

Forum: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3)

Issue: Protecting cultural heritage in conflict zones

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INTRODUCTION

From monuments to performances and natural sights, our cultural heritage is what we all have in common. It is the means for communities to come together, for us to have something to share. In our interconnected society, wanting to explore and learn about different cultures has become part of the status quo. Heritage wasn't always as we know it today, however. At first, culture was only what we could feel, see and count. As the times progressed though, cultural heritage is no longer considered a passive way to store information. It has become a "living" practice that involves people and their way of life.

Nowadays, with the numerous violent and long-term conflicts that have broken out in all corners of the world, heritage has become endangered. What happens when a temple is destroyed? What are the consequences of letting traditions die out? How much is lost alongside the lives of those that have fallen? Many questions surrounding the real impact of conflict zones on cultural heritage begin to arise the greater the issue becomes. Amidst the scrambling to save parts of civilizations lost to time, one thing is certain: it is no longer acceptable to let the tumultuous nature of war take away what can be lost forever.

From treaties redefining our perception of cultural heritage, to resolutions condemning its destruction, to new innovative solutions being developed to prevent such destructive actions from happening in the first place—the international community needs to step up now more than ever to find a way to stop the immense loss of heritage. Cultural heritage is not a luxury—it is a human right that needs to be protected in our ever-changing world.

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Tangible

"real and not imaginary; able to be shown, touched, or experienced"¹

Intangible

"impossible to touch, to describe exactly, or to give an exact value"²

Cultural identity

"an individual's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group"³

¹ "Tangible." Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus, www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tangible. Accessed 3 July 2025.

² "Intangible." Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus, www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/intangible. Accessed 3 July 2025.

³ "Cultural Identity." The Oxford Review, www.oxford-review.com/the-oxford-review-dei-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dictionary/cultural-identity-definition-and-explanation/. Accessed 3 July 2025.

Heritage

“something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor; tradition”⁴

Cultural cleansing

“the intentional removal or destruction of cultural markers associated with specific groups or heritage within a geographic area, often linked to violent conflicts or oppressive political regimes”⁵

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Categorization of cultural heritage

Tangible cultural heritage

Tangible elements of cultural heritage include physical objects, spaces and manifestations of beliefs and values of different religious or cultural groups⁶. These buildings, monuments, artifacts and sacred terrains serve as vessels holding physical memories of the meaningful practices said groups uphold or used to uphold. Some of the most well-known cultural heritage sights of this category are known as the “(New) Seven Wonders of the World”, which include monuments such as the Great Wall of China or the Taj Mahal in India⁷. Tangible culture is divided into two categories: movable and immovable. As the names suggest, movable tangible heritage mostly includes artifacts that can be moved from place to place while immovable tangible heritage involves all elements that remain in one specific place.

Intangible cultural heritage

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) refers to upholding and preserving skills, craftsmanship and knowledge⁸. Due to its nature of being passed down on a mouth-to-mouth basis, intangible heritage is always changing and thus many of its aspects cannot be considered authentic, in contrast to tangible heritage elements⁹. Be that as it may, this type of heritage holds great cultural significance when considering the identities of the different cultural groups that preach such spoken practices. Some examples of intangible heritage include performing arts, such as the Jamaican Reggae, rituals, such as the Brazilian Yaokwa, or culinary traditions, such as the Tajikistani Oshi Palav¹⁰.

⁴ "Definition of HERITAGE." Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Dictionary, 21 Nov. 2023, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/heritage.

⁵ "Cultural Cleansing | EBSCO." EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | www.ebsco.com,

www.ebsco.com/research-starters/ethnic-and-cultural-studies/cultural-cleansing. Accessed 3 July 2025.

⁶ Antczak, Oliver, et al. "Tangible & Intangible Heritage | Cambridge Heritage Research Centre." Cambridge Heritage Research Centre | www.heritage.arch.cam.ac.uk/people/research-themes/tangible-intangible. Accessed 3 July 2025.

