

# MUNSA 2022



## **United Nations Economic, Scientific & Cultural Organization Study Guide**

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## Note of the Chairs

Dear delegates, we are glad to welcome you to the third edition of MUNSA. This is the first time that we host the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) committee.

UNESCO is a body that doesn't seem to hold a lot of power as it has no binding power, as many organs inside the United Nations (UN), and it is often disregarded as one of the less important bodies of the UN. Although this committee has no binding power it is a key element in order to reach the sustainability goals that have been agreed upon by all necessary parties in order to have an egalitarian and prosperous future.

Our topic- Protecting World Heritage during violent conflicts- is of great significance globally. The outbreak of new wars in places where peace had reigned for seventy years has reminded many of us how fragile the stability we enjoy is. We are called to strengthen security in all aspects, including cultural heritage.

We wish you to enjoy three days of fruitful debate and great social events. We are excited to show you the many wonders of the beautiful Mediterranean city of Barcelona where culture and nature meet in a splendid place to host a UNESCO debate.

We hope this Study Guide is of great help in order to prepare for the conference. We highly encourage you to do further research in order to have a broad understanding of the subject. It is recommended not to focus too much on specific cases, especially taking into account the current conflicts emerging all over the world from Tigray to Ukraine, the focus of the debate is to discuss the mechanisms of protection and conservation of the World Heritage. Research and understanding of the topics is needed in order to have a successful debate that brings us closer to protecting humanity's heritage.

We aspire that you learn and enjoy the debate as much as we have with the preparation of it. If you have any doubt don't hesitate to contact us.

Cèlia Burrell and Afaf Sebbar



## Information about the Committee

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is a specialized agency of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that aims to promote security and peace within its reach. It has 193 member countries and 11 associated members. Its headquarters are at the World Heritage Center in Paris. It also has 53 regional offices and 199 regional field commissions all over the world.

During World War II, in 1942, the allied countries that were confronting the Nazi Germany met in the United Nation for the Conference of Allied Minister of Education (CAME), with the objective to rebuild the educational systems once the war was over. Soon this project acquired a universal character, and countries such as the United States decided to join the agreement.

In 1945 a UN Conference for the establishment of an educational organization based on CAME. It gathered representatives from 44 countries with the aim to create an organization that would promote the culture of peace, in their own words the organization had to establish the “intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind”<sup>1</sup>, thus preventing the outbreak of another world war.

When less economically developed countries started to join the UN, in the 1950s, UNESCO began to focus on more topics apart from education, some of them were poverty reduction, high rate of illiteracy and development. During the 1980s UNESCO was heavily criticized by western countries for its alleged anti-West approach to cultural issues as well as for the increase in their budget. This resulted in the US exiting the organization in 1984, followed by the United Kingdom and Singapore one year later. The UK rejoined in 1997 and the US and Singapore in 2003 and 2007.

The conflicts with the US arose again when in 2011 UNESCO approved the full membership of Palestine as a member state, the US announced it would no longer finance the institution as the congress legislation prohibits financing any UN agency that admitted Palestine as a member.

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<sup>1</sup>UNESCO, *UNESCO in brief*. Link: <https://www.unesco.org/en/brief>



The US lost voting rights in 2013. In 2018 both the US and Israel left the organization citing an “anti-Israel” bias.

UNESCO is one of the main agencies of the UN working in order to implement the current sustainable development goals (SDGs). Using education, science and culture they strive to build sustainable solutions, find peace, combat climate change and end extreme poverty through innovation and creativity.<sup>2</sup> The UNESCO committee defines itself as the laboratory of ideas of the United Nations searching for global solutions.

### Vision

This UN body is built on the basis that intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity is the correct path to secure lasting peace and wellbeing worldwide as well as achieving fairer rates of development.

One of the aims of UNESCO is to develop educational tools to help people live as global citizens. UNESCO works to ensure that every kid can have an access to education and to promote equality and dignity among all cultures. It also ensures to foster scientific developments and promotes policies for development. It defends freedom of expression as a pillar of democracy. UNESCO focuses on helping countries establish international standards that aim to develop a better flow of ideas between parties.

UNESCO has declared two overarching objectives for all their actions: “peace” and “equitable and sustainable development”. It has furthermore identified two global priorities: “Africa” and “gender equality”. UNESCO aims to be a leader in its fields of competence and has the goal and aspiration to set the global agenda on all issues related to global educational, scientific and cultural matters.

