



## **Blue Shield Statement on Christchurch**

**3 March 2011**

Following the recent earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, the Blue Shield expresses its great sorrow for the loss of lives and the destructions the city's cultural heritage sites and institutions suffered.

The city of Christchurch has been rocked by a major earthquake (magnitude 6.3) on last Tuesday, 22 February 2011, half a year after the 7.1 earthquake of 4 September 2010. Besides the serious casualties, the toll on heritage is to be high. It appears that there is very important damage to the historic area of the city and its built heritage.

Among others, the Anglican cathedral, the Catholic basilica, and the Victorian Gothic Provincial Buildings, symbols of the city's cultural heritage, has been severely damaged. Some major cultural institutions and conservation places, such as museums, libraries and archives, are also reported to be significantly affected. What happened in Christchurch once again underlines the vulnerability of cultural institutions, sites and monuments in case of natural disaster.

In addition to the tragic loss of human lives and the country's prevailing state of shock, the loss of these significant aspects of Christchurch's heritage will have profound and lasting consequences on the self-conception and the collective memory of its inhabitants. The intangible values of a people's cultural heritage can support the processes to regenerate normality and help people to move forward. Cultural heritage is a fundamental aspect in the rebuilding of community identity and dignity, as well as in keeping up hope after such a catastrophe.

The Blue Shield trusts that the emergency authorities will take appropriate measures to ensure the preservation of heritage features of the city in the aftermath of the disaster.

The Blue Shield Mission is "to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict, natural and man-made disasters". While it strongly supports the priority to find the missing, and to help the injured and homeless; it places the expertise and network of its members at the disposal of their New Zealand colleagues to facilitate their work in assessing the damages, and, for subsequent recovery, the restoration and repair measures.

The Blue Shield calls on the international community, responsible authorities and local population to give the fullest support to all efforts underway to protect or rescue the heritage of Christchurch and avoid further damages to museums, libraries, archives, monuments and sites.

The member organisations of the Blue Shield are currently liaising with New Zealand colleagues to obtain further information on both the situation and on the possible needs and types of help required so as to mobilise their networks accordingly. A more complete report on damages, needs and actions will be published subsequently, in order to facilitate coordination.

## The Blue Shield

The Blue Shield is the protective emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention which is the basic international treaty formulating rules to protect cultural heritage during armed conflicts. The Blue Shield network consists of organisations dealing with museums, archives, audiovisual supports, libraries, monuments and sites.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), founded in 1996, comprises representatives of the five non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in this field:

- The International Council on Archives ([www.ica.org](http://www.ica.org)),
- The International Council of Museums ([www.icom.museum](http://www.icom.museum)),
- The International Council on Monuments and Sites ([www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org))
- The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions ([www.ifla.org](http://www.ifla.org))
- The Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations ([www.ccaaa.org](http://www.ccaaa.org))

National Blue Shield Committees have been founded in a number of countries (19 established and 19 under construction). The Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS), founded in December 2008, will coordinate and strengthen international efforts to protect cultural property at risk of destruction in armed conflicts or natural disasters. The ANCBS has its headquarters in The Hague.

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### The actions of the Blue Shield can also be followed on:

- our Website: <http://www.blueshield-international.org>
- Twitter: [blueshieldcoop](https://twitter.com/blueshieldcoop)