

UNESCO

Destruction of Cultural heritage in the Middle East by ISIS



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LIST OF PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

USA
Australia
Belgium
Canada
Denmark
France
Jordan
the Netherlands
UK
Russian Federation
Syria
Iraq
China
Libya
Turkey
Saudi Arabia
Egypt
South Korea
Oman, Germany
Italy
Japan
Lebanon, Afghanistan
Tunisia
Algeria

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized committee of the United Nations which pursues fundamental ideas of freedom proclaimed in the UN Charter. The main goal of UNESCO is to achieve world peace and security through promoting international collaborations on all areas, chiefly education, science and culture. With 195 member states actively being involved, UNESCO is navigating its way to contrive new ways to build peace and sustainable development. As “intellectual” agency of the United Nations, UNESCO expands its ways to bring creative intelligence to life and sustain the hope of a humanism. GECMUN, following the passion and the ideas of the actual UNESCO, aims to discuss about most controversial issues of the global society with each delegate’s creative resolution to the topic.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict

First international treaty that was signed in May 14, 1954 in Hague to enforce the protection of cultural property in armed conflicts. Immovable and movable cultural heritages fall under the protection of Hague Convention.

ISIS (ISIL)

ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, are the Jihadist Militant group with strong holds in both Iraq and Syria. ISIS are composed mostly with Sunni Arab, wanting to rule its citizen by Sharia law. They want to revive ancient caliphate and expand it to compass all Muslims, believing it will bring apocalypse as written in scripture.

Difference between Shia and Sunni

After death of Muhammad, Islam was divided into two branches Sunni and Shia. Sunni islam believed next prophet should be Abu Bakr, while Shia believed Ali should be next prophet. Both Sunni and Shia believe opposite subbranch of Islam has distorted meaning of Quran. 83% of Muslims are Sunni (ISIS) while only 16% of muslims are Shia.

Jihadism

Jihadism, movement of jihadist, describes Islamic militant movement perceived as to be rooted in islam and big threat to the West. Word “Jihadism” is also used to define Sunni Islamic struggle. In 2003, Martin Kramer describes Jihadism as “most violent persons and movements in contemporary Islam, including alQaeda.”

AlQaeda

AlQaeda is a Sunni militant Islamist that was found in 1988 after war in Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980. Bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam found AlQaeda. Unlikely with ISIS (major goal of ISIS is to build Islamic State), AlQaeda concentrated on worldwide terror to show off their existence. AlQaeda’s major goal was to make West into tremor of horror.

Syria

Palmyra: Palmyra was an ancient city that thrived in desert east of Damascus. Being part of silk road, it gained its wealthy and started to build colonnaded avenues and impressive temples. However, all of the Palmyra's preserved temples and avenues were destroyed by ISIS.

Mar Elian Monastery: Dedicated to 4th century saint, Mar Elian Monastery was important pilgrimage site for hundreds of Syrian Christians.

Apamea: Wealthy trading city in Roman era, Apamea had many artifacts. To obtain financial aid, ISIS excavated Apamea's artifacts and sold to people.

DuraEuropos: One of the oldest Christian church, built by a greek settlement, and highly decorated Romeera building was destroyed.

Mari: Flourished ancient city in era of Bronze age.

Iraq

Hatra: Hatra, selected as UNESCO World Heritage site in 1985, was capital of independent kingdom of mixed culture of Greek and Roman. Its architectures portray mixture of West and Eastern. ISIS recorded video of using sledgehammers to destroy major architects in Hatra.

Mosul Museum and Libraries: Mosul Museum and Libraries had thousands of manuscripts, books and artifacts. Mosul Museum had most of important Nineveh's heritage. However, ruthless ISIS destroyed and fired Mosul Museum and Libraries in 2014.

Mar Behram Monastery: Mar Behram Monastery was built in 4th century to commemorate Christian Saint. The extremists destroyed the Saint's tomb.

Mosque of the Prophet Yunus: Mosque of the Prophet Yunus was built to dedicate Jonah, biblical figure considered as a prophet to may Muslims. However, ISIS interprets Johah as forbidden. 2014, mosque was excavate and demolished with explosive.

TIMELINE-HISTORY OF ISIS

1979: At Afghanistan, Zarqawi and Bin Laden form its group known as ISIS and alQaeda respectively at Afghanistan war(vs Soviet Union).

1989: By Soviet withdraw, Arab fighters also withdraw from Afghanistan.

1990s: Bin Laden grows alQaeda into a global network; Zaqawi forms his own group but fizzles.

1996: Both men return to Afghanistan, ruled by Taliban

2001: alQaeda attacks America from its base. US launch attack to Afghanistan, Bin Laden flees to Pakistan and Zarqawi flees to Iraq.

