



Forum: COMUN 2020

Issue: The rebuilding of damaged cultural heritage sites in war zones

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Introduction

Cultural heritage has recently fallen under threat of destruction and damage throughout a variety of war zones especially within the middle east inside countries such as Syria. This can lead to the complete erosion of cultural heritage in the form of buildings, townscapes, and archaeological remains. As countries battle for land, power, and political control the heritage of countries, religions, and small ethnic groups are hurt in the process, by a variety of small militant groups, and armies. Under the supervision of UNESCO which was created in 1972, cultural heritage has been overseen and safeguarded by UNESCO in multiple situations. A variety of nations are becoming increasingly aware of the effect of damaged and destroyed cultural heritage sites in war zones which is being recognized and supported by the UN, and a variety of member states.

Leaders of communities and groups around Syria are abusing their power by destroying or altering cultural sites to remove evidence of different cultures, religions, or past ruling groups. Cultural heritage is something that needs protecting and supervising by governments and NGOs which is the reason as to why we will discuss this in COMUN 2020.

Definition of Key Terms

UNESCO

A body of the UN which focuses on the social and economical aspects of most issues focusing on human rights, cultural heritage, education, medical care, etc.

Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is an expression either physical and symbolic representing the way a group or civilization developed in the past.



Palmyra

Palmyra is a major cultural heritage site with many artifacts and monuments which are very significant for Syria and many groups living nearby.

The Bamiyan Valley

The Bamiyan Valley is a major cultural heritage site with many artifacts and monuments which are very significant for Afghanistan and many groups living nearby.

General Overview

Syria

The Syrian crisis which turned into an armed crisis at the end of 2011 has led to more cultural heritage being damaged than any other war in the past 40 years. With the majority of the danger being in “The World Heritage Site of Palmyra”. Palmyra has been listed as a world heritage site since 1980 and has been labelled a heritage site in danger from 2013. A temple inside of Palmyra was blown up by jihadists in September 2015 dating back to 32BC, and attempts to restore or reconstruct what has been damaged is currently on its way. The civil war is still raging on today with all sides not specifically caring about the cultural heritage at hand, but mainly on winning. Jihadist groups have destroyed museums and artefacts to make a point that they will continue in the future and will destroy the culture and presence of anyone who threatens them, making the situation in Palmyra more worrying than ever. Palmyra is still accessible today as Jihadist groups have not destroyed the remains of the once glorious city. Despite this, Palmyra has still sustained several types of damage being looting, collateral damage, or army occupation.

There have been many attempts to protect the cultural heritage of Syria, and it is still an urgent matter today whether due to a violation of human rights or due to its historical importance. Both the UN and UNESCO have urged all involved parties to stop the military warfare inside and around heritage sites and protect what is left of their heritage, as it is vital for their religions and cultures to thrive and prosper.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan had also been active in a war for more than 15 years which has led to cultural heritage sites being in grave danger. The Bamiyan valley of Afghanistan had suffered from a lot of damage and destruction as military operations would take place in the valley, putting



the artefacts and cultural heritage under danger of things such as bullets, explosive, and accidental damages. The heritage inside the valley represents not just the culture of Afghanistan and the groups which once lived there but also the culture of multiple surrounding groups and countries, and even countries such as India, and China where cultural heritage and values are sacred and well looked after and cared for. The valley is the most famous and monumental sign of Buddhism from the past, due to their symbolic values, which was important when the monuments were deliberately destroyed in 2001.

UNESCO Convention on protecting Cultural heritage

In 1972 UNESCO adopted a new convention aimed at protecting Cultural heritage especially in places of danger such as Syria and Afghanistan. This convention aimed to rebuild and further protect heritage from all countries and did so using its “strategic objective” of Credibility, Conservation, Capacity Building, Communication, and Communities. The convention defines global cultural and natural heritage aims to protect both of these in all cases where it can. The creation of the world heritage list was essential for this convention as it decides on whether cultural heritage is worthy of saving. The convention also states how the world heritage fund spends its money and how it functions. The convention also states what member states need to do in order to fulfill their obligations. Despite this, the convention may lack detail which ensures it works efficiently and effectively in the modern age.

Other Cultural Heritage Sites

Although Afghanistan and Syria are two of the most significant cultural heritage sites which have been and still are in danger over the past few decades, there are still a variety of other countries and regions which have a cultural heritage which in the future may be damaged or displaced during a war. This demonstrates the need for a global agreement between all member states, not just an agreement focusing on the main issues today.

Major Parties Involved

Syria

Syria is currently part of a civil war placing all its cultural heritage sites in danger, something that the UN and all member states see as being very important, something that must be fixed, making Syria an important part of this debate.

Afghanistan



Afghanistan has suffered a lot in the past and has multiple heritage sites which may be unprotected meaning that Afghanistan's cultural heritage and the heritage of many others may be at risk, something which needs to be dealt with.

UK

The UK has acted on the issue of cultural heritage damage and restoration in the past and has close ties with all countries, meaning that it has a lot of power during this debate, and should use its economic and military ties to its advantage.

China

China has a lot of cultural heritage within the member states at risk meaning that they are an important part of the issue and must stay adamant to protect their cultural heritage and ensure its comes to no harm.

Timeline of Events

November 4th 1946	The implementation of UNESCO
November 16th 1972	A convention regarding world cultural and natural heritage was adopted by UNESCO
March, 2001	Destruction of the largest Buddhist statues in Bamiyan Valley
March 15th, 2011	The start of the civil war which spiked the resulting damage to many sites of cultural heritage
August 12th 2014	UNESCO strengthens attempts to protect cultural heritage
August 31st, 2015	Confirmed destruction of a major temple within Palmyra

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Many member states have attempted to solve this worldwide problem, especially the UK, and Italy which have both attempted to solve the problems in Syria on multiple occasions. To solve the conflict multiple member states have attempted to retrieve any damaged cultural heritage and fix it, then return in accordingly. There have also been attempts from the UN to



solve the problem at hand speaking to countries such as Syria and urging them to understand the stakes at hand, yet many of the speeches and recommendations have not followed through as seen in Syria, where cultural heritage is still at risk, and being damaged today.

Possible solutions

The obvious step forward would be to stop any future damage to cultural heritage sites and to ensure there is no looting in the future using whichever means necessary. Although the reconstruction of the sites which have already been damaged and the restoration of any damage artefacts is also important as thousands of artefacts which are damaged have been retrieved, and are all important to a specific cultures traditions, heritage, etc. The reconstruction of large monuments may not always be necessary but as a priority must be set in place, important cultural artefacts or heritage sites which can be ensured in the future should be restored and reconstructed as soon as possible. Although countries currently participating in war do not always have the facilities to protect cultural heritage on both sides, as seen in the past, other MDC's who have a strong military and economic stability will be able to assist struggling countries and cultures on behalf of the countries themselves, or on behalf of the UN.

A global agreement across all UN member states such as the Global Human Rights Convention would also help to ensure cultural heritage sites were not destroyed or damaged. This could be watched over and supervised by a variety of NGO's or by UN peacekeepers, although this would need to take into consideration a member states sovereignty ensuring that the peacekeepers or NGO investigators/supervisors did not affect with the countries ability to run itself.

Useful documents

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

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