The organization has also defined some overarching objectives such as:

- Attaining quality education for all and lifelong learning
- Mobilizing science knowledge and policy for sustainable development
- Addressing emerging social and ethical challenges

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, *UNESCO: The lab of ideas, the lab for change!* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt7l1Ky4-gQ>



- Fostering cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace
- Building inclusive knowledge societies through information and communication

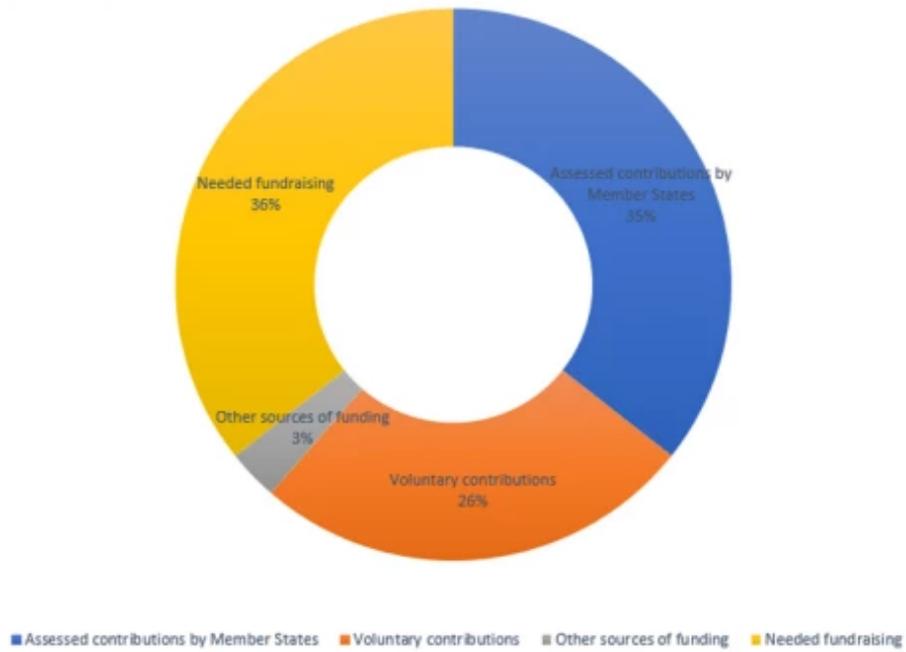
This body has also defined concrete goals for the near future, some of them are:

- Helping more than 260 million out of school children get an education
- Teach skills to 800 million adults worldwide
- Train 70 million new teachers
- Embrace cultural diversity
- Defend freedom of expression and access to information
- Strengthening scientific cooperation to protect our planet and our oceans

UNESCO gets its funding from contributions by member states, voluntary contributions, fundraising, and some other smaller ways of funding. Funding specifically for the conservation of World Heritage sites includes the World Heritage Fund, composed of obligatory contributions from member countries and voluntary contributions, as well as funds-in-trust donated by countries that have some particular result.



**UNESCO approved budget 2022/2023 – 1.5 Billion US\$  
(Including needed fundraising)**



**Figure 1:** UNESCO budget. Source: <https://www.unesco.org/en/budget-strategy>



## Key definitions

**Convention:** a formal agreement between country leaders, politicians, and states on a matter that involves them all<sup>3</sup>

**Protocol:** the system of rules and acceptable behavior used at official ceremonies and occasions<sup>4</sup>

**Cultural Cleansing:** The eradication of the customs, language, etc., of a particular group, especially through official or legal measures.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cambridge English Dictionary, *Convention* <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/convention>

<sup>4</sup> Cambridge English Dictionary, *Protocol* <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/protocol>

<sup>5</sup> Lexico, *Cultural Cleansing* [https://www.lexico.com/definition/cultural\\_cleansing](https://www.lexico.com/definition/cultural_cleansing)



## History about the topic

The preservation of the World Heritage is one of the main concerns of UNESCO. Part of their mandate is to protect and raise awareness about the symbols of cultural heritage around the world. One of the ways to fulfill this duty, and the main one, is through the UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) program.

Established by the World Heritage List (WHL), there are currently 1154 cultural sites, of which 218 are natural, 897 are cultural and 39 are mixed<sup>6</sup>. Violent conflicts lead to damage and destruction of these legacy sites, with no regard to the cultural, historical, and socioeconomic significance of such. From the aforementioned 1154 cultural sites, the WHL marked 52 of those in danger from pollution, natural disaster, poaching, uncontrolled urbanization and most importantly, armed conflicts and wars. Tangible heritage damages result from gun fires, robbery, arson, and illegal construction among others. Intangible heritage also faces the risk of disappearance or deterioration due to the discrimination or ban of certain cultures and traditions.

Protecting that heritage is also a major objective of the New Urban Agenda that seeks to optimize the interdependence among the global agendas between all national and international parties.

Most of the occasions, practically all the damage done to cultural heritage is done by non-state radical actors that seek high impact actions at the same time that they victimize groups on the ground of cultural or ethnic basis.

Any cultural property as defined in article one of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict ("the Hague Convention) is eligible for enhanced protection.

Cultural heritage is increasingly threatened by environmental circumstances, but mainly because of violent conflicts. Violent conflict is often correlated with changing social and economic circumstances, such as mistreatment, and recessions; thus meaning that these factors risk the

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<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, *World Heritage List* <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>



survival of such sites. Because of the intertwined nature of socioeconomic problems and the measures that need to be taken in order to preserve humanity's inheritance, UNESCO needs to be aided by other institutions that can intervene in such types of conflicts. The protection of the WHS is an issue that involves all the international community thus it is urgent to the collaboration between all parties involved.