2003: US invades Iraq. US topples Saddam Hussein's Sunni dictatorship and disbands Iraqi army. Unemployed and lost their place to go, Iraqi army joins insurgency led by Zaraqwi and Jihadist group joins insurgency too.

2004: Zarqawi's group became dominant insurgency. Zarqawi's group formed alliance with alQaeda and changed its name to AQI, alQaeda of Iraq.

2006: Iraq's Sunnis rise up against him and Zarqawi was killed by airstrike promoted by US. With US intervention, power of rebel shrinks

2011: America withdraws in 2011 from Iraq. When ArabSpring spread, Bashar alAssad cracked down violently on protesters. Rebels happened, and Assad releases jihadists(extremist) to fight against the rebels. AQI change its name to Islamic State of Iraq led by Abu Bakr alBaghadi.

2012: Baghdadi sends top deputy to Syria to spread new alQaeda branch to fight alongside of rebel which is known as Jabhat alNursa.

2013: Baghdadi announced that he is taking control of all alQaedaallied forced in Syria.

2014: Sunni welcomed ISIS more than Shiadominated government. ISIS controls a third of Iraq and a big part of Syria.

Now: Its power has shrank but ISIS is terrorising international wide threatening people.

INFORMATION ON THE TOPIC

Historical background

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), also known as the “intellectual” agency of the United Nations aims to build peace and sustainable development. UNESCO works to reach this aim through building connections among member states in three different areas: education, science, and culture.

Since 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) is continuously destructing the cultural heritage sites of the Arab region including Syria and Iraq. UNESCO strongly encourages all the member states to create effective solutions for this issue that it threatens numerous precious heritages of the region. UNESCO General Director Irina Bokova’s often quoted that, “Damage to the heritage of the country is damage to the soul of its people and its identity.”

ISIS is a Sunni Muslim terror organization, which appeared in 2012 to 2014 during and after the Syria’s civil war. ISIS is constantly threatening the international safety and security by conducting terrors and beheading citizens. The main objective of ISIS is to bring all of the Muslims and Muslim regions under their control.

There are different motivations that led ISIS to destruct cultural heritages in the conflict region. They want to show their ideology to the world. They are trying to remove all the traces of previous civilizations or religions in order to follow the Islamic tradition that they believe in. However, the major motivation is not only about ideology. ISIS uses propaganda videos, which shows its fighters destroying the heritage sites in order to reach their main purpose. Their purpose is to attract media attention and use these actions as political tactics that could enable them to influence the world. ISIS is also selling some of the antiquities on the black market to fund their campaign.

We emphasize the urgency of this cultural crisis and encourage delegates to come up with various solutions, both long term and short term that will protect damaged region’s heritages and people’s identities from ISIS.

Status Quo

Loss of heritage sites may not sound like a serious issue than the refugee crisis or devastation of the city's infrastructure, because some may only think that they are just old sites and monuments. However, heritage sites are not only the traces of the past. They are the representations of national identity across religions and ethnic groups.

According to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Arms Conflict, this kind of public destruction politically intended to influence media is considered to be a war crime. Though UNESCO launched the Unite4Heritage campaign to combat this issue, we still need more engagements from the member states. Since July 2015, ISIS took over a region of land in the Middle East that includes 20% of Iraq's 10,000 cultural heritage sites, which are determined by UNESCO World Heritage. Approximately 41 main cultural heritage sites and monuments are completely lost. The rate of destruction is doubled from 34% in 2014 to 66% in 2015 and it is still increasing.

Stances of UN Member States and parties involved

United States of America

US is applying physical power against ISIS in the conflict region. A US-led coalition of Western and Middle Eastern countries started air strikes against ISIS in Iraq since 2014. The US provided weapons and trainings to moderate Syrian rebel forces and Special Forces are fighting against ISIS with anti-ISIS forces from Iraq and Syria.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is in cooperation with US to moderate Syrian rebel forces. The authorities of Saudi Arabia are afraid of ISIS inspiring Saudi jihadists to overthrow the current government and revolt against the monarchy's legitimacy.

Jordan

Jordan is a strong ally of USA, which joined the air strikes against ISIS in Syria to protect its borders. They are trying to forestall the jihadist groups from being active in Jordan. Jordanian military had doubled its size alongside the border with Iraq.

Iraq

The former Shiadominated government created conditions that helped Sunni IS to settle down in Iraq. ISIS is taking over the territory that stretches largely around Syria, and northern and western Iraq. Iraq is receiving military assistance from US, which includes advising, training, and equipping the Iraqi military. Along with Syria, Iraq is one of the most affected countries from destruction of heritage sites by ISIS. Some of the important ancient sites that are damaged by ISIS include: Hatra, Nineveh, Mosul Museum and libraries, Nimrud, Mosque of the Prophet Yunus and more.

Russia

Russia is not included in the US-led coalition but they launched their own airstrikes in Syria in September 2015, which target IS strongholds and the fighters.

