

## FOREWORD

*Heritage at Risk* 2004/2005 groups national and regional reports on monuments and sites in danger, highlighting threats and risks affecting cultural heritage worldwide and diffusing this information. Subjects include wars, interethnic conflict, barbaric acts, plundering and pillage, natural catastrophes, atmospheric pollution, urban development and inappropriate planning regulations, not to mention neglect, uncontrolled tourism and inaccurate restorations. The publication of the 2004/2005 Report shows how many countries have reacted positively to this initiative since its first appearance in 2000. It also highlights how assessment, regular monitoring and planning of long-term programmes are not only necessary but indispensable for the protection of cultural heritage worldwide. So too are strengthening national legislation on cultural property and continued cooperation from international bodies. UNESCO through its World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS through its National Committees are strongly committed to reducing the impact of threats and destruction and I wish to thank ICOMOS and its President, Michael Petzet, for their efforts to maintain this regular reporting of conditions of cultural heritage worldwide. A number of other NGO's are also currently active on this matter, like the WMF and Heritage without Borders.

On the subject of natural disasters, who can forget the tsunami tragedy which hit the coasts of several countries of Asia and Africa on 26 December 2004, killing so many, destroying infrastructures and devastating the natural and cultural landscapes of several countries. The total loss cannot yet be assessed. Speaking at a press conference at the *Mauritius International Meeting on Small Island Developing States* on 5 January 2005, Mr Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, stressed the need of a strategic and systematic approach at national level to help countries in terms of risk preparedness. UNESCO, along with experts from the World Heritage community and local authorities, is mobilizing all efforts to evaluate damage to the sites inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List located in the regions hit by the earthquake and tsunami. Information is currently being collected and missions will be dispatched in coordination with the national authorities as soon as possible to decide on appropriate action. UNESCO is proposing expert assessment missions to Sri Lanka and Indonesia to assess the situation of the affected cultural and natural World Heritage properties, notably the Old Town of Galle and its Fortifications and the Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra. Emergency assistance will also be available through the World Heritage Fund to help the affected countries establish detailed damage assessments and rehabilitation plans. These UNESCO expert assessment missions will fall under the joint declaration of cooperation between UNESCO and the Government of Italy on emergency actions in countries affected by conflicts or natural disasters for the safeguarding, rehabilitation and protection of cultural and natural heritage. On the policy level, an important advance has been made on the occasion of the Meeting on Cultural Heritage Risk Management, organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in collaboration with the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan, ICCROM and ICOMOS in the framework of the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan, 18–22 January 2005). The Recommendations resulting from this event (Cf. <http://www.unisdr.org/wcdr/thematic-sessions/thematic-reports/report-session-3-3.pdf>) have stressed the proactive role of heritage as a contributor to sustainable development and disaster reduction, as well as the importance of traditional knowledge systems and intangible heritage in mitigating and/or preventing disasters.

## Iraq after years of embargo and war

This fourth world report gives an assessment of Iraq's cultural heritage, in the wake of the conflict and more than ten years of embargo. The chapter entitled "State of Ecology and Built Heritage After Four Decades of Adversity" includes five case-studies (the Marshlands of South Iraq; the Kurdish Countryside; the Old Town of 'Ana on the Euphrates; the Citadel of Arbil; and the Ottoman *Saray* Administrative Complex in Baghdad) and an overview of restoration and reconstruction works carried out in the country. 2005 will mark soon two years after the looting of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad and of many other Iraqi cultural institutions in Baghdad and around the country (April 2003). The entire structure of the cultural heritage of Iraq – archaeological sites and historic buildings, museums and cultural institutions, libraries and archives, and the intangible heritage – has been badly affected, thereby causing an irreversible loss to Iraqi people and, in particular, children who are stewards of cultural heritage for future generations.

Looting of archaeological sites and plundering of historic buildings continue unabated. While it is now possible to determine the number of artefacts that disappeared from the Iraq Museum of Baghdad, it is quite impossible to assess the number of objects that have been illicitly removed from archaeological sites and sold off. More than 10,000 archaeological sites have been identified and included in the inventory prepared by the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, with many others not yet listed. These include the well-known remains of Ashur, Ctesiphon, Eridu, Hatra, Isin, Khorsabad, Kish, Lagash, Larsa, Nimrud, Nineveh, Samarra, Ur and Uruk. Two sites have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List: Hatra in 1985, and Ashur in 2003. Illicit excavation at archaeological sites continues to destroy the Iraqi heritage, in particular in the southern region, at such important sites as Isin, Umma and Umm Al-Aqarib. The installation of military bases close to or at archaeological sites, as in the cases of Hatra, capital of the Parthian Empire, and Babylon, capital of the Neo-Babylonian king, Nabuccodonosor II (604–562 BC), calls for urgent attention, as these may cause irreversible damage.

