

CULTURE AND HERITAGE AT WAR CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS Barcelona, October 27, 2022

Context

The first half of the twentieth century in Europe was characterized by the two great world wars, their effects on the population and a significant destruction of cultural heritage. This context influenced the personal and artistic trajectory of Pablo Casals, who understood that music could not remain on the margins of the problems of people and life.

The constitution of the United Nations and multilateralism opened its doors to dialogue between countries to build a better future. The [1954 UNESCO Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict](#) and its protocols opened a new stage by considering cultural heritage as a property of humanity.

Despite this benchmark in international law, unfortunately, some violations stand out, such as in the Balkan conflict (1991), the Buddhas of Bāmiyān (2001), the Iraq war (2003) or the Syrian civil war (2011), among other infractions. These events have mobilized global awareness of the need for effective heritage protection in the case of war conflicts. Led by UNESCO, which at the 2015 Conference reinforced its action in this field with a new strategy of international cooperation between states, to prevent material destruction and the denunciation of illegitimate trafficking of works of art.

The [United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights](#) (2016), in her report relates the intentional destruction of cultural heritage as an act of violation of cultural rights "the right to access and enjoyment of cultural heritage is part of international human rights law" because of the significance for individuals and groups.

Cultural heritage acquires great importance in the present for its role in human development, also as a heritage of the past from where we come from and who we are, but also with regard to the commitment to the future for new generations. With a projection both locally - nationally and internationally as "cultural heritage of all humanity".

The various destructions that wars and armed conflicts entail affect and alter the cultural life of individuals and communities and, therefore, their tangible and intangible cultural heritage, considered in a holistic approach. In many conflicts, acts of deliberate destruction of the cultural heritage and its reclamation and dissemination become a form of "cultural warfare" against the population, in many cases resulting in acts of "cultural cleansing".

The existence of an international regulatory framework was, at the time, a great step forward and a planetary awareness of this form of destruction. In the same way, it is evident that the mere existence of the norm is not enough and it is necessary to devote much effort to raising awareness of global citizenship in this field. Mainly in the education of children and youth, the great victims of wars and their effects, in order to contribute to building a global awareness of the integral protection of heritage as a wealth of humanity.

Final reflections of the conference

The conference held on October 27, 2022, sought to highlight the importance of the defence of human and cultural rights in current armed conflicts and to bring to light the conventions, declarations and international law related to the deliberate destruction of culture as a weapon of war. Throughout the presentations and discussions, various contributions to be considered were expressed.

We stress the importance of joint action through multilateral bodies, such as UNESCO and others, but we also call for greater involvement of global civil society in defence of universal values and international solidarity in the protection of cultural diversity and different heritages.

We consider that the [1954 Convention](#) and other standards provide an essential legal framework, but require other complementary strategies in the field of public awareness to make these realities known and promote certain educational actions. At the same time, we note that the importance of the rule does not change society and it is necessary to promote greater awareness of society in this field.

Throughout the conference, the need to relate the intentional destruction of heritage to cultural rights was raised, in accordance with the report of the United Nations expert. We must bear in mind that war also destroys the cultural life of the population who cannot exercise their right to participate freely. In some cases, conflict can descend into a kind of cultural cleansing, attempting to deny the values of the other with little respect for diversity.

The defence of cultural rights and the cultural dimension of human rights as a whole, in these war contexts, is considered a necessary approach, as well as the relationship with the 2030 Agenda, which in its SDG 16 proposes to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, and access to justice for all.

The different interventions proposed a vision of integral cultural heritage, understood as the conjunction of immovable, intangible and natural heritage, according to the latest definitions, and respect for cultural diversity. This perspective recognizes that the cultural destruction of war goes beyond historic buildings and affects the proper functioning of facilities, events, festivals and cultural traditions and the organization of collective cultural life.

In view of the situation we are living, in Ukraine, but also in other places, it is considered essential to give visibility to the destruction of cultural heritage by trying to get the media to echo these aspects that are often hidden.

The reality of current conflicts presents new problems and difficulties, calling for the strengthening of instruments and mechanisms for the protection, prevention and fight against the destruction of cultural heritage and the trafficking of works of art.

We propose that the different cultural agents and actors mobilize for the dissemination and commitment to this cause and respect for other cultures. And that the different cultural spheres and expressive languages contribute with their visions and representations of this global conflict.

Encourage international solidarity for the cultural reconstruction of countries that have suffered war or conflict through international development cooperation agencies. Study the possibility of creating specific aid funds (such as humanitarian aid) for emergency and prevention purposes and for the protection of personnel defending the heritage.

Maintain constant observation of the realities in which these rights are violated in order to communicate them in general and to complement media reports with data on the impact of wars on culture.

In the same way, we should encourage the collection of information and documentation on the effects of the war on cultural heritage as an exercise of memory and for future processes.

At present, the war in Ukraine shows us the lack of respect for cultural heritage and infrastructures, which forces us to reflect on the subject and encourage greater involvement of cultural agents in the protection of the world's heritage as a sign of commitment to shared values.

Barcelona, October 2022