Syria

During and after the civil war in Syria, ISIS seized large parts of Syria. 1020% of their territory is in Syria. After the outbreak of the civil war, Syria is facing the biggest refugee crisis with about 11 millions Syrians being displaced. Currently, ISIS is attacking heritage sites by using bulldozers and explosives. Major heritage sites in Syria that are damaged by ISIS are: Palmyra, Christian monastery, Apamea and more.

Libya

Greek and Roman antiquities and prehistoric artwork in Libya are also in danger of ISIS. Since government in Libya is divided into two rival governments, it is impossible to keep the track of damaged ancient sites. Though ISIS didn't conduct largescale destruction in Libya, lots of valuable heritages including sculptures and artefacts are now in danger.

Lebanon

As a country adjacent to Syria, Lebanon is hugely influenced by the conflict in Syria and ISIS. Under ISIS propaganda of clearing out the other religions, Lebanon is experiencing serious terrors. It is also considered as the easiest place for ISIS to expand its territory. With the refugees from Syria, fighters of ISIS came into Lebanon and spread across country. They are trying to achieve their ultimate goal of taking over Caliphate through regrouping and training in Lebanon. Therefore, Lebanon should be concerned about protecting their heritage sites from ISIS forces.

Turkey

Turkey is defeating ISIS in the territory along its borders with Syria and Iraq in response to the terrors happened in the border town of Suruc and in the capital Ankara.

Afghanistan

In 2015, ISIS announced that it is creating a new province in Afghanistan. There are 10003000 fighters in the country conducting terrors and attacks.

Tunisia

Though Tunisia is considered as a successful country of Arab Spring, the actual reality was not successful. Tunisia became a top source of ISIS fighters. Between 6,000 to 7,000 Tunisians left to fight for ISIS. ISIS attracted young people of Tunisia with all the sweet promises. However, most of them didn't manage to return because they committed suicide terrors or dangerous attacks.

Algeria

In late 2015, ISIS launched several attacks targeting Algerian security forces. After these attacks, ISIS took over the power and started to operate some of the provinces and increasing its size. Supported by its success in neighboring countries like Libya and Tunisia, smallscale attacks in Alergeria is increasing also. It will slowly destabilize the Algerian regime.

Belgium, Denmark, The Netherlands

Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands are included in the US-led coalition carrying airstrikes against ISIS.

Canada

New Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has decided to withdraw Canadian fighter jets from the US-led coalition after he winning the election.

Australia

Australia is a member of the international military coalition striking IS facilities in Syria and Iraq.

Possible solutions

a) The use of military force against ISIS

When AlQaeda had several terror attacks on the United States of America, the US initiated "Operation Neptune Spear" to assassinate Osama Bin Laden. After the death of Osama Bin Laden on May 2, 2011, the power of AlQaeda shrank dramatically. Following the successful method that the US tried to stop AlQaeda's influence, nations could collaborate to eradicate ISIS in military means. However, this method could cause thousands of innocent lives. In the Afghanistan war, an estimate of 11,624 innocent civilians died. ISIS uses Syria and Iraq as their base. Massive air attacks will kill civilians for sure. Recently, Russia used deadly arsenals in Syria to drive ISIS out of Palmyra. The operation was successful, destroying 3,000 terror targets during 14 days of airstrikes. On the other side of success, 1,000 civilians died in the bombardment. Using military forces against ISIS would easily eradicate ISIS, but its cost of operation would be the innocence of civilians.

b) Acknowledge ISIS as an official Islamic state.

ISIS's main goal is to establish their own Islamic state and further spread to the world. If the international world acknowledges ISIS as an official state, ISIS might stop terror attacks on nations. However, it is most likely that ISIS would not stop their offensive intrusion because their primary purpose of terror is to recruit new Jihadists by boasting their influence.

c) Stop ISIS's Propaganda

It is commonly known that ISIS uses social media services to recruit Jihadists to their group. ISIS is posting their news and places in Twitter to guide routes to ISIS. Even though the national government is currently conducting methods to stop ISIS accounts, the methods seem to be reinforced. Nations could collaborate with SNS companies to catch individuals trying to be Jihadists. However, this act could be seen as violating human private life and not a direct solution in protecting cultural heritage.

Dealing with ISIS would be one of the hardest topics in the modern world. Is there a solution to protect cultural heritage that is being destroyed by ISIS without military means? How could we prevent ISIS from destroying important historical cultural heritage? Given possible solutions by chairs are to remind any solutions have cost on it. Our goal is to contrive the most effective ways to protect cultural heritage.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How can the cultural heritage destruction influence each nation?
2. How does the cultural heritage destruction impact social, economical and political status quo of the world, especially of the member states where their cultural heritages had already been attacked?
3. To what extent should military measures be involved in hindering further destruction?

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