

Research report

Forum: UNESCO

Issue: Finding ways to protect UNESCO World Heritage Sites located in Warzones

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Introduction

When a landmark or area holds a lot of cultural, historical or any other form of significance, this will be legally protected by the UN and in particular UNESCO. This is because these places hold a lot of national, but also universal value. Especially socially, these sites are important to entire communities and countries. However, due to events in the area, the sites can be destroyed. Sadly, this already happened to multiple sites, including the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, which were bombed in 2001, the Old Town Hall in Prague, Czech Republic, which was destroyed during the second world war and (Parks). The Temple of Baalshamin which was formerly located in Palmyra, Syria, but was bombed by ISIS fairly recently, in 2015. (Fisher)

Obviously, we can not let this happen to other World Heritage Sites, especially those which are now in danger due to being located in war zones. These specific sites include for example the sites in Palestine and Israel, a place where a huge conflict is currently taking place, but also Iraq and Syria, which are continuously being bombed by the U.S. For this issue, we will write a solution in order to protect these World Heritage Sites which are currently at risk, NOT to solve the conflicts themselves.

Definitions of key terms

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO strives for peace through cooperation in Education, Culture and the Sciences of all the UN member states. (UNESCO)

World Heritage

A World Heritage is the name for places on Earth that are of particularly universal value to cultures and societies and have therefore been added to the World Heritage List in order to be protected for future generations to appreciate and enjoy. (UNESCO World Heritage Centre)

Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is the legacy of tangible and intangible heritage assets of a group or society that is inherited from past generations. Not all legacies of past generations are "heritage", rather heritage is a product of selection by society. (Wikipedia contributors)

Landmark

In this case, a landmark refers to an event or discovery that marks an important stage or turning point. (Oxford Languages)

Universal and national value

When something is of global (= universal) importance or of importance to a certain country (= national).

International convention

An international convention (also known as a treaty) is a signed agreement between different countries that is legally binding. (UN Enable)

Cultural property

“Cultural property are tangible items that are part of the cultural heritage of a group or society. They include such items as cultural landscapes, historic buildings, works of art, archaeological sites, as well as collections of libraries, archives and museums.” (Wikipedia contributors, “Cultural Property”)

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

A World Heritage Site is a landmark or area with legal protection by an international convention administered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). World Heritage Sites are designated by UNESCO for having cultural, historical, scientific or other forms of significance. (Wikipedia contributors, “World Heritage Site”)

General overview

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre has been active since 1977, holding conventions to discuss the protection of the assigned sites. These sites, as spoken about in the introduction, are globally recognised as the most significant areas and therefore protected. They are of importance culturally, but usually also life-supporting. 90% of the sites provide jobs, $\frac{2}{3}$ are essential water sources and about $\frac{1}{2}$ help prevent natural disasters like floods or landslides. (IUCN) These are all reasons to protect and prevent further damage on these properties. Therefore, you are encouraged to look up further information on the history and such of World Heritage Sites within the country you are representing or your involvement in past solutions.

Major parties involved

UNESCO World Heritage Centre

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre is the organisation formed by the UN which decides on which areas or landmarks get to be a world heritage site and therefore receive protection.

Countries in conflict

→ See list of examples of World Heritage Sites below

UN member states

All UN member states should be involved in this matter, as they collectively decided on protecting these World Heritage Sites, which, as the word implies, is of global importance.

Organizations and agencies that help prevent or repair damage

There are numerous organizations that focus on the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, such as the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and SAFE (Saving Antiquities For Everyone). When thinking of solutions, you could involve funding for such organizations.

Timeline of Key Events / Previous attempts to solve the issue

1874, Belgium- Fifteen European states met to discuss the Laws and Customs of War. “All seizure or destruction of, or wilful damage to [...] historic monuments, works of art and science should be made the subject of legal proceedings by the competent authorities.”

1899, the Netherlands - An international peace conference was held where they adopted a Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land.

1935, France - The Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions (also known as the Roerich Pact) passed, stating that cultural property, which “form the cultural treasure of peoples” must “be respected and protected in time of war and in peace”.