One of the most important and recent cases, which will be explained in more detail in another section, is what has happened in Syria. Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 all six UNESCO WHS have been damaged. Africa is the continent where the WHS are damaged the most with reports showing that from 1979 to 2013 22% of all world heritage in Africa was affected by violent conflict<sup>7</sup>.

The WHS in Africa are generally the ones that are most threatened by violent conflicts as it is the continent with the most unstable political situations. As examples we have the effects of the situation in Congo in WHSs as the Virunga National Park, the Garamba National Park and Kahuzi-Biega National Park. The countries with the most countries in danger are Syria (6), Democratic Republic of Congo (5), Yemen (3) and Iraq (3).

It is also important to focus on the post-conflict protocols, as rapid cleansing and rebuilding might be damaging for the conservation of what is left of the cultural heritage.

UNESCO is the international body that is mainly responsible for the protection of culture around the world. As it has been stated the importance of the region of Africa in this topic it is important to understand how cultural cleansing is the main objective of most of the destruction of cultural heritages. In 2017 Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director-General, was very vocal about the need for protection of culture in order to establish global and regional peace:

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<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, State of Conservation of World Heritage Properties, 2014, p. 97



*“Violent extremists target culture because they know that cultural heritage is a force for resilience. They attack heritage and persecute communities in an overall strategy of ‘cultural cleansing’, because they know the power of culture to delegitimize their claims and false promises. In the face of this threat, we must respond with the ‘hard power’ of military measures. This also calls for the ‘soft power’ of culture and the transmission of history, as a moral and intellectual shield against hatred,”*

<sup>8</sup>

It has also established a collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in order to undertake joint projects to enhance the protection of cultural heritage. The ICRC has access to many places where other humanitarian organizations cannot access so the flow of information coming from this organization will be key in the future.

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<sup>8</sup>*UNESCO and Partners Stand Against Cultural Cleansing and violent extremism.* UNESCO. (2018, September 27). Retrieved July 1, 2022, from *UNESCO and Partners Stand Against Cultural Cleansing and Violent Extremism* UNESCO, UNESCO and Partners stand against Cultural Cleansing and Violent Extremism <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-and-partners-stand-against-cultural-cleansing-and-violent-extremism>



## Past Actions

### ***The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.***

Adopted in 1954 after the large-scale destruction of cultural heritage during the Second World War. It is widely referred to as the Hague convention and to this day it is the most comprehensive multilateral treaty dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage.

The Hague Convention aims to protect cultural property such as monuments of architecture, art or history, archaeological sites, works of art, manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest, as well as scientific collections of any kind regardless of their origin or ownership.

It states the importance of protecting the world heritage as “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world”

The following obligations to the signatories of the conventions were defined:

- Adopting preventive measures such as preparing inventories, planning emergency measures to protect property against the risk of fire or the collapse of buildings, and preparing the removal of cultural property to places of safety.
- Developing initiatives which guarantee respect for cultural property situated on their own territory or on the territory of other States Parties. This involves refraining from using such property in any manner that might expose it to destruction or deterioration in the event of armed conflict, and by refraining from all acts of hostility directed against it.
- Registering cultural property of very high importance on the International Register of Cultural Property under Special Protection in order to obtain special protection for such property;



- Marking certain important buildings and monuments with a distinctive emblem of the Convention;
- Providing a place for eventual refuge to shelter movable cultural property;
- Establishing special units within the military forces responsible for the protection of cultural property;
- Setting sanctions for breaches of the Convention; and,
- Promoting the Convention among the general public and through target groups such as cultural heritage professionals, and military or law-enforcement agencies.

### ***The first protocol***

During 1954 a protocol called the First Protocol was also established. The First Protocol regulates the protection of cultural property during occupation. It forbids all the exports from the occupied territory and requires the return of the property exported. It also prohibits the retention of cultural property. And it also prohibits the sale of cultural property.

During the 1980s and 1990s there were several criminal acts committed towards cultural property, thus the agreements reached in the Hague convention needed to be updated. In 1991 a review of the convention started by applying the knowledge gained from the latest conflicts.

### ***The second protocol***

The Second Protocol<sup>9</sup> to The Hague Convention was adopted at a Diplomatic Conference in The Hague in 1999. Some of the improvements made include the creation of a new category called “enhanced protection” for the cultural property of the highest value to humanity, it defines sanction for the violations of cultural property and defines which individual is responsible for the crime. To ensure the activation of the Second Protocol it established a twelve-member Intergovernmental Committee to oversee its implementation.

### ***Limitations of the Hague Convention***

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<sup>9</sup> Second protocol of the Hague Convention.

Link: [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/1999\\_protocol\\_text\\_en\\_2020.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/1999_protocol_text_en_2020.pdf)



Although it is currently signed by 107 countries, this convention has proved not to be effective in tackling the prevention of the destruction or illicit trafficking of Cultural Heritage.

