



**Statement by ICBS on the Destruction of Cultural Property in the Middle East
March 13th 2003**

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) is alarmed at reports of damage to, and destruction of, cultural property occurring as a result of continuing armed conflict in the areas administered by Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

In making this statement, the International Committee of the Blue Shield takes no position on any of the other issues surrounding the conflicts that are taking place in the region. Cultural property is priceless and irreplaceable, of vital importance not only to each community, but also to humanity as a whole.

This region is universally recognized to have an extremely rich cultural heritage. The loss of parts of that heritage would constitute an impoverishment of the heritage of all the peoples of the world. It would therefore be a tragedy if this were to happen whatever the cause.

The ICBS therefore urges all parties to initiate joint actions to protect the rich cultural heritage of the region. In this connection it welcomes the recent decision of the Israel Supreme Court to rule against a decree by the Israel Defence Forces ordering the destruction of Mameluke and Ottoman houses in the old city of Hebron.

Whilst the ICBS is not currently in a position to assess reports of damage and destruction to cultural property in the region, it is willing to respond to any requests for technical assistance and coordination which may be required, within the resources available.

ICBS urges all competent authorities in the region to take the greatest possible care to protect the cultural heritage represented by the archives, libraries, monuments and sites, and museums located in the area, including the collections held in them, in order to ensure that they are safeguarded for future generations