## UNESCO's action to protect the Iraqi cultural heritage

Protection, like rehabilitation, is a long-term process calling for international efforts and long-term strategies. Since April 2003 UNESCO is committed to devising an overall strategy to protect the Iraqi cultural heritage. Two expert missions visited the country in May and June 2003 to begin defining priority domains of intervention in close cooperation with the Iraqi authorities. Three international expert meetings took place between April a few days after the looting of the Iraq Museum and August 2003. The resulting programme for culture was included in the global strategy for the rehabilitation of Iraq, drawn up by the United Nations System in February 2004.

Following the third UNESCO expert meeting in Tokyo in August 2003, the participants recommended that the Director-General of UNESCO set up an International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture of Iraq and UNESCO, the Committee was created in September 2003 in order to allocate

international assistance according to needs and plan a programme following the highest international standards. Its first Plenary Session took place in May 2004 at UNESCO Headquarters and led to a number of recommendations, that are now receiving the attention of the UNESCO Secretariat in order to ensure an appropriate follow-up.

Financial contributions to implement field projects have been made to UNESCO by the Governments of Italy, Japan, Switzerland, Flanders, Norway, Turkey, Czech Republic and Latvia. Other UNESCO Member States, including Germany, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Netherlands, Poland, the Czech Republic, United Kingdom, United States of America, Jordan, Egypt, Spain, and Switzerland have expressed their willingness to contribute to protecting the Iraqi cultural heritage by means of technical assistance. Moreover, UNESCO has received contributions to its Special Account for Iraqi cultural heritage, in particular from Greece and the Holy Sea, while Saudi Arabia has pledged financial assistance.

Thanks to these contributions, and in spite of the state of insecurity in the country, during the last two years UNESCO has been active in Iraq and is today implementing fourteen projects for a total amount of more than eight million dollars. These involve several fields: archaeological sites, historic buildings, cultural institutions and museums, libraries and archives, and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The "Iraqi Maqam" was proclaimed as Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003 and Iraq benefited from financial assistance of the UNESCO/Japanese Funds-in-Trust for the Intangible Cultural Heritage for the preparation of this candidature.

The main aims of these UNESCO projects are the fight against illicit traffic of the Iraqi cultural heritage, the rehabilitation of premises and provision of equipment to enable cultural institutions to become fully operational as soon as possible, and capacity-building and training for professional staff, in order to update their skills in various fields.

Among its activities to combat illicit traffic of Iraqi cultural property, UNESCO is working closely with INTERPOL on the basis of an agreement signed in July 2003, to track archaeological objects, illicitly exported from Iraq, on the art market. In this

regard, documentation on cultural property is an essential tool: a training course in basic standards for documentation of movable properties (Object-ID Standard) for the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage staff was held in Amman in December 2004. Two other training courses were organised simultaneously in Amman with the assistance of WMF/GCI on the use of GIS and preparation of an archaeological sites database. Vehicles and equipment to strengthen security are being provided at endangered sites under the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) programme for protection of the Iraqi cultural heritage. A training course for border patrols and site guards to stop illicit traffic in cultural artefacts and provide security at archaeological sites was held in Amman in October-November 2004 thanks to a contribution by the Government of Italy and the assistance of the Italian Carabinieri. As part of the activities for the rehabilitation of the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad, and with the aid of a contribution by the Swiss Government, UNESCO is providing a museum collection and information management database, as well as hardware with which to operate the system. The first session of a training course in documentation using photogrammetry took place in Riga in June 2004 and concentrated on archaeological sites and historic buildings.

Among the projects aiming at rehabilitation of premises and provision of equipment, UNESCO is providing equipment for the maintenance and patrolling of the site of Nineveh in northern Iraq which was the imperial capital of the Biblical Assyrian King Sennacherib in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Specialized publications on museum studies have also been delivered to the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, while, thanks to a contribution pledged by the Government of Japan, UNESCO is assisting the Iraqi authorities in the rehabilitation of the conservation laboratories of the museum. Under the UNDG programme to protect the Iraqi cultural heritage, the first phase of the projects for the rehabilitation of the Regional Centre for the Conservation of Cultural Property in the Arab Countries, and of the Child Museum, both of which are in Baghdad, began in 2004. The rehabilitation of the Melodic Institute and provision of equipment for the National Library and National Archives in Baghdad are also planned in the UNDG programme.

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