## ***UN Resolutions***

### ***Resolution 6.42 of the UNESCO***

During the 4th session of its General Conference, this resolution states its interest in “ensuring the co-operation of interested States in the protection, preservation and restoration of ... all objects of cultural value”.

### ***Resolution 2347 from the UNSC***

Other UN bodies have also started actions in order to protect cultural heritage. Most notably the UN Security Council in the resolution 2347. This resolution focused only on the protection of cultural maintenance of international peace and security. This document focuses mainly in the terrorists groups that use cultural property while also addressing the international community for the need to protect cultural heritage. It called for international organizations, especially UNESCO, for the protection of culture for the benefit of the global society.

It also called upon states to ‘take strong and effective measures to combat the looting and trafficking in cultural property from their places of origin, particularly from countries experiencing conflict and internal strife, and to identify and prohibit the trade in looted cultural property that has been trafficked across borders and, as appropriate, to reinforce the monitoring of free ports and free trades zones.’

## ***The World Heritage Convention***

Created in 1972, this convention aims to identify and protect natural and cultural heritage of “outstanding universal value”<sup>10</sup> Its importance relies on the fact that it’s the first document to link together the conservation of natural and cultural properties.

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The convention defined the “Five C’s” which are the strategic objectives in order to be able to protect the World Heritage:

- Credibility
- Capacity-building
- Communities
- Conservation
- Communication

The convention defines the natural and cultural sites that can be defined as World Heritage. It also sets the duties of the States Parties in identifying potential sites and protecting them.

Explains how the World Heritage Fund should be used and managed.

The convention is a reaction to the decision to build the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, which would have flooded the valley containing the Abu Simbel temples, which is considered a treasure of the ancient Egyptian civilization. Both the Egyptian and the Sudanese government appealed and UNESCO launched a safeguarding campaign. After this event UNESCO initiated the preparation of the draft for the convention of cultural heritage with the help of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

### ***Underwater heritage convention***

Adopted in 2001, the convention intends to protect "all traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character" which have been underwater for over 100 years. The protection of these cultural artifacts is key for the reconstruction of humanity's history.

### ***Intangible Culture Heritage Convention***

It was adopted by the UNESCO general Conference in 2003. Defines Intangible Cultural Heritage in article 2 as:

*“The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in*



*response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. “*

This convention is operative on national and international level. State Parties are required to take necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory." Some of the measures include the identification of intangible culture in the territory, imposing the needed policies to protect it and educating the population about it. Furthermore, the states are required to "endeavor to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups, and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management".

The convention proposes international cooperation for actions such as the exchange of information, joint initiatives and the establishment of assistance between countries.



## Significant historical cases

### Abu Simbel temples

These outstanding archeological figures had to be saved from the rising waters from the Nile in a campaign from 1960 to 1980. The campaign cost about US\$80 million, half of which was donated by some 50 countries. The operation began on April 1, 1964 with the construction of a cofferdam to protect the site from rising water, and continued with the excavation of the cliff around the two temples. Abu Simbel is cut into 1,035 blocks each weighing 20 to 30 tons. Eight hundred workers and a hundred technicians worked for four years in the middle of the desert, under a blazing sun. The operation, in which some fifty countries collaborated, cost 36 million dollars. This has shown the importance of solidarity and nations' shared responsibility in conserving outstanding cultural sites. They are especially important as the protection of these temples were the reason for The World Heritage Convention. Today, the Convention has reached almost universal membership, with more than 1,000 registered sites.

### Mali and the ICC rule

The International Criminal Court (ICC) ordered thar Ahmad al-Faqui al-Mahdi to pay 2,7 million in euros in reparations for his role in the destruction in Timbuktu in 2012, this was protected by the WHS program of UNESCO. The destruction of this historical site happened during the attacks of the military group Ansar Dine. Ansar Dine initially forbade the region's inhabitants from visiting the mausoleums of their ancestors and the saints, as this was viewed as a blasphemous and superstitious practice. As the number of visits increased, the group decided to demolish the mausoleums. The objective was partially to end the practice of worshipping there, but also to challenge Timbuktu's status as a world heritage site. 14 mausoleums were destroyed along with residents' tombs, the Sidi Yahya mosque door was also affected. 139 victims applied for reparations to the ICC arguing that the attack not only took away their ability to worship their ancestors and saints but it also caused psychological harm.



With significant international funding Timbuktu has been largely rebuilt, the reparations focused on the impact that the destruction had on the community.

“The attacks on Mali’s cultural heritage, whether mausoleum or ancient manuscript, were attacks on our beliefs and way of life in an attempt to undermine us. Our response is to engage everyone in safeguarding, revitalization, rehabilitation and education for the future of Timbuktu”, stressed N’diaye Ramatoulaye Diallo, Minister of Culture of Mali.

