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Convention for the fight
against the illicit trafficking
of cultural property

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**Fifth Session of the Subsidiary Committee of the Meeting of States Parties to the
Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and
Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property
(UNESCO, Paris, 1970)**

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Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda: UNESCO's Actions in Conflict Zones

This information document summarizes the main points of discussion of the presentations on UNESCO's Actions in Conflict Zones.

I. Introduction

1. In addition to its follow-up activities on the relevant UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions, the Secretariat is implementing numerous emergency actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Syria and Yemen. Recent conflicts and the rapid development and expansion of the art market in the region have created a high demand for cultural objects, and increased the prevalence of illegal trafficking of cultural artifacts from these countries that require specific responses to efficiently protect their cultural property against illicit trafficking.
2. Initiatives to curb illicit trafficking of cultural property were formalized in the *Strategy for the Reinforcement of UNESCO's Actions for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of an Armed Conflict*¹, adopted at the 38th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2015.

II. Actions in Iraq

3. With the onset of the armed conflict in March 2003, the National Museum of Iraq lost many artefacts while various archaeological sites were illegally excavated. Pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1483 (2003), Member States are to take appropriate steps to facilitate the safe return of Iraqi cultural property and to prohibit trade in or transfer of such items. While around 5,000 objects out of an estimated of 15,000 have been retrieved, through the efforts of the Iraqi government and the cooperation of the international community, the illicit trade of cultural property still remains a major challenge.
4. With the fall of Mosul to ISIL/Daesh in June 2014, extensive and deliberate damage to cultural heritage, as well as an unidentified level of looting and illicit trafficking of cultural objects have taken place all over the country. UNSC Resolution 2199 (2015) imposes an import ban and worldwide moratorium in trading of Iraqi cultural property.
5. To respond to prevailing challenges, UNESCO and its partners have been cooperating closely for the implementation of the above-mentioned resolutions. They are also actively engaged in capacity-building and awareness-raising activities, including the reinforcement of due diligence of importing countries on proof of provenance that still need to be developed and strengthened.

III. Actions in Syria

6. The destruction of Syrian cultural heritage is having a dramatic effect on the region's heritage, including monuments, places of worship and archive collections. Out of 1,200 destructed archaeological sites analyzed in Syria, at least 25% of them were impacted by looting. UNESCO cooperates with governments and international organizations such as INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization, as well as museums and auction houses to stop illicit trafficking of Syrian cultural property.
7. In the framework of the "Emergency Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage" project funded by the European Union, UNESCO implements capacity-building initiatives such as the training organised from 10 to 14 November 2014 in Beirut, addressed to museum and cultural heritage legislation experts, police and customs officers, from Syria and neighbouring countries: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey; and the three-day event on the

¹ https://en.unesco.org/system/files/unesco_clt_strategy_en.pdf

fight against illicit trafficking and restitution of cultural property in Syria², held from 30 November to 2 December 2015 in Beirut, where the participants were trained on stakeholders' engagement and cooperation, international legal framework, and preventive measures to facilitate return and restitution of cultural objects. Moreover, an animation clip on prevention of illicit trafficking of Syrian cultural property was produced to raise awareness on facts and numbers about looting of cultural artefacts and to inform potential buyers on the criminal aspects. The clip will be launched during the Fourth Meeting of State Parties, and is available in English and Arabic.

8. In addition, UNESCO actively follows up and assesses the implementation of UNSC 2199 (2015) along with partners. To this aim, UNESCO cooperated with INTERPOL to organize a two-day meeting on preventing the circulation and sale of illegally exported Iraqi and Syrian artefacts on the international market and their restitution. The meeting was held at the UNESCO Office in Beirut on 14 and 15 December 2016, with the support of the Norwegian Embassy.

IV. Actions in Mali

9. Mali is gradually recovering from violence and political unrest caused by the conflict in 2012. The country is engaging in resilience and reconstruction and the historic decision of the International Criminal Court - sentencing Al-Faqi Al-Mahdi for the war crime of deliberate destruction of cultural heritage in the UNESCO's World Heritage site of Timbuktu in 2012 – is a major step for strengthening international justice and towards peace and reconciliation in Mali. Criminal and justice responses for the protection of cultural heritage has become a major security issue, which cannot be delinked from the protection of human lives.
10. In response, UNESCO continues to organize training and awareness-raising activities in order to fight the looting of West African cultural heritage in particular. In order for the UNESCO Office in Bamako to strengthen the capacities of customs, police and gendarmerie, a research study to be shared with all relevant national stakeholders was commissioned with the view to shed light on prevention of illicit trafficking of cultural objects. Furthermore, from 14 to 15 March 2017, UNESCO organized in Bamako the international conference on the challenges and issues related to the protection of cultural heritage in conflict zones, during which the rehabilitation programme of the damaged cultural heritage in Northern Mali was discussed, including issues of illicit trafficking.

