

## Research Report

**Assembly:** General Assembly 3

**Topic:** The question of protecting cultural heritage and art in conflict zones

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### Introduction

Art and culture represent and differentiate communities, it is what enables individuality and diversity. Culture and art are as well a way of preserving and remembering history and traditions. However in conflict zones, art and cultural property (sites, books, manuscripts, etc.) often get damaged or destroyed. As a result, these zones are depleted of their art and culture, which then gets forgotten. Nations must take action in order to protect their heritage.

### Definition of Key Terms

#### **Culture**

“the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time”

#### **Art**

“an activity through which people express particular ideas”

#### **Cultural Heritage**

“an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation”, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values”

#### **Tangible Cultural Heritage**

Perceptible cultural heritage including artefacts, monuments, landscapes, etc.

### ***Intangible Cultural Heritage***

Impalpable cultural heritage including values, traditions, oral history, etc.

### **Background Information**

Since the dawn of time, there have been conflicts and war, and they are often unavoidable. Unfortunately these conflicts come with destruction and/or damage. It has for long been perceived as normal when victors seize and/or destroy the enemy's property. Whilst other destroyed properties may, art and cultural heritage cannot be restored to its original form as it holds history and meaningful significance.

Criticism of cultural heritage destruction has been around for quite some time, since the 6th century BC China's Sun Tzu, and the 19th century Europe's Von Clausewitz have said that it is bad military practice. There have been many attempts to protect cultural heritage nationally as well, but it's not until after WW2 and the widespread destruction then that attempts of international protection have been made.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aims to "encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity." therefore it has put forth 10 different criteria to identify cultural properties that would be listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

However many cultural heritage sites still remain at risk nowadays, and actions taken mostly concern Tangible Cultural Heritage, with little awareness about the loss of Intangible Cultural Heritage (almost half of the world's languages are at risk of extinction).

### **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

#### ***UNESCO***

UNESCO has adopted and passed numerous conventions serving the preservation of Tangible Cultural Heritage, provided

#### ***UN Security Council***

The UN Security Council has passed resolutions which state that the damage of cultural sites must be avoided during conflict.

#### ***MINUSMA***

MINUSMA, the peacekeeping program in Mali was entrusted with protecting Cultural Heritage sites in case of attacks

### Greece

Greece alongside China initiated the formation of a coalition which aims to protect Cultural Heritage

### Timeline of Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of Event</b>
1850	During the civil war in China, rebel forces demolished the 80 meters tall Porcelain Tower of Nanjing filled with religious carvings, statues and images of Buddha, fearing that the enemy would use it as a lookout point.
1860	During the heist of the First Opium War, the British ordered the destruction of the Old Summer Palace which was once used as a base of operations for the Qing Dynasty Emperors
1951	UNESCO established a committee to draft the Hague Convention, 56 states participated in the drafting
2003	The National Library and Archive of Iraq which held 12 million items detailing the nation's history, was destroyed by Saddam Hussein's loyalists with the intention to abolish records of the Ba'athist regime.
2012	Members of a group linked to Al-Qaeda began targeting and destroying ancient shrines and mausoleums located on the edge of the Sahara desert.
2013	The Great Mosque of Aleppo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site was destroyed during an intense clash between government forces and Syrian rebels.

### Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The Hague Convention 1954
- The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
- The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage
- The Declaration concerning the International Destruction of Cultural Heritage
- The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions
- The UN Security Council's Resolution 2347

### Previous Attempts to solve the issue

UNESCO has continuously attempted to solve the issue, as it has established a committee to draft the 1954 Hague Convention which repeated and developed Lieber's Articles of War (1863). UNESCO has established and passed numerous conventions concerning the conservation of Cultural Heritage.

In Article 8 of the Brussels Declaration, it's stated that all destruction of Cultural Heritage During war should be punished, 25 years later, a peace conference was held in the Netherlands aiming to revise it.

In 2015, around 50 nations adopted the UN Security Council's Resolution 2199 prohibits trades in cultural property coming from Iraq and Syria.

"In February 2016, Italy signed an agreement with UNESCO to create the world's first emergency task force for culture, composed of civilian experts and the Italian carabinieri."

### Possible Solutions

In order to protect Cultural Heritage, it's possible to raise more awareness on the subject, encourage international cooperation and scout for communities at risk of Cultural Heritage loss and identify loss they risk in order to provide them with the necessary assistance..

For Intangible Cultural Heritage, awareness should be raised about the communities at risk and provide possible resources such as educational programs in order to preserve languages (which holds culture and tradition).

For Tangible Cultural Heritage, military forces should be trained to operate in protected areas, laws should be enforced and punishments established for those who intentionally seize, damage and/or destroy cultural sites.

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