### **Taliban’s destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas:**

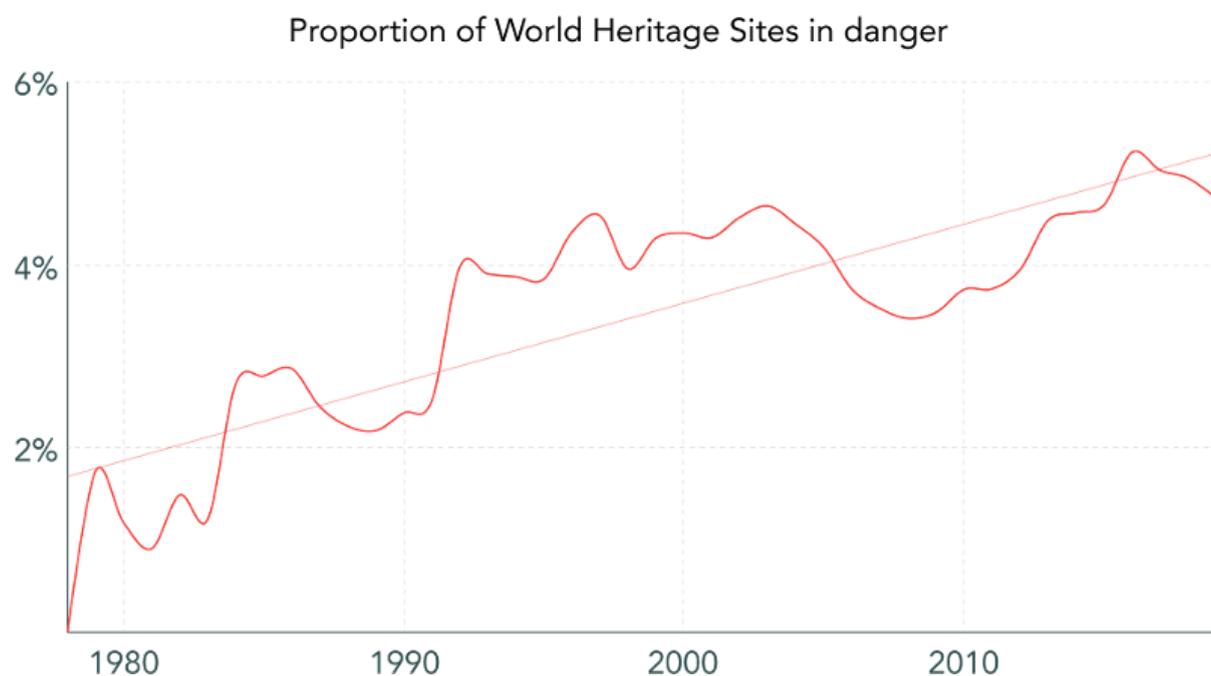
In 2001, the Taliban ordered all non-Islamic monuments and sanctuaries to be demolished in Afghanistan. The two Bamiyan Buddhas, one 38 metres high and the other 55 metres high, were subjected to a type of jihad by the Taliban. To aid in the devastation, rockets and tank shells were used, and dynamite was used to complete the task.

Since then, Afghan authorities and the international community, including UNESCO have been working relentlessly to preserve Afghanistan's rich cultural and natural heritage, which bears testament to thousands of years of intercultural interchange. Cultural landscape and archaeological remnants of the Bamiyan Valley were added to the World Heritage List in 2003. The conservation and stabilization of the Bamiyan World Heritage property, empowerment of local communities, revitalization of intangible cultural heritage, and construction of a cultural center for Bamiyan dedicated to creativity have all been supported by long-term and solid international cooperation since then, resulting in an investment of more than US\$ 27 million. To keep the habitats stable, international partners worked on a six-phase stabilization project.

## Recent Developments

### WHS at Risk

Nowadays there are several WHS that are at risk. The political instability that has been installed in the world in the last years has also contributed to the increase in danger for these sites. There are currently 53 endangered sites.



**Figure 2:** Evolution of WHS in risk timewise. Source: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5fa1c58788394468a06e85349271e421>

Some examples:

Everglades National Park: situated in Florida it is remarkable for its wildlife. It is currently being threatened by human settlements, damages for natural disasters such as hurricanes and invasive species.

Vienna's historic center: Proposals for a high-rise hotel are threatening Vienna's historic center's architectural ensemble, which includes Baroque castle and gardens as well as the late 19th-century Ringstraße dotted with stately buildings, monuments, and parks; The tower's projected height of 66.3 meters exceeds the 43-meter limit set by UNESCO. Because of



opposition, it has already been reduced from 75 meters to 50 meters. According to UNESCO, it is possible that once one tower is built exceeding the height limitations, even if it is appealing, more will follow and they will not be as friendly in design.

Coro and its port: With its Caribbean-only earthen buildings fusing native customs with Spanish Mudéjar and Dutch architectural skills, Coro is Venezuela's oldest city and the capital of Falcon State. It is one of the oldest settlements in the New World, having been established in 1527. As a result of the unusually high rainfall, it was placed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger in 2005.