V. Actions in Yemen

11. UNESCO has intensified and conducted a range of activities to fight against illicit trade of antiquities in Yemen, which focus on four key areas: capacity-building for the prevention of illicit trafficking; awareness-raising and advocacy; inventories of Museum Collections; and tracking of stolen artefacts.
12. The Doha Office is undertaking training activities for Yemeni officials on a mobile rapid assessment tool applicable to movable and immovable cultural heritage. This tool is used for inventory of movable cultural objects and the prevention of their illicit trafficking following the destruction of the Dhamar Museum. So far, approximately 1000 objects have been inventoried.

² http://www.unesco.org/new/en/beirut/single-view/news/workshop_on_the_fight_against_illicit_trafficking_of_cultural_property_and_its_restitution_in_syria#.V3l0gdHVzGg

13. From 24 to 30 April 2016, an international campaign entitled “Yemeni Heritage Week - Museums United for Yemen” was organized in cooperation with 10 leading museums from all over the world, to draw the general public’s attention on the richness of the Yemeni cultural heritage, at risk due to the ongoing conflict.

VI. Actions in Libya

14. Since 2014, the increasing number of attacks against cultural sites in Libya and the rise of ISIL/Daesh pose severe threats to the Libyan cultural heritage. UNESCO’s approach in Libya falls under four main lines: build and maintain a common approach to emergency measures within the divided national institutions; increase engagement with local communities, including security forces and cultural organizations; introduce a cultural approach in international humanitarian responses, in cooperation with UN Support Mission in Libya; and strengthen vigilance across the region to prevent illicit trafficking of Libyan cultural property, in coordination with INTERPOL, the World Custom Organization and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.
15. UNESCO is currently implementing a project on urgent interventions to secure most threatened museums and warehouses in Libya (Tripoli, Sabratha, Leptis Magna and Cyrene). This activity falls within the priority actions identified in the Sectorial Action Plan resulted from the *International Expert Meeting on Safeguarding Libyan Cultural Heritage*, held in Tunis on 9-11 May 2016 and organized by UNESCO and ICCROM in close cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Libya (DoA). The project aims at urgently increasing the *in-situ* protection at threatened museums and warehouses in Libya, with a view to enable DoA to start transferring and securing collections, and to reinforce risk management and first-aid measures for collections in museums and deposits.

VII. Actions in Afghanistan

16. During decades of conflict in Afghanistan, looting was rampant and the most infamous and well-documented example of illicit trafficking is the National Museum of Afghanistan, where it is estimated that around 70% of the museum collection present in 1991 was unaccounted for and presumed stolen. This included such rare pieces as the ivory carvings from Bagram and a collection of some 30,000 coins from various periods in antiquity, amongst other acquisitions important in the history of world art and archaeology.
17. Notwithstanding the fall of the Taliban in 2001, they still control one third of the country and illicit trafficking of antiquities remains a major source of terrorist organizations. On the other hand, illegal excavations are a source of income for poor communities across the country.
18. UNESCO and its partners’ main activities in Afghanistan focus on information sharing and institutional capacity building to prevent illicit trafficking of antiquities and promote the return of illegally stolen objects. Accordingly, following an agreement between UNESCO and the Afghan Customs Department (ACD), UNESCO supported ACD both financially and technically on the training “Prevention of illicit trafficking of antiquities and cultural objects” for customs officers. The “train the trainer” programme organized by UNESCO from 2013 to 2015 lasted six weeks per year. As a result, six trained instructors of the Afghan National Customs Academy (ANCA) trained 750 customs officers from across the country. ANCA will continue this training throughout 2016-2017. Moreover, posters and leaflets of the Red List of Afghanistan Antiquities in Dari and Pashto were disseminated and the subject of “illicit traffic of antiquities” was officially added to the mandatory ANCA curriculum.