⁷ Price, Cory. "What Are The 7 Wonders Of The World?" WorldAtlas, 6 Feb. 2023,

www.worldatlas.com/places/7-wonders-of-the-world.html. Accessed 3 July 2025.

⁸ Antczak, Oliver, et al. "Tangible & Intangible Heritage | Cambridge Heritage Research Centre." Cambridge Heritage Research Centre | www.heritage.arch.cam.ac.uk/people/research-themes/tangible-intangible. Accessed 3 July 2025.

⁹ UNESCO Committee. "Tangible and Intangible Heritage." Intangible Heritage Intangible Heritage - Culture Sector - UNESCO, www.ich.unesco.org/en/tangible-and-intangible-heritage-00097. Accessed 3 July 2025.

¹⁰ UNESCO Committee. "Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices." Intangible Heritage Intangible Heritage - Culture Sector - UNESCO, www.ich.unesco.org/en/lists. Accessed 3 July 2025.

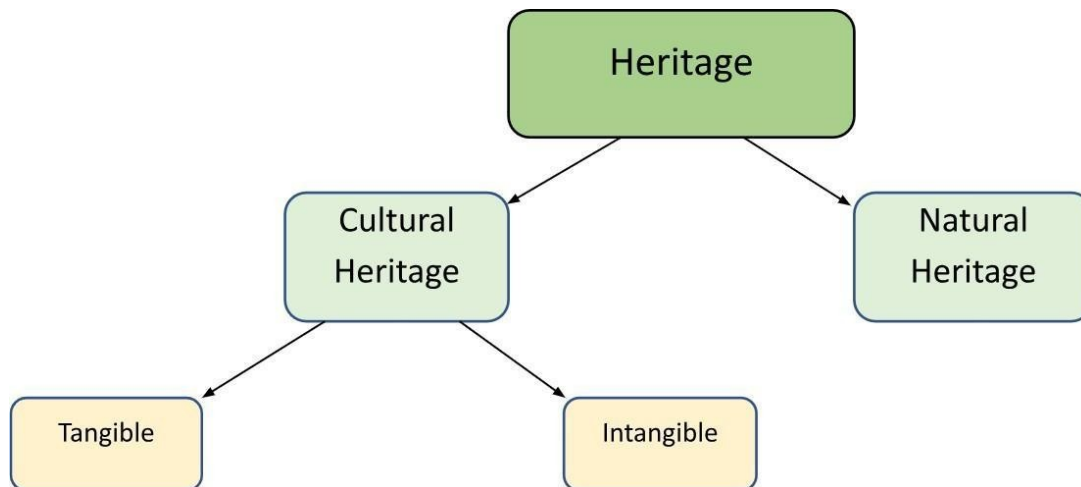


FIGURE 1: CATEGORIZATION OF HERITAGE¹¹

Heritage as a dynamic concept

For many years, our perception of what falls under the umbrella of cultural heritage was restricted to only involve certain aspects. Cultural heritage used to be a building of historical significance, a monument of an ancient tribe or a prehistoric weapon found in a sealed cave. The only criteria that were being applied to measure one of these “curiosities” value was either its age or rarity. However, in more recent times, cultural heritage has gained a new meaning. Nowadays, cultural heritage evolves alongside societies and communities.

1972 marks a landmark year for the evolution of cultural heritage. On the 16th of November, UNESCO created the World Heritage Convention, a treaty that is now responsible for the selection of UNESCO World Heritage sites. The World Heritage Convention’s operations, however, started off with a document that would completely alter the perception of heritage and shape the way we view it even until today, the “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage”¹². This way, many new means of protecting heritage, funding operations and creating international guidelines were set in stone. The redefinition of the term “cultural heritage” remains the most influential of them all nonetheless: Intangible and natural heritage were officially recognized as cultural aspects to be protected just like tangible ones. How does culture change though? What makes a story, a song, a dance evolve constantly?