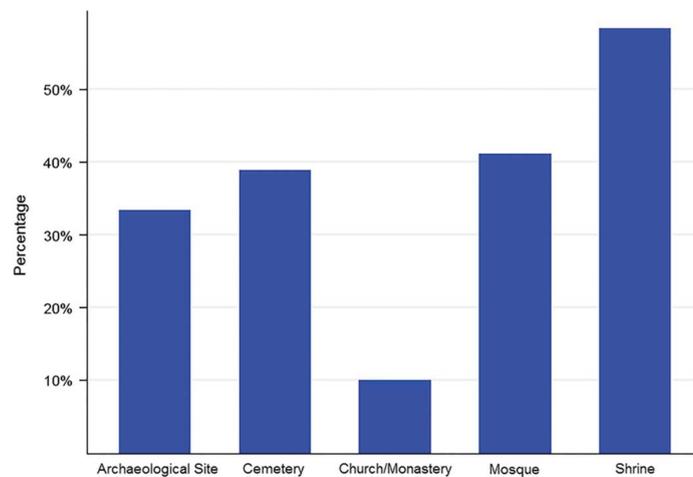
## **Significant events**

### **1. The Trump Administration**

In the beginning of 2020 during the peak of the tensions between the USA and Iran, the then president of the USA publicly stated that he was considering targeting iranian site that were “very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture,” completely ignoring the fact that the US is a signatory of the 1954 Hague Convention. Trump defended his attack towards the significant iranian culture as a way to demoralize the iranian population. One day after the initial statement, when speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump defended his threat and stated, "They are permitted to kill and maim our people. They are permitted to employ roadside explosives to kill our citizens. And we are prohibited from touching their cultural site? It does not function that way.

### **2. Syrian War**

The civil war in Syria has been of great concern for UNESCO since ISIS reached the region during the height of their power. That’s why UNESCO established a delegation on Libanon. Some non-state actors have tried to destroy places with cultural significance for Syrian people.



Percentage of reported heritage attacking events claimed by ISIS during the study period for analysed site-types

The previous Director-General of the UNESCO, Irina Bokova, stated that UNESCO was notified that “the serious damage that has already been inflicted on Syria’s heritage,” The city of Aleppo was the focus of most of the destruction, experts calculate that 10% of the historical building have been destroyed. ISIS strongly follows the strategy of cultural cleansing.

ISIS has been destroying historical sites, monuments, museums and other types of cultural sites for years. The group also sells ancient artifacts to be able to finance their violent actions.

A key example was Palmyra, the group recorded and distributed the images of the blowing up of the city that best represents the multiculturalism of the Syrians.

Russia estimated that in 2016 the terrorist group had a revenue of between 150 and 200 million dollars from looting antiquities.

There have been several international reactions to this new type of warfare. For instance in 2015 the UNSC passed a resolution in which it explicitly condemned ISIS’s profiteering of the destruction of cultural heritage. The US Congress passed a bill, the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act, that banned the import of antique artifacts for Syria.

UNESCO has strengthened its efforts in surveilling the state of cultural heritage in the region. UNESCO has been supported by the United Nations



Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) with its UNOSAT program, using satellite technology to survey the current state of the cultural legacy. Apart from that, it has established a regional observatory in Lebanon to assess the state of Cultural Heritage in Syria.

The 38th General Conference of UNESCO (Oct 2015) passed a resolution on the “Reinforcement of UNESCO’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict”.<sup>11</sup> With this resolution, UNESCO expresses the clear goal to expand its collaboration with other UN bodies as well as other related international organizations, in order to implement measures for rapid intervention in the case of Cultural Heritage destruction.

### **3. Afghanistan**

The rise to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan again has brought back the memories of cultural destruction that the old Taliban government did.

On August 19, 2021, the UNESCO made a statement: “calls for the preservation of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage in its diversity, in full respect of international law, and for taking all necessary precautions to spare and protect cultural heritage from damage and looting.”

This is especially important if we recall the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan in March 2001. In this site, we could find several pieces of evidence of the culture that developed in the region in the 1st century. The Buddhist sculptures and the remains of the fortress are testament of its past civilization.

The destruction of the Buddhas was considered by the international community as a retaliation of the economic sanctions imposed on the country, especially by the US. The Taliban had other reasons to defend their actions. Afghan Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakel stated that the destruction was for religious issues: “We are destroying the statues in accordance with Islamic law and it is purely a religious issue.

Mullah Mohammed Omar, the Taliban leader then, gave two reasons for the destruction:

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<sup>11</sup> UNESCO. General Conference, 38th, 2015 [945]. Link: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002433/243325e.pdf>



*“Muslims should be proud of smashing idols. It has given praise to Allah that we have destroyed them”<sup>12</sup>*

*“I did not want to destroy the Bamiyan Buddha. In fact, some foreigners came to me and said they would like to conduct the repair work of the Bamiyan Buddha that had been slightly damaged due to rains. This shocked me. I thought, these callous people have no regard for thousands of living human beings—the Afghans who are dying of hunger, but they are so concerned about non-living objects like the Buddha. This was extremely deplorable. That is why I ordered its destruction. Had they come for humanitarian work, I would have never ordered the Buddha's destruction.”<sup>13</sup>*

The destruction was received with horror by the international community, including those countries that supported the Taliban such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. UNESCO sent 36 letters to the government urging them to stop the destruction.

