

**Forum:** General Assembly 3 (GA3)  
**Agenda:** On measures to preserve cultural relics in war impacted regions  
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## Introduction

Cultural relics are simply defined as a surviving and non-renewable memorial of the past that represents the civilization of the region. Culture relics are often categorized as movable and unmovable; examples of movable relics include delicate pottery, jewelry, forms of arts, etc. where instances for the latter would comprise ancient tombs, cave temples, stone carvings, mural paintings, historical architectures and more. Due to the non-renewable nature of the relics, the value that can be reflected from the items is highly cherished as historic information about the past may be discovered through the objects while the worship and respect for the ancestors are also demonstrated. For the infinite value of the artifacts, over 193 countries adhered to the Convention with the common mission to identify and safeguard the world's most outstanding heritage. Albeit the established and functioning comprehensive approach to preserving the cultural relics, the uncontrolled loss and destruction of heritage still occur in many parts of the world, especially in regions that are severely suffering from war tragedies.

Under circumstances where living conditions are unbearable, necessities are below demand, life maintenance is barely guaranteed, buildings are bombed to ashes; not only lives of people are being wiped away from the gunfire confronts but so is the history that ancestors left behind for the world. Destructions of culturally significant monuments, buildings, relics, or objects were significant in the past wars. For instance, the two million books that went extinct in the flames in Vijećnica or the tallest monuments of Buddha, the Buddhas of Bamiyan, that was left to ashes by the weeks of bombs from the Taliban in 2001; the list would go on forever so would the pity for the priceless values of those precious heritages. The uncontrollable chaos in the war impacted regions has elevated the danger for the cultural relics to the level where actions are urged before events become irreversible. It is the General Assembly 3's mission to draft resolutions that will protect and preserve those valuable cultural heritages in unfortunate regions that are affected by ruthless armed conflicts due to its potential for unlimited knowledge as well as the deserved respect to the history of mankind.

## Key Terms

**Archaeological excavation-** The procedure by which archaeologists unearth, restore and record cultural and biological remains buried in the ground

**Cultural genocide-** Any deliberate act committed with the intention of wiping out a culture or the cultural heritage of a specific regions through ways such as destructions of its historic sites, symbols, language, and suppressing the rights to practice the inhabitants' cultural norms.

**Cultural relics-** Non-renewable cultural resources that are preserved from the past, being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art, or science.

**Save haven-** Temporary refuges situated in foreign regions or countries for cultural properties at risk in the context of armed conflicts

**Tangible Cultural Heritage-** Physical artefacts that are produced, maintained, and transmitted intergenerationally in society, e.g., Buildings, monuments, artworks, books

**World Heritage Sites-** Natural or cultural sites or objects inscribed on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List due to its demonstration of influences or significant in a global context, having “outstanding universal value”.

## General Overview

### *Intentional Destructions & Cultural Genocide*

The intentional destruction of cultural relics can be traced down to countless reasons, but they can all be considered violent efforts to rewrite history. Religion being a great source of belief for many people is often targeted for destruction due to aggressive opposing opinions. In war zones of West Africa and the Middle East, extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) often worsen the chaos by directing attacks to religious symbols that are not in accordance with their own. One of the recent heartbreaking examples to be the destruction of the temple of Baalshamin. This temple to the Phoenician god Baalshamin is one of the best-preserved sites, located in the world heritage site of Palmyra, situated in Syria. It was built nearly 2000 years ago and bears witness to the depth of the pre-Islamic history of the country. In May 2015, the ISIS widely spread propaganda images that demonstrated militants laying explosives in and then blowing up the temple of Baalmshamin; made apparent the acts were done for publicity to gain support while demonstrating their extreme determination to destroy religious symbols that they consider to be heretical. The extremists sought to display control and authority to the international community through such violent, thus public acts. A step further, intentional destructions may be conducted to forcibly erase the cultural heritage of a region. As the former French president Francois Hollande once said, the act of cultural genocide is done to “break what was there before in order to kill hope afterward, to eradicate human and cultural diversity”, deliberate attacks towards the culture can be with the aim to subdue its people by terminating their beliefs. In the case of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban, the brutal move promoted the vast majority of Hindu and Buddhist populations to flee the country, fearing forceful religious persecution from the extremists. Hence, the motives for intentional destructions of cultural relics can be concluded to be mainly for religious or socio-political purposes.