¹¹ HALO x ILJ. "Cultural Heritage Engraved in Blood: A Human Right Beyond Time." Harvard Law Journals, 12 May 2025, www.journals.law.harvard.edu/ilj/2025/03/cultural-heritage-engraved-in-blood-a-human-right-beyond-time/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

¹² UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage." UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 16 Nov. 1972, www.whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

Intergenerational transmission

The nature of intangible cultural heritage is not static, nor can its evolution be contained. One of the main factors that reinforce this is the way intangible culture is passed down generation by generation. Word-of-mouth travels far and thus is unable to remain authentic. An example of this is the oral storytelling practice of folklore. Folklore tales—and the lessons they want to teach—have been known to undergo alterations due to different memories of the same story clashing, customs and traditions being different or a need to match the times. Whether it's the child-snatching sea creatures of the Inuit or a backward-footed Brazilian forest protector, these stories will live on to change and adapt as the times see fit.

Revival of forgotten practices

It is not uncommon for many parts of different heritage to die out or simply be forgotten in time. It is also not uncommon for communities involved with these cultural elements to come together and actively attempt to bring back lost traditions. Same as with folklore, these practices are almost exclusively revived through collective memories and the few records that have been left behind by ancestors. Despite this, it seems that the practice of reconstructing tradition has managed to bring communities closer while also protecting heritage from loss once anew.

Artistic reinterpretation

The performing arts have always played a major part in intangible cultural heritage. Traditions such as the Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre, African tribal dances and mariachi bands continue to thrive. Still, the performing arts have shifted and start to focus on issues of modern-day society. Artists take the liberty to add a contemporary touch to otherwise traditional performances, allowing them to express feelings that challenge the norm, for example.

Conflict and war

Just as our perception of everyday affairs begins to change during conflicts, so do our traditions and customs during long-term conflicts. Traditional songs become peace anthems, stories begin to contain messages of hope and performances begin calling for freedom, all to mitigate tensions and create hope. Oftentimes, these practices can be seen in refugee camps or between displaced populations, thus sustaining tradition and the people's livelihoods even far from home.

The impact of conflict zones on cultural heritage

When parties engage in armed conflict, cultural heritage sites fall under the risk of destruction or damage. Sites can be used as active targets, paving the way for further provocation and conflict escalation. As far as intangible cultural heritage is concerned, with the massive casualties armed conflicts bring about, the loss of valuable parts of this type of heritage is inevitable. Below, three examples explaining different instances of deliberate damage to cultural heritage.

Destruction and damage of Palmyra, Syria

It all began with the execution of one of the most devoted Palmyran archeologists by the ISIS terrorist organization. Khaled Al-Assad's death marked the beginning of Palmyra's destruction; a city caught between the fires of the Syrian Civil War in early 2013. By May 2015, ISIS had gone on to destroy the majority of the most significant Palmyrian archeological and cultural monuments. Not only were temples, such as the Temple of Bel and Temple of

Baalshamin, looted, bombed and destroyed, but ancient theaters were also used to hold executions that would later be posted online¹³.



FIGURE 2: BEL TEMPLE IN PALMYRA AFTER ISIS ATTACK¹⁴

The cultural “cleansing” of Yazidi Heritage, Sinjar Mountains

Between 2012 and 2016 ISIS launched targeted attacks on various cultural heritage sites in Iraq and Syria. Despite the remoteness of the region, the Yazidi population became the victims of a deliberate eradication attempt in the summer of 2014. The terrorist group was equipped with large amounts of explosives and tractors, which were used to destroy 68 temples and shrines. One of the most memorable and gruesome acts of ISIS during this cultural cleansing was the Sheikh Mand shrine incident: fourteen elderly villagers were executed inside the sacred space before the terrorist group proceeded to blow up the shrine¹⁵.

¹³ Kuntar, Salam A., and Steven Zucker. "Palmyra: the modern destruction of an ancient city." Smarthistory, 5 Jan. 2018, www.smarthistory.org/palmyra-arches/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

¹⁴ "The Destruction of Palmyra by ISIS." CBS News | Breaking News, Top Stories & Today's Latest Headlines, 5 Apr. 2016, www.cbsnews.com/pictures/palmyra-destruction-temple-bel-triumph-arch-isis-before-after/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

¹⁵ "The Yazidi Genocide." Counter Extremism Project, www.counterextremism.com/topics/yazidi-genocide. Accessed 16 July 2025.



