

General Assembly Third

Committee: SOCHUM

CIMUN

Topic 3: The question of protecting world cultural heritage sites in
regions of armed conflict.

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Introduction	2
Key Terms	2
Background Information	3
Major Countries and Organizations Involved	4
Relevant UN Reports and Resolutions	4
Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue	5
Possible Solutions	5
Bibliography	7

Introduction:

Over the years, the scale of armed conflicts has increased massively. These conflicts have led to an increase in the destruction of places that hold significant importance to this world. The safety of these places is essential because they strengthen both national and cultural identity. Cultural heritages are also important internationally as they help create an appreciation of cultural diversity and help increase the knowledge of human society, ancient language and culture, and origin of human species.¹ In the past, numerous laws have been designed to protect these sites, but should they continue to receive this protection?

Key Terms:

UNESCO World Heritage Site - A site that holds scientific, cultural, historical, or another form of importance and is therefore protected by UNESCO for future generations to appreciate.

This initiative was started in 1972, and as of 23rd August 2020, there are now a total of 1121 World Heritage Sites (869 cultural, 213 natural, and 39 mixed). The entire list can be found here: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>.

For a location to be classified as a World Heritage Site, it must follow at least one of the ten criteria listed in this document: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>.

Culture Heritage - A way of living passed down from generation to generation. This includes places, values, and objects.

¹ Techera, Erika J. "Protection of Cultural Heritage in Times of Armed Conflict: The International Legal Framework Revisited." *SSRN*, 24 Oct. 2007. Date Accessed: 26/7/2020. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1023474

Background Information:

In 2017, the international community proved that it was unified in their beliefs of protecting cultural heritage by unanimously adopting UNSC Resolution 2347, which formally recognizes that cultural heritage safety is crucial for security.

This process began on July 27, 1874, when fifteen different European countries met in Brussels to inspect the draft international agreement concerning the Laws and Customs of War. One month after, Article 8 of the Brussels Declaration specified that during times 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 (ihl-database.irc.org).” Twenty years later, another peace conference was held in the Netherlands to amend the Brussels Declaration(which never got ratified) and adopt the Hague Convention of 1899, which gave immunity to cultural sites.

After the second world war, in 1948, The Netherlands proposed a draft text to UNESCO, which was about the protection of cultural sites during armed conflict; this was adopted six years later in 1954.²

In the same year, the Egyptian Government decided to build the Aswan High Dam. This dam was created to improve hydroelectric power, regulate the floods of the Nile river, and increase agricultural production. However, the dam’s creation also led to the Nile river and 3000-year-old monuments of ancient Egypt to be flooded. In 1959, the Egyptian and Sudanese governments requested UNESCO to help them protect these monuments and sites. In 1960, UNESCO agreed to help and launched the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia. This campaign resulted in the recovery of thousands of ancient objects and the relocation of several temples. The campaign ended in 1980 and was quite successful and led to numerous other safeguarding projects such as saving Venice and it’s lagoon.

Around ten years later, UNESCO reexamined the 1954 conventions and drafted the second version, which was adopted in 1999. Now, the deliberate destruction of cultural heritages was punishable, and in 2004, a former Yugoslavian officer became the first conviction of this new law. In 2016, Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi was found guilty of the

² “A Historic Resolution to Protect Cultural Heritage.” *UNESCO*, 9 Jan. 2020. Date Accessed:

27/7/2020

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

destruction of 10 religious places in Timbuktu. For the first time, damage against cultural heritage was considered a war crime.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved:

UNESCO: Is the main UN organization that is involved in recognizing and protecting world heritage sites. To help UNESCO achieve this, they have many partners that either assist financially, by raising more awareness or doing both.

The Netherlands: Responsible for drafting resolutions regarding protecting world heritage sites and cultural or scientific monuments. The Netherlands has also been the host for peace conferences regarding this topic and was the country that initially brought the need to protect heritage sites in areas of armed conflict to UNESCO's attention after the second world war.

Relevant UN Resolutions and Reports:

In 1972 UNESCO adopted the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.³ This convention is the baseline for all of the work that UNESCO does to protect world heritage sites in general. The convention of the Hague in 1954 (second draft in 1999) is one of the essential conventions in regards to world heritage sites, specifically in zones of armed conflict⁴. This convention aims to criminalize actions that damage a world heritage site. It recognizes world heritage sites as a place that needs to be protected and should under no circumstances be put in a place where it can be ruined. As of now, 132 countries have ratified this convention.

³ "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage." UNESCO, 2020, www.whc.unesco.org/?cid=175.

⁴ "Protecting Cultural Heritage in Armed Conflict: the 66th Anniversary of the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization." *Protecting Cultural Heritage in Armed Conflict: the 66th Anniversary of the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention* | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020, www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dynamic-content-single-view/news/protecting_cultural_heritage_in_armed_conflict_the_66th_ann/.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue:

After world war 2, the Hague Convention was ratified by many countries in hopes of preventing militaries in the future from disregarding the cultural value of certain world heritage sites. In 2004 this became successful for the first time when someone who was previously a Yugoslavian officer was convicted for having damaged a world heritage site.

Another attempt at solving the issue has been campaigning and raising awareness. Campaigns such as the International Campaign to Save Monuments of Nubia have greatly helped protect many world heritage sites and the things inside them. In recent years UNESCO has raised awareness through worldwide movements such as #Unite4Heritage⁵. These movements are created in hopes of making the public aware of the need for protection of these sites.

Possible Solutions:

The first step to protecting world heritage sites in armed conflict areas is to ensure that these places are recognized. Without recognition as a world heritage site, there is nothing the UN or the government of the country in which the world heritage site is in can do.

Furthermore, taking on UNESCO's goals could be crucial for being able to protect world heritage sites adequately. What countries themselves could do regarding these goals is: sign the convention regarding world heritage sites, help provide emergency assistance especially in places of armed conflict, support activities that increase public awareness of world heritage sites, encourage international cooperation.⁶ In regards to protecting heritage sites, specifically in armed conflict, the act of providing emergency assistance would be the most important.

Another crucial step to protecting heritage sites would be to get the Convention of the Hague conference in 1954 to be ratified by more countries, especially the countries that are currently involved in armed countries. Furthermore, this convention then needs to be

⁵“Awareness-Raising: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.” *Awareness-Raising | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 2020, www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/armed-conflict-and-heritage/activities/awareness-raising/.

⁶ Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. “World Heritage.” *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, 2020, www.whc.unesco.org/en/about/.

incorporated into national laws. If this can be done, it will ensure that even in zones of armed conflict, world heritage sites remain a protected area.

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