

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

For the Safeguarding and Preservation of the Cultural Sites in Syria. Memorandum of the German National Committee of ICOMOS

Since the beginning of the civil war more than five years ago, the rich cultural heritage of Syria, including its six cultural sites on the World Heritage List of UNESCO, has been constantly threatened by destruction or has already been destroyed in parts. The great losses do not only affect the Syrian people, but all nations of the world, whose values are deliberately being attacked.

Implementing the Bonn Declaration on World Heritage

After its constitution was adopted on November 16, 1945 in London, and based on the awareness that wars begin in the minds of men, UNESCO was commissioned to construct peace in the minds and in the moral solidarity of men. It is meant to help develop the democratic principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect of all men and prevent the propagation of prejudice and of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races. The education for justice, liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern.

With the aim to reinforce these goals the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 27 years later in Paris. The idea was to preserve cultural or natural heritage of outstanding relevance as part of the World Heritage of all humankind and to keep alive, deepen and broaden knowledge about this.

With the Bonn Declaration on World Heritage the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO on June 29, 2015 unanimously condemned the destruction and looting of World Heritage sites as a tactic of war and recommended that the UN Security Council include heritage protection in the mandates of peacekeeping missions. Destructions as in Syria or in Iraq are ostracised as war crimes that should be prosecuted by every state. To this end, everything is to be done to combat the illegal trade of cultural properties.

Stopping the illegal trade of cultural properties

The cultural loss caused by looting of museums and archaeological excavation sites is immeasurable. Besides the trade of weapons and drugs the illegal trade of cultural properties is one of the world's most profitable illegal markets. International terrorism is increasingly profiting from this trade of illegally exported cultural properties.

Strengthening international cooperation

There have always been close cultural ties between Europe and the Near East. Starting from Africa via the Near East the European continent was settled. Important impulses for the history of humankind, such as the transition to a production-based economy, the development of cuneiform writing, the formation of states, and the three book religions originate from there.

Cultural exchange is the driving force of continuous change; in accordance with that, understanding beyond borders is the first step towards an exchange and contributes to the continuity and development of culture worldwide. Cultural monuments are important milestones in the course of human history; in their diversity lies great potential for the future and they promote tolerance

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towards the other. Handing down monuments to future generations is a humanist *conditio sine qua non*.

In this context, World Heritage sites are proof that there is an understanding of a joint narrative of the history of humankind. The recognition of a site as World Heritage underlines the international community's appreciation of the achievements of a culture as contribution to a universal history.

The destruction of World Heritage sites is targeted at destabilisation. The related universal values of humankind cannot, however, be destroyed, if we are aware of them and remain to be so. Through international cooperation also in safeguarding, documentation, preservation, research and rebuilding we can save these sites for the future and invigorate the idea of international solidarity.

Expanding networks for the conservation of cultural heritage

In view of war, violence, destruction and death people in Syria, Iraq and other conflict areas of this world are facing existential challenges. For the safeguarding and conservation of the cultural heritage professional knowledge needs to be provided on an international scale; necessary communication and information as well as networks have to be strengthened; possibilities of working in these conflict regions have to be fathomed; priorities for work need to be defined in international consultation, and training on site should be supported.

Adopted by the Board of the German National Committee of ICOMOS on July 22-23, 2016 on behalf of the Annual General Meeting on November 28, 2015.