FIGURE 3: SHEIKH MAND SHRINE BEFORE DESTRUCTION¹⁶

This “cultural genocide”¹⁷, was most likely driven by ISIS’ perception of “religious duty”, thus resulting in the attempt to erase the cultural identity of the Yazidi, while simultaneously severing their ties with their sacred and ancestral land. With hundreds of religiously and culturally significant sites purposefully demolished, a great deal of tangible Yazidi culture was lost, resulting in irreversible heritage loss. As far as the surviving Yazidi are concerned, the displacement that was caused by ISIS became an obstacle for the transmission of intangible culture.

The looting of the National Museum of Iraq

With the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the region of Baghdad has fallen into a state of panic and chaos. Amongst the chaos, one building holding thousands of years of Mesopotamian culture falls under the hands of looters taking advantage of the situation. The National Museum of Iraq, once home to thousands of artifacts from ancient Sumerian cities and Babylon became the target of a 36-hour-long looting operation between the 10th and 12th of April 2003. Although the museum staff, still present at the time of the operation, had managed to store approximately 8.000 artifacts safely, another 15.000 were stolen or destroyed¹⁸. Amongst them, the Warka Vase, a relic that is one of the first known narrative reliefs of human history. Archeologists all around the world refer to this action as “one of the worst acts of cultural vandalism in modern times”¹⁹.

¹⁶ "Sheikh Mand." Wikiwand - Wikipedia, and Beyond, Wikimedia Foundation, Inc, www.wikiwand.com/en/articles/Sheikh_Mand. Accessed 16 July 2025.

¹⁷ "Cultural Cleansing | EBSCO." EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | [Www.ebsco.com](http://www.ebsco.com), JIM, 2023, www.ebsco.com/research-starters/ethnic-and-cultural-studies/cultural-cleansing. Accessed 16 July 2025.

¹⁸ Mark, Joshua J. "The Looting of the Iraq Museum, Baghdad: The Lost Legacy of Ancient Mesopotamia." World History Encyclopedia, 2005, www.worldhistory.org/review/45/the-looting-of-the-iraq-museum-baghdad-the-lost-le/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

¹⁹ Prasad, Jocelyn. "Iraq Museum Looting: 15 Years on." The University of Sydney, 10 Apr. 2018, www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2018/04/10/iraq-museum-looting--15-years-on.html. Accessed 16 July 2025.



FIGURE 4: VANDALISM AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF IRAQ, 2003²⁰

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

France

During the 72nd Session of the United Nations (2017), the Security Council passed resolution 2347²¹ on the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict. France's collaboration with Italy led to the creation of a landmark resolution when it comes to the protection of cultural heritage. This resolution became the first ever to exclusively focus on protecting heritage in times of armed conflict. Aside from this, France has also been collaborating with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the series of Abu Dhabi Conferences. Specifically, in 2016 the two nations agreed upon the creation of "safe havens" to store cultural property in case of armed conflict breaking out²². Despite France's active involvement in resolving the issue, the government has been faced with heavy backlash numerous times once it was discovered that local mayors opt to demolish culturally significant buildings for urban development²³. This, in turn, has raised concerns about transparency with the public and international stakeholders on the matter.

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America is known to be the home of many global organizations that specialize in the protection, achieving and research of cultural heritage. These institutions and stakeholders are all actively involved in advocacy for the protection of heritage in armed conflict as well as support of missions for its protection. Some of these organizations include Getty Trust's Digital Archive and the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative. Moreover, the US's national authorities, specifically the FBI's art crime investigation sector, have close ties with both UNESCO and INTERPOL for the prosecution of traffickers and their networks. Despite these

²⁰ Archaeos, Inc, ww.archaeos.org/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

²¹ "Resolution 2347 (2017) /." United Nations Digital Library System, Mar. 2017, www.digitallibrary.un.org/record/862506?ln=en&v=pdf. Accessed 16 July 2025.

