

Egyptian Cultural Heritage in times of Conflict

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Figure 1: Farida Waheed during a visit to Egypt's oldest train station in Alexandria which is one of the endangered heritage sites in Egypt due to lack of maintenance

Being from Egypt which is one of the countries having the oldest civilizations of all time has contributed much to my passion for cultural heritage. I have always been fascinated by the world's heritage and the safeguarding and protection of it. Egypt has for long suffered from lack of finances and appropriate strategies for the protection of its cultural heritage however the situation has come to a maximum in the recent political changes in Egypt.



Figure 2: A soldier inside the national Egyptian museum after being looted on the 28th January 2011

Since the 25th January in 2011 and the political changes in my country I have witnessed a lot of incidents involving the loss and destruction of the Egyptian cultural heritage. From the looting of Egyptian Museums such as the Egyptian national museum and Malawi museum, to the looting of important archeological sites in Dahshur and others, a lot has been lost and still being lost. Bomb attacks on several security buildings have resulted in the destruction of multiple historical buildings such as Mohamed Ali Palace in Shubra. Fires in historical police stations

and the loss of all the documents of the Egyptian Scientific complex are all incidents that should be an alert that Egypt's heritage is in danger.



Figure 3: During attacks on the Egyptian Scientific Complex: Members of the community trying to save rare historical documents

Although Egypt is one of the countries signing the agreement on the Hague convention this hasn't helped a lot in developing strategies for the safeguarding and protection of the cultural heritage in the past years. Only recently has Egypt started establishing a department at the ministry of antiquities run by the Egyptian heritage rescue foundation for the protection of our cultural heritage in times of conflict.



Figure 4: Farida Waheed attending one of the workshops and meetings at Cairo organized by Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation which is currently working on the protection of cultural heritage sites in conflicts



Figure 5: The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo after being partially destroyed due to a nearby bombing

I have been working on collecting data and documenting the losses through my research work. I have worked on a research paper entitled "Heritage Destruction during Political Shifts: A case study of the 25th January revolution" in order to contribute in documenting the losses. I am currently trying through my work to raise awareness about the incidents and the cultural heritage sites endangered and to propose solutions to enhance current strategies. I am also trying to present my work internationally in conferences to raise as well national and international awareness about the issue. I wish to be a part of the international community for the protection of the World's Heritage as I believe that it is an irreplaceable part of the history of humanity. I believe as well that the Egyptian society is well aware of the importance of their cultural heritage and could contribute greatly in the future in protecting our heritage. With the support of national and international institutions a lot can be done in terms of building capacities that could protect Egypt's endangered heritage.



Figure 6: Members of the community forming a human shield for the safeguarding of the national Egyptian museum

 Farida Waheed joined the Blue Shield expert network in 2016