



Blue Shield Statement on Syria

17 May 2011

Following the recent events in Syria, the Blue Shield expresses its deep concern regarding the safeguarding of the country's invaluable cultural and historical heritage. The Blue Shield also deplores the suffering and loss of life during this conflict.

Between 1980 and 2006, six sites bearing witness to the rise and fall of sophisticated cultures stretching from prehistory to the 17th century were chosen to become part of the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Ancient cities of Aleppo, Bosra, and Damascus are evidence of the civilizations that passed by, settled and flourished in Syria between the 2nd millennium B.C. and the 17th century A.C.

The site of Palmyra contains the ruins of a city that was one of the most important cultural centres of the ancient world, standing at the crossroads of several civilizations, the art and architecture married Greco-Roman techniques with local traditions and Persian influences. The Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din are two castles which represent the most significant examples illustrating the exchange of influences and documenting the evolution of fortified architecture in the Near East during the Crusades.

The ongoing conflict in Syria gives reason for concern, not only amongst academics but for everybody devoted to the conservation of cultural heritage, and aware of the vulnerability of cultural institutions' collections, sites and monuments. Artillery, and all military action, poses a grave danger to cultural institutions and sites, as shown in the past in the old city of Hama (1982) and more recently at the mosque of Daraa. Any loss of Syrian cultural property would greatly impoverish the world's collective memory.

Syria has been a State Party to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its First Protocol since 1958 and to the 1972 World Heritage Convention since 1975. These conventions, as well as customary international law, impose on all nations the obligation to protect their cultural heritage in time of armed conflict. The Blue Shield calls on all parties to the conflict in Syria to fulfil these obligations and to protect the outstanding world cultural heritage sites and repositories located within Syria.

The Blue Shield's mission is "to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict, natural and man-made disasters". For this reason it places the expertise and network of its member organizations at the disposal of their colleagues working in Syria to support their work in protecting the country's heritage, and if necessary, assessing for subsequent recovery, restoration, and repair measures.

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

National Blue Shield Committees have been founded in a number of countries. The Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS), founded in December 2008, works to 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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