²² "Heritage in Danger: Conference of Abu Dhabi." Cultural Relations Platform, 2 Dec. 2016, www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/2016/12/02/heritage-in-danger-conference-of-abu-dhabi/. Accessed 16 July 2025. ²³ "Cultural Heritage Remains Highly Threatened." France ONU, Mission permanente de la France auprès des Nations unies à New York, www.onu.delegfrance.org/Cultural-heritage-remains-highly-threatened. Accessed 16 July 2025.

efforts, the US faces criticism, as the 2003 Iraq invasion left a staggering mark on not only destroyed and trafficked heritage, but also the perception of protecting cultural heritage.

Greece

For many years, Greece has been one of the most active UNESCO partners when it comes to knowledge exchanges surrounding the preservation and protection of cultural heritage. Numerous educational campaigns have been organized by Greek cultural committees and organizations, academic collaborations have become a staple for heritage research and effective, long-term policymaking on protecting heritage has become a primary goal for the nation. As of June 2025, seeing as the events and effect of the Israeli-Palestinian war have not worn out, Greece proposed a safeguarding action plan involving orthodox churches in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. However, this—alongside many more actions the country has taken over the years—does not solely focus on the protection of cultural heritage during armed conflict²⁴.

Syria

The Syrian Arab Republic's cultural heritage has been the target of many attacks. One of the most prominent was the 2012 to 2016 heritage attacks by the terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) where cultural sites were deliberately destroyed, turned into military bases or had their artifacts stolen and trafficked²⁵. This action triggered an international response, making governors, researchers and experts reconsider the importance of protecting cultural heritage. Aside from this, the consequences and aftermath of the conflict resulted in satellite monitoring systems to be used as a means of heritage protection for the first time.

These attacks on Syria were also the main reason that the nation became an avid supporter of Resolution 2347 on curbing artifact trafficking alongside the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict, pressing the UN Security Council to galvanize this landmark resolution.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

In the 1940s, the international community sought to create a commission that would dedicate its cause to the protection and preservation of culture, the progress of science and the right to education. There is one UN body that fits that description: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO has played a pivotal role when it comes to protecting cultural heritage, especially in armed conflict. Not only did the organization create and establish the first World Heritage Convention, but they also renewed the concept of heritage to include living traditions alongside other intangible and natural cultural elements. To this day, UNESCO protects more than six hundred cultural sites, artifacts and elements under the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)²⁶.

Europa Nostra

The "The European Voice of Civil Society committed to Cultural Heritage"²⁷, more commonly known as Europa Nostra is a European body in charge of coordinating advocacy efforts

²⁴ Admin. "Greek Ministry of Culture: Cooperation with Palestine for the Protection of Cultural Heritage." ProtoThema English, www.en.protothema.gr/2025/06/23/greek-ministry-of-culture-cooperation-with-palestine-for-the-protection-of-cultural-heritage/

²⁵ Sati, Anshika. "Indian Council of World Affairs." Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), 2 June 2025, www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls_id=13021&lid=7942. Accessed 16 July 2025.

²⁶ "Our History." UNESCO : Building Peace Through Education, Science and Culture, Communication and Information, 6 Mar. 2025, www.unesco.org/en/brief/history?hub=171411. Accessed 16 July 2025.

²⁷ "Organisation." Europa Nostra, 26 June 2024, www.europanostra.org/organisation/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

for the protection of cultural heritage. Ever since its founding on 29 November 1963, Europa Nostra has been the largest and “most representative” heritage preservation network for European countries. Operating in over 40 countries, the organization engages civilians in the cultural heritage protection movement. Aside from their efforts, Europa Nostra also established the European Heritage Awards for outstanding preservation initiatives in 1978²⁸.

