UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage

17 October 2003

The General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization meeting in Paris at its thirty-second session in 2003,

**Recalling** the tragic destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan that affected the international community as a whole,

**Expressing** serious concern about the growing number of acts of intentional destruction of cultural heritage,

**Referring** to Article I(2)(c) of the Constitution of UNESCO that entrusts UNESCO with the task of maintaining, increasing and diffusing knowledge by “assuring the conservation and protection of the world’s inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science, and recommending to the nations concerned the necessary international conventions”,

**Recalling** the principles of all UNESCO’s conventions, recommendations, declarations and charters for the protection of cultural heritage,

**Mindful** that cultural heritage is an important component of the cultural identity of communities, groups and individuals, and of social cohesion, so that its intentional destruction may have adverse consequences on human dignity and human rights,

**Reiterating** one of the fundamental principles of the Preamble of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict providing that “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world”,

**Recalling** the principles concerning the protection of cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict established in the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions and, in particular, in Articles 27 and 56 of the Regulations of the 1907 Fourth Hague Convention, as well as other subsequent agreements,

**Mindful** of the development of rules of customary international law as also affirmed by the relevant case-law, related to the protection of cultural heritage in peacetime as well as in the event of armed conflict,

**Also recalling** Articles 8(2)(b)(ix) and 8(2)(e)(iv) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and, as appropriate, Article 3(d) of the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, related to the intentional destruction of cultural heritage,

**Reaffirming** that issues not fully covered by the present Declaration and other international instruments concerning cultural heritage will continue to be governed by the principles of international law, the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience,

Adopts and solemnly proclaims the present Declaration:

1 – Recognition of the importance of cultural heritage

The international community recognizes the importance of the protection of cultural heritage and reaffirms its commitment to fight against its intentional...
destruction in any form so that such cultural heritage may be transmitted to
the succeeding generations.

II – Scope

1. The present Declaration addresses intentional destruction of cultural
heritage including cultural heritage linked to a natural site.

2. For the purposes of this Declaration “intentional destruction” means an
act intended to destroy in whole or in part cultural heritage, thus
compromising its integrity, in a manner which constitutes a violation of
international law or an unjustifiable offence to the principles of humanity
and dictates of public conscience, in the latter case in so far as such acts are
not already governed by fundamental principles of international law.

III – Measures to combat intentional destruction of cultural heritage

1. States should take all appropriate measures to prevent, avoid, stop and
suppress acts of intentional destruction of cultural heritage, wherever such
heritage is located.

2. States should adopt the appropriate legislative, administrative, educational
and technical measures, within the framework of their economic resources,
to protect cultural heritage and should revise them periodically with a view
to adapting them to the evolution of national and international cultural
heritage protection standards.

3. States should endeavour, by all appropriate means, to ensure respect for
cultural heritage in society, particularly through educational, awareness-
raising and information programmes.

4. States should:

   (a) become parties to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of
       Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two 1954 and 1999
       Protocols and the Additional Protocols I and II to the four 1949 Geneva
       Conventions, if they have not yet done so;

   (b) promote the elaboration and the adoption of legal instruments providing
       a higher standard of protection of cultural heritage, and

   (c) promote a coordinated application of existing and future instruments
       relevant to the protection of cultural heritage.

IV – Protection of cultural heritage when conducting peacetime
activities

When conducting peacetime activities, States should take all appropriate
measures to conduct them in such a manner as to protect cultural heritage
and, in particular, in conformity with the principles and objectives of the
1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural
Heritage, of the 1956 Recommendation on International Principles
Applicable to Archaeological Excavations, the 1968 Recommendation
concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or
Private Works, the 1972 Recommendation concerning the Protection, at
National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 1976
Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of
Historic Areas.

V – Protection of cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict,
including the case of occupation

When involved in an armed conflict, be it of an international or non-
international character, including the case of occupation, States should take
all appropriate measures to conduct their activities in such a manner as to
protect cultural heritage, in conformity with customary international law and
the principles and objectives of international agreements and UNESCO
recommendations concerning the protection of such heritage during
hostilities.

VI – State responsibility

A State that intentionally destroys or intentionally fails to take appropriate
measures to prohibit, prevent, stop, and punish any intentional destruction of
cultural heritage of great importance for humanity, whether or not it is
inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO or another international
organization, bears the responsibility for such destruction, to the extent
provided for by international law.

VII – Individual criminal responsibility
States should take all appropriate measures, in accordance with international law, to establish jurisdiction over, and provide effective criminal sanctions against, those persons who commit, or order to be committed, acts of intentional destruction of cultural heritage of great importance for humanity, whether or not it is inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO or another international organization.

VIII – Cooperation for the protection of cultural heritage

1. States should cooperate with each other and with UNESCO to protect cultural heritage from intentional destruction. Such cooperation should entail at least:

(i) provision and exchange of information regarding circumstances entailing the risk of intentional destruction of cultural heritage;

(ii) consultation in the event of actual or impending destruction of cultural heritage;

(iii) consideration of assistance to States, as requested by them, in the promotion of educational programmes, awareness-raising and capacity-building for the prevention and repression of any intentional destruction of cultural heritage;

(iv) judicial and administrative assistance, as requested by interested States, in the repression of any intentional destruction of cultural heritage.

2. For the purposes of more comprehensive protection, each State is encouraged to take all appropriate measures, in accordance with international law, to cooperate with other States concerned with a view to establishing jurisdiction over, and providing effective criminal sanctions against, those persons who have committed or have ordered to be committed acts referred to above (VII – Individual criminal responsibility) and who are found present on its territory, regardless of their nationality and the place where such act occurred.

IX – Human rights and international humanitarian law

In applying this Declaration, States recognize the need to respect international rules related to the criminalization of gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular, when intentional destruction of cultural heritage is linked to those violations.

X – Public awareness

States should take all appropriate measures to ensure the widest possible dissemination of this Declaration to the general public and to target groups, inter alia, by organizing public awareness-raising campaigns.