### *Illegal Trade*

After a brutal attack on cultural heritage, investigation of the site for remains of valuable relics often concludes with nothing found. This is due to how the looting and illegal trade of cultural valuables in conflict zones are well-organized as they are often for the aim to fund the same extremist groups that intentionally destroy the cultural sites for them to construct their own military facilities to expand in power. Albeit seeming extremely unethical, terror organizations such as ISIS manage to raise funds by selling off stolen artifacts from museums and archaeological dig sites. At times, they are sold to authorized associations in the forms such as a threat to destroy the priceless items unless paid an incredible amount while the relics can easily fetch prices up to millions of US dollars on the black market. The goods are often first procured in the historical sites that are under the control of extremist groups, yet soon, an inspector of the organization would examine the relics, destroying those that they consider being against their beliefs and publicizing their possession of the goods and demand payments for the sales of the remaining relics, receiving all offers from both the authorities and black market with the simple criterion of the higher price. Due to the nature of illegal trades, goods are passed through many hands at many transit points mainly of developing countries until ending in the wealthy hands of the final buyers who possibly do not fully understand that their act is supporting the expansion of terrorism that can put the world in danger. Albeit many resolutions passed regarding the trade of relics, there are still intense underground trading activities of looted cultural heritage. The disrespect and unlawful acts upon priceless items solely for the superficial financial gains for the enlargement of the extremist group.

### *Awareness & Education*

The lack of awareness and education regarding the importance of cultural relics contributes to one of the largest reasons for the difficulty in preservation. Due to the chaotic living conditions in the regions suffering from destructions by armed conflicts, education does not tend to be on the list of priorities as survival is not even a basic guarantee for them. Most of the ongoing wars are located in sub-Saharan Africa as well as western Asia, the literacy rate of adults (15 years old or older) in these two regions is 65.47% in 2019 and 70.2% in 2015 respectively. However, the lack of education leads to the lack of awareness of many things such as the protection of cultural relics. In many instances, when international assistance is offered to the people to protect their cultural heritage, many do not understand the reasons for such doings as they reckon those goods to be ordinary. Therefore, it can be difficult to work with the locals to provide them with help to preserve their relics and ask for their assistance to protect the goods as they have not developed the awareness for so nor have gained the knowledge of what the objects truly mean. Though it may be overly forceful to request them to act in the will of the international community without fully briefing them on the reasons and prior to ensuring their personal safety in the chaos. Thus, not only external support directed at the preservation of relics needs to be conducted, but indirect inputs of education regarding the relevant knowledge should be provided to the locals to raise their awareness, certainly under the circumstance of offering aids to improve their current living statuses.

## Timeline of Events

- 1874 The Brussels Declaration was signed by 15 European Nations. This being the first significant recognition of the need to protect cultural relics during war.
- 1899 The ratification of the Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land during the Hague Convention of 1899 reaffirmed the contents of the Brussels Declaration.
- 1935 The Roerich Pact was signed by the United States and Latin American nations.
- 1954 The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was adopted.
- 1966 The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), established on 16 December 1966. Guaranteed rights to freely participate in the cultural life of the community while encompassing an obligation of preservation and presentation of mankind's cultural heritage
- 1977 Additional Protocol I and II to the Geneva Convention, forbidding pillage and destruction of cultural property by invading and occupying forces.
- 1979 UNESCO Convention adopted, which the most ratified international convention on the issue of illicit trafficking cultural property.
- 1972 The World Heritage Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972. Leading to the creation of the World Heritage List.
- 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects adopted. Laid down laws for the restitution of stolen cultural objects and the return of illegally exported cultural objects.
- 2007 Former Yugoslav navy officer Miodrag Jokić was found guilty for the tried intentional destruction of cultural heritage for his bombardment of the historical old town of Dubrovnik with mortars. Jokić's sentence was the first ever conviction for the destruction of cultural heritage.
- 2015 Over 50 nations adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2199.
- 2016 The International Criminal Court (ICC) sentenced Malian Islamic jihadist Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi to nine years in prison for destroying ten religious sites in the historical city of Timbuktu. The first instance of the destruction of cultural heritage becoming a war crime.
- 2017 UN Security Council Resolution 2347 was passed, creating an international fund to protect cultural heritage and the organizing a system of safe zones for endangered cultural property.