Global Heritage Fund

Although the Global Heritage Fund primarily focuses on protecting cultural heritage in the developing world, the organization’s role in the broader heritage protection sector is undeniable. Their patented protection methodology “Preservation by Design” stems from community-based collaborations and efforts, as well as global partnerships to “enable long-term preservation and development of global heritage sites”²⁹. Moreover, the GHF has actively been using satellite technology as early warning and threat systems since 2010³⁰. Later that year, the Global Heritage Network, the digital manifestation of all relevant satellite data, was released and operates to this day.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
1942	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is created
14 th May 1954	Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict becomes the first treaty dedicated specifically for the protection of cultural heritage
1956	The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) is created
29 th November 1963	Europa Nostra is created

²⁸ "Awards." Europa Nostra, 14 June 2023, www.europanostra.org/our-work/awards/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

²⁹ Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage Sites in the Developing World. Global Heritage Fund, www.globalheritagefund.org/images/uploads/docs/GHFSavingOurVanishingHeritagev1.0singlepageview.pdf. Accessed 16 July 2025.

³⁰ Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage Sites in the Developing World. Global Heritage Fund, www.globalheritagefund.org/images/uploads/docs/GHFSavingOurVanishingHeritagev1.0singlepageview.pdf. Accessed 16 July 2025.

16th November 1972	World Heritage Convention becomes the first official document to recognize intangible and natural culture as heritage to be protected.
1978	European Heritage Awards are created
10 th – 12 th April 2003	The National Museum of Iraq looting takes place amidst the US invasion of the nation
17th October 2003	Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage is established after damage to cultural heritage in Iraq
2010	Global Heritage Fund launches the “Global Heritage Network”, a satellite system that monitors illegal activity in cultural sites
2012	ISIS heritage attacks begin in Syria
Summer 2014	A cultural cleansing takes place against the Yazidi minority of Iraq
May 2015	The city of Palmyra is destroyed by ISIS
2016	ISIS heritage attacks in Syria end
2-3 rd December 2016	Abu Dhabi Conference is held, resulting to the signing of the Common Declaration on Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage
24 th March 2017	UN Security Council Resolution 2347 is the first resolution on protecting cultural heritage
June 2025	Action Plan for the protection of orthodox tangible heritage (Greece) begins in the Gaza Strip and Weest Bank

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UNESCO System for Safeguarding Cultural Heritage

This convention highlights UNESCO’s strategic approach to the preservation and protection of cultural heritage under any circumstance. The focus of this convention lies in the

protection of intangible cultural heritage while also raising awareness to trigger international responses and fostering international collaboration³¹.

World Heritage Convention (1972)

This convention marks one of the biggest shifts in society's perception of cultural heritage. Up until that point, heritage only included the tangible, leaving out all intangible and natural aspects from the definition. The adoption of their first treaty stirred reactions from the international community and led to the surge of global cultural heritage appreciation.

UN Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017)

This resolution is considered a landmark since 2017, no other Security Council resolution enforced the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict. The resolution affirms all statements made under the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and condemns all unlawful attacks on cultural heritage³².

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH)

Following the upheaval of UN Security Council Resolution 2347, ALIPH was created. This project takes part in funding for over 400 restoration and preservation projects in Less Economically Developed Countries, such as Yemen, while also acting in the Middle East considering current affairs. While the alliance receives strong donor support for their projects all over the world, there are certain limitations to what the organization can do without the help of agencies actively involved in the sector, diplomatic restrictions hinder progress.

1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Event of Armed Conflict

1954 marks the year of the first convention exclusively dedicated to the protection of tangible cultural heritage in case of armed conflict. Although this treaty was successful at upholding this goal—having also established the first version of the Blue Shield emblem—the mechanisms and countermeasures proposed were not strong enough to limit illicit trade. Additionally, governments of countries in conflict feared that having the Blue Shield emblem embedded on their landmarks would make them targets for attacks.