After the destruction there were several attempts and projects with the idea of reconstructing the two largest Buddhas. There have also been several reproductions.

When the Taliban came to power in 2021 again they promised to preserve the rest, but there has been no proof of that so far.

#### **4. Iraq**

“Extremists have destroyed many archaeological sites, religious buildings, museums and libraries across Iraq and communities have been deeply affected by this. Rebuilding this cultural heritage is the way for people to leave behind what they have suffered and open a new door; it is essential to national and local reconciliation”, said Faryad Rawandozi, Minister of Culture of Iraq.

Prior to 2003, the Iraqi government maintained a statewide army of paid site guards whose responsibility it was to protect archaeological, historical, and heritage sites under their control. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, this system, which had been extremely effective, disintegrated and was only partially reconstituted in subsequent years. In the Kurdistan region, it has been easier to maintain a network of government-employed site guards, but the current economic downturn in Kurdistan and the rest of Iraq has

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<sup>12</sup> American Taliban : how war, sex, sin, and power bind Jihadists and the radical right

<sup>13</sup> Rediff.com, (2004), *The Rediff Interview/Mullah Omar* <https://www.rediff.com/news/2004/apr/12inter.htm>



once again posed a threat to this system and is likely to lead to renewed instances of illegal looting of archaeological sites for financial gain.

The 2003 placement of a US military base within the ruins of ancient Babylon also had a devastating effect on Iraqi archaeological heritage. According to the OHCHR, the only way to save the station is through the rapid assessment, recording, and expert treatment of damaged buildings, as well as the careful examination and removal of rubble and explosives (UXO and mines). This will ensure the survival of heritage structures and the preservation of irreplaceable information.

### **5. Bahrain:**

During the tensions in Bahrain in 2011, government forces were responsible for the destruction of 38 Shia mosques, several of which were of significant historical and cultural importance. In the instance of the Masjid Kowaikebat, the destruction of the mosque resulted in the loss of religious artifacts that were housed within the structure. The al-Barbaghi mosque, which held important cultural importance, is one of the mosques that the government has demolished. The al-Barbaghi mosque, which was constructed in 1549, served as a symbol of Shia Islam's position in Bahrain for many years. As part of the process of acknowledging the findings of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), the government of Bahrain made a commitment to reconstruct all of the mosques. This vow has not been followed through on in its entirety by the government. Interlocutors state that three of these mosques were rebuilt by the Shia community.

### **6. Ukrainian War**

Since the war in Ukraine started in the beginning of 2022, culture has played a key role in the war. For example the Ukrainian Ballet and Opera will refrain from interpreting Russian pieces. Worldwide there has been a push in order to stop collaborating with Russian artists, for example The Montreal Symphony Orchestra has postponed several shows of the pianist Alexander Malofeev.

The 1st of July of 2022 the UNESCO recognized the borscht cooking for its cultural significance and added it to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding by the Intergovernmental Committee for



the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Ukrainian delegation asked for the fast-track examination.

Since the war started UNESCO has been a key actor in protecting Ukraine, there have been several measures implemented in the fields of education, culture and the protection of international press.

The investigations of UNESCO show terrific data ( as of 27 of June):

- 2028 educational institutions destroyed
- 10 killed journalists
- 154 cultural sites damaged, but not any WHS



# Bloc positions

## Europe

### Council of Europe (CoE)

This institution is composed of 47 states integrating most European countries, its members held a Convention in 1985 for the *Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe*<sup>14</sup>, which was revised in 1992 in the Valletta Convention. In 2001, CoE established the Convention for the protection of *Audiovisual Heritage* and since then it has been adopting actions that are in favor of cultural heritage preservation.

For historical reasons, many outstanding sites are located in Europe, which makes them a priority for the CoE and the European Union (EU). As part of its efforts to protect Europe's structural and archaeological heritage, the European Union adopted the 1985 Granada Framework for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, which established the principles of European cooperation and coordination of architectural conservation policies.

### European Union (EU):

All the countries in the EU are also in CoE and both organizations collaborate closely, but apart from that, UNESCO and the European Union (EU) are close and organic partners, sharing values and aims, and joining efforts to support nations in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.

The EU adds to the classification of tangible and intangible culture the digital culture in its aim to protect the most innovative culture.

The EU's framework for cultural heritage includes the following:

- **Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe** which is a law passed in 2014 by the European Commission to the

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<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe, (1985), European Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property <https://rm.coe.int/168007a085>



Parliament, Council, Economic and Social Committee and the Region's committee of the EU.

