

Blue Shield Statement on Iraq

June 17, 2014

PROTECTION OF IRAQI CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES

Blue Shield is appalled by the great suffering and loss of life in the current fighting in Iraq and expresses great concern about the safety of Iraq's invaluable cultural and historical heritage.

Blue Shield urges all armed combatants to observe the international laws that protect cultural heritage and to act responsibly, safeguarding the testimony of Iraq's unique history for the enrichment of future generations.

Iraq is home to some of the world's oldest and most significant archaeological and cultural sites. Iraq has three UNESCO World Heritage sites and twelve tentative World Heritage sites. Iraq's museums, particularly the national museum in Baghdad and the regional museum in Mosul, are repositories for countless irreplaceable artefacts that record this unique history.

In the event of international military action, Blue Shield calls on any participating countries to be mindful of obligations under the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols; the 1972 UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage; the additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions; and customary international law to avoid targeting cultural heritage sites and repositories and to minimize collateral damage to cultural heritage wherever possible.

Iraq ratified the 1954 Hague Convention and its First Protocol in 1967, thereby acknowledging and committing to the protection and preservation of cultural heritage in the case of armed conflict. Blue Shield urges the international community to help Iraq fulfil its obligations to this Convention and also urges all parties to the conflict to abide by Iraq's Antiquities Law, Law Number 55 of 2002.

Blue Shield is concerned that archaeological and cultural objects may be removed from museums, libraries, archives, and archaeological sites and placed on the illegal international art market. The actions of all governments in preserving this heritage should be consistent with the terms and spirit of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, of which there are 127 States Parties. Blue Shield implores auction houses and other art outlets to ensure that no illegally exported material is sold.

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Blue Shield is the protective emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention, the basic international treaty formulating rules to protect cultural heritage during armed conflict. The Blue Shield network consists of organizations dealing with museums, archives, libraries, monuments and sites.

The Blue Shield's mission is to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict, natural and human-made disasters. For this reason, it places the expertise and network of its member organisations at the disposal of colleagues working in Iraq to support their actions in protecting the country's heritage, and if necessary, in assessing subsequent recovery, restoration, and repair measures.

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