

- Coordination - as I just mentioned the Blue Shield works closely with other organisations from different sectors.
- Legal compliance, implementation, and policy development. The Blue Shield promotes the international law that underpins our work. For example, the Blue Shield sits alongside other humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR, OCHA, the Red Cross and Save the Children on NATO exercises and supports the legal compliance with IHL. We also work with international initiatives regarding environmental disasters, such as the Sendai Framework.
- Education, training, and capacity building,
- Supporting partners in proactive protection and risk preparedness
- And during emergency response
- As well as post-disaster disaster recovery.

**Slide 17:** Over the next few slides, I will explain a little more about our work in practice. Training and capacity building, in particular, is a core area of activity for us. The protection of cultural heritage is a specialised field that requires training and specialist expertise.

This slide highlights just a very small selection of our training activity which includes compliance with IHL, and conflict and emergency response. It includes, for example, an exercise carried out by Blue Shield France between heritage staff and the national fire brigade, BSI staff working to train NATO forces in cultural property protection, collaborative training for the UNIFIL peacekeeping deployment in Lebanon with heritage professionals since 2013, and support to a UNESCO Pacific Office training course in the 1954 Hague Convention for Fijian Peacekeepers, and the Fijian Department of Heritage and Arts in 2018.

**Slide 18:** In addition to our training, Blue Shield also responds to requests for support from affected groups in conflict.

For example, at the request of the Ukrainian authorities, Blue Shield International is supporting implementation of IHL, specifically the 1954 Hague Convention.

BSI personnel have visited Ukraine several times to evaluate the effects of the war on Ukraine's cultural sector, have met with several Ukrainian colleagues and groups working on heritage protection, and visited sites to deepen awareness and understanding of the damage and looting of cultural heritage that has occurred during the current conflict. As well as exploring the impact on institutions, and on local communities near the front line, work has focussed on evaluating the barriers and challenges to effective implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention during the conflict, evaluation of assessment methodologies, and assessing the feasibility of documenting information related to international heritage crime. Today, we are still working to provide recommendations to the Ukrainian authorities for improving capability to document such occurrences and safeguard at-risk heritage and improve implementation of IHL.

However, in line with our stance of independence, impartiality, and neutrality we also keep channels of communication open with the Russian Federation.

**Slide 19:** BSI and national committees of the Blue Shield are also regularly requested to work in other crisis situations.

Members of the Lebanese National Committee of the Blue Shield worked directly with eager volunteers, the Lebanese armed forces, the Directorate General of Antiquities, and the Lebanese NGO Biladi following the 4 August 2020 explosion in the port of Beirut. Thanks to years of cultural property protection training between BSI and UNIFIL (an example of which was shown on the previous slide), the peacekeepers specifically offered to work in Beirut to assist in heritage recovery, and were invaluable in stabilising two significant historic buildings, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This close working relationship would not have been possible without years of training in partnership with Blue Shield building understanding and trust.

Blue Shield has also been active in wildfires across Europe, for example the image on the slide shows a buttoned house (a type of historical architecture) burning in Kep-ez-beleni Village in Türkiye, during the wildfires 2021. Blue Shield Türkiye worked across the country to document the scale of the damage (which included the loss of 60 historic houses in Kep-ez-beleni village alone) and provided recommendations to prevent re-occurrence.

During and following the flooding in Limburg, The Netherlands also in 2021, numerous requests were received by Blue Shield Netherlands for support in assessing damage and saving cultural property.

**Slide 20:** The previous slides illustrate how Blue Shield is working in conflicts, disasters, and peacekeeping contexts at the request of host governments, and operating in many of the same crisis environments as humanitarian organisations. However, in order to meet our Blue Shield overall goal of healthy, peaceful, secure, stable, and sustainable communities, we

need to work more cohesively with the humanitarian ecosystem to ensure crisis affected people's needs are being fully met to include cultural needs.

Blue Shield is committed to growing its presence and capacity in the humanitarian ecosystem and strengthening our humanitarian partnerships. In doing so, we will support, where possible, the humanitarian ecosystem to mainstream cultural heritage protection in humanitarian response, advocate for additional funding for cultural heritage protection, and conduct research into cultural heritage protection as a humanitarian issue, and its impact on crisis affected people.

**Slide 21:** I hope you now have a better understanding of the Blue Shield. You can find more detailed information about the Blue Shield Movement on our website.

In the next presentation, my colleague María José Romero Torres from Guatemala will discuss what is cultural heritage and how its destruction can impact on crisis affected people.

Thank you for listening.