- A new European agenda for culture (2018), also a comment passed by the commission.
- The European Council 2019-22 Work Plan for Culture (2018): this document establishes five priorities, which are:
  - Sustainability in cultural heritage
  - Cohesion and well-being
  - An ecosystem supporting artists, cultural and creative professionals and European content
  - Gender equality
  - International cultural relations
- The European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage (2018) reflects and broadens the success of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018.

## **United States of America**

Currently the US is not a member of UNESCO and has promoted its own legislation in order to protect its cultural heritage.

The Cultural Property Implementation Act was passed into law by the United States in 1983. (CPIA). The United States and its cultural property importation laws are putting into practise the UNESCO Convention of 1970. This legislation allows the United States to make bilateral or multilateral agreements with other UNESCO Convention State Parties, or impose emergency import restrictions, if a State Party asks it.

Arkansas, for example, has developed its own programmes to educate the general public about these issues. More than 700 Arkansans have joined the Arkansas Archaeological Society as a result of their participation in the Arkansas Archaeological Survey Training Program, which teaches archaeology to the general public. Programs and hotlines have been put in place by other state National Park Service branches to enroll residents as site stewards, such as the South Dakota branch of the National Park Service.

Laws and programmes at the federal and state levels are making progress in educating the public about looters and prosecuting them, but more needs to be done to ensure that what is left is documented and protected.



## **Israel**

Also not currently a member of UNESCO. In 2017, UNESCO included the Palestinian old town of Hebron in the occupied West Bank to its list of world historical sites. In response, Israel claimed that the decision's phrasing omitted Jews' historic ties to the area, and the Israeli UNESCO ambassador left the session in protest. There have been declared 9 World Heritage Sites within the country of Israel.

The Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) has a dedicated Conservation Department to protect the Israeli cultural heritage. This body seeks to protect the cultural heritage within the country's values and highlights the sensitivity required for the treatment of a mosaic of such different and diverse cultures. The policies created by this body are based in the Antiquities Law.

It is also remarkable the collaboration of the USA in protecting the cultural heritage of Israel (remember that both of them renounced their position in UNESCO for the same reason).

## **Africa**

At the present count, there are 98 World Heritage Sites in Africa, including 54 cultural sites and 39 natural sites. The Reactive Monitoring mechanism is constantly monitoring the conservation of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the region.

As stated during all the SG the African continent is the one that is struggling the most with this issue. The responses of the countries to the protection of meaningful heritage is remarkably heterogeneous. Many valuable historical landmarks have been ruined, vandalized, or demolished in the last decade in countries all over the continent. Historical sites in Libya, Algeria, Egypt, and Mali, among other African countries, have been decimated by internal and cross-border violence. Protests by students at the University of Cape Town sparked a national conversation in South Africa. A mixture of destruction of colonial heritage monuments was also involved. Cecil John Rhodes, a British business tycoon and politician, has a



statue at the campus, which has sparked a lot of debate. Some interpreted the statue as a reminder of the oppression of colonial rule. In the view of others, even though monuments were reminders of an oppressive past, they should be preserved and protected as a testament to South Africa's history.

## **Ukraine**

A famous cultural icon in Kharkiv was recently damaged by Russian strikes: the Kharkiv State Academic Opera and Ballet Theater. UNESCO has documented at least 120 incidents of cultural property damage or destruction since the invasion began on February 24. These include museums, historic buildings, libraries, and religious organizations. Damage to 191 historic sites has been estimated as a result of a joint effort between the Virginia Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian's Cultural Rescue Initiative.

It has been claimed that in April alone, there have been more than 50 Russian attacks on heritage sites, according to a preliminary damage assessment for cultural properties being conducted by UNESCO.

## **Asia**

The Asia-Pacific regional bureau of UNESCO is collaborating closely with Mekong cluster nations to promote cultural heritage management across multiple dimensions. This includes creating capacity and enhancing policies for disaster risk management, visitor management, and impact assessments on cultural heritage.



## **Questions the resolution should address:**

- How can World Heritage be protected efficiently? How can parties help to protect them?
- How can the illegal trafficking of artifacts from Cultural Heritage be stopped?
- Which mechanisms can UNESCO adapt? How can other members of the international community help?
- How can awareness regarding the value of Cultural Heritage be highthen?
- How can the current legislation be implemented?
- How can we solve the conflict between preserving the World Heritage and respecting some religious beliefs?
- How can UNESCO communicate the importance of Work Heritage better?



## **Additional reading**

We recommend that you read the most relevant conventions for the topic at hand, remarkably:

- The Hague Convention
- The World Heritage Convention

It is also interesting to do some research on different ways to approach the actors that are actively harming the WHSs, as it will be important to tackle ongoing situations. We also recommend that you broaden your knowledge of how the different trends in society and its view on culture might affect the protection of these sites.

Achieving long term solutions for this issue will be key, thus the communication of its importance to younger audiences will be a key aspect of it.

We also recommend reading the communications from the European commission to the rest of the organs of the EU, as it is one of the bodies with most advanced legislation regarding the concerns of this debate.



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