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

### The Brussels Declaration

Article 8 declared that all wilful damage to institutions of this character, historic monuments, works of art, and science should be made the subject of legal proceedings by the competent authorities. The declaration was signed

by 15 European states essentially the beginning of creating global standards and systems to protect cultural heritage. Yet, it was never ratified.

#### The Hague Convention Second Protocol

The Convention outlines criminal responsibility and authorized procedures addressing the protection of cultural property in the event of domestic, national armed conflicts. It also established the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

#### The Roerich Pact

It was signed by the United States and Latin American nations, agreeing that historic monuments should be considered as neutral, and respected and protected both in times of peace and war. The pact was signed on April 15, 1935.

#### The Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict

The Committee is composed of 12 states Parties to the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954. The Committee meets once a year in ordinary sessions with the aim to develop guidelines for implementation and be responsible for the granting and rescinding of enhanced protection status. It also considers requests for international assistance and an Action Plan on promoting the ratification of the Hague Convention while keeping control over the established fund for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

#### World Heritage Convention

The Convention defines the kind of natural or cultural sites which are considered for inscription on the World Heritage List. It also sets out the duties of States Parties to identify potential heritage sites and clarify their roles in protecting and preserving them. By signing the Convention, the countries commit to conserving all World Heritage sites in their nation. Countries are encouraged to integrate the protection of sites with planning programs, to adopt measures that would give the heritage a function in the daily life of the community.

#### World Heritage Fund

The fund is used for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of Outstanding Universal value was established in 1977 under Article 15 of the World Heritage Convention. The World Heritage Committee makes decisions upon the amount of budget for the fund and its use. They allocate most of their budget for services of the Advisory Bodies and for International Assistance.

#### UNESCO Convention 1970

To fight the illicit international trade of cultural properties, the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970 – commonly referred to as UNESCO Convention 1970 - was drafted. It is the most broadly ratified international convention regarding the issue of illicit trafficking in cultural property. It clearly states that “the export and transfer of ownership of cultural property under compulsion arising directly or indirectly from the occupation of a country by a foreign power shall be regarded as illicit”.

#### UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects

The international legal instrument lays down laws for the restitution of stolen cultural objects and the return of illegally exported cultural objects, especially from areas of armed conflicts. It sets out a time frame within which private own or States can apply for restitution of their objects – 50 years and within 3 years of knowledge of the location of the object and identification of its possession.

#### Rome Statute by the International Criminal Court (ICC)

Article 8 states that people presumed to have intentionally attacked against civilian objects or buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, charitable purposes, and historic monuments, will be persecuted by the ICC.

#### UN Security Council Resolution 2347

The resolution encourages the UN Member States to establish a network of ‘safe havens’ in territories to protect cultural relics stressing the countries’ primary responsibility for the protection of dispersed cultural heritage. This resolution is the most systematic support network regarding global heritage preservation efforts to date.

## Possible Solutions

### Safe havens

Highly encourage all nations to construct safe havens to provide a safe site for relics when needed while establishing protocols regarding international networks of safe havens to transport movable heritage from regions of armed conflicts as emergency evacuation. By providing a safe haven, it removes relics from the marketplace, preserves their physical integrity, and provides a basis for their safe return to the entities or individuals of possession or those of appropriate.

### Strengthening governance

Governments of individual countries should strive to work actively in the regulations and/or constructions regarding the protection of cultural relics to ensure minimum destruction during armed conflicts.

### Protocols regarding relics trafficking

Establishing tough protocols that implement actions for the destruction of black markets for cultural relics trades.

### Protection precautions for cultural heritage

Implement further physical or non-physical protection for the unmovable heritage to avoid destruction from intentional attacks.

### Raise awareness & Education

Develop education programs for civilians to widely promote and inform the importance of cultural relics and suggest ways that they can help to protect the properties from danger. Relevant information embedded in textbooks for the education of younger children since little.

### Disaster response guidelines

Establish and implement global guidelines for responding to destructions of cultural relics to seek ways to recover from the damage instantly while receiving standardized assistance.

### Archive of cultural heritage

Promote the national use of the method of digitally scanning the relics and preserving them on a digital cultural heritage archive to ensure that it is preserved despite damage while providing enough information for researchers to attempt recovery or replication of the object.

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