

70th anniversary of the Hague Convention: UNESCO launches new initiatives to protect cultural property

Paris, 15 May 2024 – As the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict celebrates its 70th anniversary, UNESCO recognises the significant progress which the Convention has made possible, and announces new initiatives during an international conference in The Hague, organized by UNESCO with the Netherlands.

On the 14th of May 1954, in the aftermath of the destruction wrought by the Second World War, the international community came together under the auspices of UNESCO to adopt the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, known as [the Hague Convention](#).

It established, for the very first time, a clear and shared global legal framework to ensure that cultural property would be protected from combat operations, and that those responsible for deliberate destruction of such property would be brought to justice.

“This Convention has not only strengthened international law and established a permanent dialogue between cultural professionals and military authorities, it has also given rise to very tangible preventive measures implemented during peacetime in all regions of the world,” acknowledged **Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO**.

70 years of concrete action on the ground

These measures include conducting localized inventories of cultural property, marking such property with the Blue Shield emblem, providing training to military personnel, and supporting the creation of units specialized in the preservation of cultural sites. Over the past five years alone, more than 7,500 military personnel have been trained across in countries.

UNESCO has also provided financial assistance to a dozen countries to enable them to better anticipate risks, to act decisively in times of conflict and accelerate post-conflict recovery. Beneficiaries include Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Paraguay and Ukraine.

The 1954 Convention has also led to the creation of a List of Cultural Property under Enhanced Protection, which currently includes 55 cultural sites. This status triggers additional protection measures, while alerting the entire international community to the imminent risk of damage. It also grants extensive powers to the judicial system to prosecute those responsible for damage or destruction.

Three new initiatives supported by UNESCO

Seventy years to the day after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNESCO and the Netherlands have organized an international conference of experts in The Hague to take stock of

what has been achieved so far and address the challenges that remain. On this occasion, UNESCO announced three new initiatives in line with current needs and technical resources.

Firstly, the creation of an international training program for judges and prosecutors in the areas of data collection, analysis and investigating the destruction of heritage. After [a first conviction was handed down by the ICC in 2016](#), marking a historic turning point, UNESCO aims to further strengthen the legal mechanisms for protecting cultural property. This training program will be modelled on an existing scheme that has been [training judiciary professionals in terms of press freedom](#) for over ten years.

Secondly, the creation of a "civil-military alliance for the protection of cultural property", whose mission will be to accelerate the creation of units specialized in heritage protection, particularly in Africa, and to link them up with heritage experts in order to share experience and best practices.

Finally, the training of site managers and military personnel in cutting-edge technologies that can contribute to heritage protection. UNESCO will support States Parties to the Convention in their efforts to make greater use of remote sensing by satellite imagery, artificial intelligence and the preventive digitization of cultural property.

About UNESCO

With 194 Member States, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization contributes to peace and security by leading multilateral cooperation on education, science, culture, communication and information. Headquartered in Paris, UNESCO has offices in 54 countries and employs over 2300 people. UNESCO oversees more than 2000 World Heritage sites, Biosphere Reserves and Global Geoparks; networks of Creative, Learning, Inclusive and Sustainable Cities; and over 13 000 associated schools, university chairs, training and research institutions. Its Director-General is Audrey Azoulay.

"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" – UNESCO Constitution, 1945.

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