International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM)

In 1956, during the 9th session of UNESCO's General Conference in New Delhi, the committee passed a proposal that urged for the creation of an "intergovernmental center"³³ for research on the preservation and restoration of tangible cultural heritage. In 1959 a deal was made with the Italian government, which allowed the ICCROM to base itself in Rome. Ever since then, the organization has been holding annual conferences and research collaborations

³¹ "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage." UNESCO : Building Peace Through Education, Science and Culture, Communication and Information, 18 Feb. 2024, www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-safeguarding-intangible-cultural-heritage. Accessed 16 July 2025.

³² "Resolution 2347 (2017) /." United Nations Digital Library System, Mar. 2017, www.digitallibrary.un.org/record/862506?ln=en&v=pdf. Accessed 16 July 2025.

³³ "History." ICCROM, 30 Aug. 2024, www.iccrom.org/about/overview/history. Accessed 16 July 2025.

together with the Italian task force Unite4Heritage. Be that as it may, communication between the stakeholders, namely UNESCO, ICCROM and Unite4Heritage—has been rough and is the core from which most issues arise.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

AI-powered risk mapping

One of the core issues that is being faced when it comes to the protection of tangible cultural heritage during periods of conflict is not being able to react to the damage in time. In more recent times, however, NGOs have started collaborating with programmers and scientists to develop AI-powered risk maps. The way these algorithms will work is by using data submitted from satellites, geospatial heritage inventories, such as Atlas³⁴, and conflict forecasting methods, such as the one developed by the World Food Program. This way a proactive strategy is undertaken, allowing for a preemptive protection strategy—this could include moving elements of tangible heritage to reinforcing the structure of monuments—to take place and thus lower the risk of losing cultural heritage. When discussing the production of such a solution, it is important to consider the factor of this being a method-in-the-making, meaning that no large-scale operation has ever tested these AI maps, leading to severe gaps in data needed to train the algorithms.

Strengthening Blue Shield Emblem

One of the outcomes of the 1954 Hague Convention was the Blue Shield Emblem³⁵. At first, it was a logo, a symbol that showed which cultural heritage sites were under the protection of the broader circle of UNESCO. Not long after, the Blue Shield grew in power and has been operating as a separate organization, while always keeping their close ties with the UNESCO body. Be that as it may, it is not uncommon for governors to opt to avoid the use of the emblem nowadays. This mostly stems from the fear that the emblem will serve as an invitation to attack the elements that carry it rather than a shield of protection against such attacks. A re-evaluation of the emblem's power could prove vital for it to sustain its influence as a cultural heritage protection mechanism. Thus, strengthening legislations and policies surrounding the Blue Shield could potentially increase its value once again, minimizing the risk of further attacks on cultural heritage sites. Keeping in mind that many have lost faith in the power of this mostly theoretical means of heritage protection is significant, nonetheless.

Archiving and documentation of intangible heritage

Conflict casualties are not something new, that is for sure. The impact that these have had on intangible culture has started to grow over the years of countless violent conflict outbreaks all over the world. With each loss of life, a part of this culture is lost as well. Seeing as intangible culture cannot be held in physical form, one of the ways it can be preserved is through detailed documentation, preferably digital to keep up with the trends of the modern age.

³⁴ "Cultural Heritage Inventory." ATLAS, www.atlas.co/gis-use-cases/cultural-heritage-inventory/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

³⁵ "The 1954 Hague Convention Blue Shield Emblems of Protection." Blue Shield International, 23 July 2024, www.theblueshield.org/download/the-1954-hague-convention-blue-shield-emblems-of-protection/. Accessed 16 July 2025.

Even though we cannot fully ensure the accuracy and authenticity of most elements, these archives will ensure that intangible culture is less likely to be lost.

Integrating intangible cultural heritage into education

Digital documentation is not the only way to archive intangible cultural heritage. Bearing in mind the nature of this type of heritage, integrating the sharing of stories, songs and other cultural aspects into the curriculum of schools all over the world could prove to not only be a means to preserve these elements for more generations to come, but also expand the knowledge and horizons of students, letting them discover passions they didn't know they had.

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