1954, the Netherlands - The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was adopted

1999, the Netherlands - The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict adopted a new protocol, increasing protection for cultural properties of great importance, with the capacity to punish individuals when doing damage.

2012 - Safeguarding the cultural heritage of a country was written into the mandate of a United Nations Mission (Resolution 2100) for the first time.

2015 - Backed by UNESCO, some fifty countries adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2199, prohibiting trade in cultural property coming from Iraq and Syria.

2016 - UNESCO created the world’s first emergency task force for culture, thanks to Italy which came with the idea.

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2017, France - The United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2347, a resolution involving official protection of World Heritage Sites.

(Fiankan-Bokonga)

Examples of World Heritage Sites to look at

Yemen

- Historic Town of Zabid
- Old City of Sana'a
- Old Walled City of Shibam
- Socotra Archipelago

Afghanistan

- Minaret of Jam
- Buddhas of Bamiyan

Palestine

- Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, Betlehem
- Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town
- Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir

Israel

- Bahá'í Holy Places in Haifa and the Western Galilee (2008)
- Biblical Tels - Megiddo, Hazor, Beer Sheba (2005)
- Caves of Maresha and Bet-Guvrin in the Judean Lowlands as a Microcosm of the Land of the Caves (2014)
- Incense Route - Desert Cities in the Negev (2005)
- Masada (2001)
- Necropolis of Bet She'arim: A Landmark of Jewish Renewal (2015)
- Old City of Acre (2001)

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- Sites of Human Evolution at Mount Carmel: The Nahal Me'arot / Wadi el-Mughara Caves (2012)
- White City of Tel-Aviv – the Modern Movement (2003) (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “States Parties - UNESCO World Heritage Centre”)

You are encouraged to look up World Heritage Sites in the country you are representing.

Possible solutions

Here you, as the delegate, can find some examples of amendments to add to the final resolution. Obviously, you are expected to think of solutions yourself as well, this is purely to inspire and help you.

- Encourage countries to sign the World Heritage Convention and to ensure the protection of their natural and cultural heritage;
- Encourage States Parties to establish management plans and set up reporting systems on the state of conservation of their World Heritage sites;
- Encourage States Parties to the Convention to nominate sites within their national territory for inclusion on the World Heritage List;
- Help States Parties safeguard World Heritage properties by providing technical assistance and professional training;
- Provide emergency assistance for World Heritage sites in immediate danger;
- Support States Parties' public awareness-building activities for World Heritage conservation;
- Encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage;
- Encourage international cooperation in the conservation of our world's cultural and natural heritage.

(UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “World Heritage”)

Also think about the following questions:

- Outside of UNESCO Heritage Sites, what constitutes cultural property? How can we redefine cultural property so that certain sites are prioritized?
- Can we punish individuals and/or groups who damage or destroy cultural property?
- How can UNESCO and individual countries monitor Heritage Sites and cultural property to see if and how they are being damaged?
- Does your country contain Heritage Sites that are possibly subject to being damaged by conflict, or has it happened to your country in the past?

(Paley)

And do not be afraid to think outside of the box, be creative. A few examples:

- Build a dome over all UNESCO World Heritage Sites in order to protect them, starting with those in war zones;
- Emit poisonous gases from all UNESCO World Heritage Sites so no person can get close to them;
- Build in AI security in the World Heritage Sites that will track down potential bomb threats in the sky above the sites and destroy them.

Now it is your turn, good luck and I'll see you at the conference!

Further Reading

Research Report Preservation of Cultural Heritage Sites in Conflict Zones:

<https://www.yu.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/UNESCO%20Topic%201.pdf>

Article about protecting heritage sites by the UN:

<https://en.unesco.org/courier/2017nian-di-3qi/historic-resolution-protect-cultural-heritage>

Heritage Sites sorted by country (very important for countries in conflict):

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/>

Article about Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Times of War:

<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13958/safeguarding-cultural-heritage-in-times-of-war>

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