



Blue Shield - Statement on Ukraine

27 February 2014

Following the civil conflict that has been shaking Ukraine, the Blue Shield wishes to express its deep concern regarding the safeguarding and protection of the country's invaluable cultural and historical heritage, as well as the institutions that house them and the people that care for them.

Ukraine's museums, libraries and documentary heritage, monuments, churches and monasteries are under risk of threat from looting and destruction. The international heritage community wishes to warn of the potential harm that cultural property may suffer.

Reports regarding damages endured by the Kiev History Museum have given the Blue Shield and its members reasons for concern. The destruction of monuments linked to the political history of Ukraine is also at the forefront of the cultural community's concerns. The Blue Shield urges the Ukrainian government to investigate the incident which occurred in the Kiev History Museum's storage rooms on the nights of 18 and 19 February 2014, and to allocate protected storage space for particularly threatened collections.

Mindful of the importance of protecting the historical, artistic and scientific heritage of Ukraine, the Blue Shield welcomes the recent creation of a Blue Shield National Committee for Ukraine. This Blue Shield Committee is currently hard at work protecting all national monuments, regardless of their political or social origins. The Blue Shield strongly supports the Ukrainian National Committee's initiative to protect the country's rich range of cultural heritage and its efforts to coordinate and store information on the cultural assets.

Ukraine has been a State Party to the 1954 Hague Convention *for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* and its first Protocol since their ratification on 6 February 1957. Ukraine is also a State Party to the 1972 Convention *Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* since its ratification on 12 October 1988.

Ukraine's 2004 International Humanitarian Law Manual clearly states that personnel responsible for the defence and protection of cultural property are "protected under international humanitarian law" and that directing attacks against such persons or "clearly identifiable cultural property" constitutes "a serious violation of international humanitarian law". Cultural property is clearly defined within the manual as being "objects of great importance to the cultural heritage of peoples [and] that play an important role in their spiritual life." These include, among others, works of art and religious or secular monuments.

The ratified international conventions, Ukraine's specific legislation, and customary international law impose on nations the obligation to protect their cultural heritage in times of armed conflict. The Blue Shield calls on all parties concerned to fulfil these obligations and to protect the outstanding cultural heritage sites and repositories located within Ukraine.

The Blue Shield's mission is to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict, natural and human-made disasters. For this reason it places the expertise and network of its member organisations at the disposal of their colleagues working in Ukraine to support their work in protecting the country's heritage, and if necessary, in assessing for subsequent recovery, restoration, and repair measures.

The Blue Shield

The Blue Shield is the protective emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention *for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, which is, with its two Protocols, the basic international treaty formulating rules to protect cultural heritage during armed conflicts. The Blue Shield network consists of international non-governmental organisations dealing with museums, archives, libraries, and monuments and sites.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), founded in 1996, comprises representatives of the five non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in this field:

- The International Council on Archives (www.ica.org)
- The International Council of Museums (www.icom.museum)
- The International Council on Monuments and Sites (www.icomos.org)
- The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (www.ifla.org)
- The Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (www.ccaaa.org)

National Blue Shield Committees have been created in a number of countries. The Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS), founded in December 2008, works to coordinate and strengthen international efforts to complement ICBS in protecting cultural property at risk of destruction in armed conflicts or natural disasters.

Website: <http://www.blueshield-international.org>