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AIC and FAIC Position Paper

On Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage Sites

American Institute for Conservation | Foundation for Advancement in Conservation

In today's highly politicized global climate, armed conflicts are escalating and vulnerable heritage sites are increasingly being targeted for destruction, deliberately vandalized and looted, or otherwise exploited for coercive or strategic military purposes. This paper presents the position of the American Institute for Conservation (AIC) and its affiliate, the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation (FAIC), on the intentional destruction of cultural heritage sites.

In accordance with AIC's and FAIC's shared mission to preserve cultural heritage for future generations, we strongly oppose the practice of targeting any cultural heritage site for destruction, and we condemn the intentional destruction or damage of cultural heritage sites.

The Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage Sites

Cultural heritage is a human right. As the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UN) states, "damage to cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, of any people constitutes damage to the cultural heritage of humanity as a whole."

Multiple international resolutions have considered how heritage should be treated during armed conflict. The Brussels Declaration of 1874, in response to the Franco-Prussian War, specified that cultural properties and sites should not be seized or willfully damaged during military conflict. The Hague Convention of 1899 advised "the besieged" to notify the enemy in advance of the location of important cultural sites in order to ensure their protection. The Roerich Pact of 1935, in response to WWI, stated that "historic monuments, museums, scientific, artistic, educational and cultural institutions shall be considered as neutral and as such respected and protected by belligerents." In 1954, the

UN adopted the “Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict” in response to widespread destruction of heritage sites during WWII.

More recently, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2199 (2015), prohibiting trade in cultural property from Iraq and Syria, where archaeological sites and museums were being illegally vandalized and looted in the wake of military conflicts. Similarly, UN Resolution 2347 (2017) condemns the “unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, religious sites and artefacts, and the smuggling of cultural property by terrorist groups.”

These latter resolutions respond to global developments in which threats to cultural heritage sites increasingly evolve in more regional contexts and/or outside formally-declared and -defined military conflicts between nation states.

AIC and FAIC’s Position

Cultural heritage sites—including religious and historic structures, cemeteries, libraries, archives, museums, and archaeological sites—have both local and global significance. Deeply important to specific communities, they are important evidence of our shared human past as well as locales for learning, enjoyment, ceremony, and remembrance. AIC and FAIC share a mission to preserve such sites for future generations.

AIC’s Code of Ethics addresses this issue explicitly in articles III and VIII which state, respectively:

While recognizing the right of society to make appropriate and respectful use of cultural property, the conservation professional shall serve as an advocate for the preservation of cultural property.

The conservation professional shall recognize a responsibility for preventive conservation by endeavoring to limit damage or deterioration to cultural property...

Likewise, FAIC’s mission, “to save cultural heritage for future generations, protecting it from decay and destruction,” opposes the intentional destruction of cultural heritage sites.

In accordance with AIC’s and FAIC’s shared mission to preserve cultural heritage for future generations, we strongly oppose the practice of targeting any cultural heritage site for destruction, and we condemn the intentional destruction or damage of cultural heritage sites.

Who We Are

AIC and FAIC were formed to support cultural heritage preservation and empower conservation professionals. AIC is the largest membership association for conservators and allied professionals who preserve cultural heritage. Based in the United States, it represents more than 3,500 individuals in more than 40 countries around the world. It supports the preservation of cultural heritage by establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, providing educational opportunities, and fostering the exchange of knowledge among conservators, allied professionals, and the public. FAIC advances conservation-focused research and education, leads treatment and collection care initiatives, and deploys conservation expertise to areas with urgent needs. AIC and FAIC work in concert to promote the preservation and protection of cultural heritage worldwide.

References

The Brussels International Declaration of 1874 Concerning the Laws and Customs of War, On Military Authority over Hostile Territory (Article 8), Aug. 27, 1874.

Hague Convention of 1899, "Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land." (Article 27) ("On Means of Injuring the Enemy, Sieges, and Bombardments").

Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments (Roerich Pact) Apr. 15, 1935.

Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, May 14, 1954. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13637&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

United Nations Human Rights Council. "Cultural Rights and the Protection of Cultural Heritage," HRC/RES/33/20, Oct. 6, 2016.

United Nations Security Council, Resolutions 2199 (2015) and 2347 (2017).

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