



## **The Seoul Declaration on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Emergency Situations**

The First International Conference of the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), held at the National Museum of Korea in Seoul, Republic of Korea, from 8 to 10 December 2011, discussed the paramount importance of protecting cultural heritage in emergency situations. The Conference brought together professionals concerned with this issue, encompassing a wide range of expertise – including heritage, military, meteorological, humanitarian assistance and information technology.

*Taking into account* the views expressed during the Conference entitled *Protecting Cultural Heritage in Times of Changes: Emergency Preparedness and Response*,

*And recalling* the leading role of the International Committee of the Blue Shield and its four founding heritage organisations (ICA, ICOM, ICOMOS and IFLA, later joined by CCAAA) in the protection of the world's cultural heritage in case of natural and human-made disasters, as officially recognised by the Diplomatic Conference of States Parties who adopted the Second Protocol of The 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict,

### **The International Committee of the Blue Shield adopts the following declaration:**

Cultural heritage, through its multiple forms (movable, non-movable and intangible), is an important expression of human creativity and a witness of the world's history. However, it faces many threats that are exacerbated by an increasing frequency and intensity of disasters, and its full range of collateral effects.

Considering that the protection of cultural heritage is recognised in several leading Conventions and other international instruments to be a shared responsibility of all of humanity, the Blue Shield network's priority is to encourage the use of all resources available to raise the awareness of both the international community and the civil society, in affected and non-affected countries, on the damage to cultural heritage induced by environmental degradation and climate change, and by the development and rising complexity of armed conflicts, as well as political and economic crises.

Being aware of the role of international legislation and its related humanitarian principles in the regulation of armed conflict and the protection of cultural heritage, all concerned institutions and organisations should join their efforts in advocating the enhancement, ratification and effective application of relevant legal instruments and policies at both national and international levels.

As previously stated in its Radenci (Slovenia) Declaration of November 1998, the Blue Shield community should seek to mobilise and further develop cross-sectorial research initiatives and collaborative professional frameworks, permitting 1) the development of training activities in emergency preparedness and response for heritage institutions, as well as all concerned professionals, with priority given to those areas which are most at-risk, and 2) the improvement of monitoring methods, using information technologies and geographic information systems, to better assess the extent of damage as disasters unfold, and, after such events, to anticipate their occurrence in high risk areas; thus permitting the gathering of information allowing for the drafting of comprehensive reports addressed to international organisations, governments and civil society.

Given the challenges implied by such objectives, and the necessity for the international heritage community to share knowledge and practices with other professional bodies, it has been proven that the protection and recovery of cultural heritage in emergency situations can in most cases be best achieved through a joint mobilisation of intellectual, technical, logistical and financial resources, before, during and after a disaster.

To that end, the Blue Shield will explore 1) the feasibility of establishing a fund for immediate cultural relief efforts in emergency situations, 2) the procedures needed to adequately plan and prepare the response to cultural emergencies throughout the world, and 3) the viability of forming partnerships with cultural and other relief organisations to improve operational on-the-ground responses to cultural crises wherever they may occur.

Considering the mandates of its constituent organisations and their work in acknowledging the current context, evaluating the future needs and priorities, and forecasting the requested solutions for the protection of cultural heritage during emergency situations, the Blue Shield, as an umbrella organisation, should act as the focal point for coordinated international rescue and relief whenever cultural heritage is endangered by natural or human-made disasters.

Adopted in Seoul on 9 December 2011.