GECMUN XIII

BACKGROUND GUIDE

SOCHUM

Discussing defensive measures for the protection of cultural heritage in Middle Eastern conflicts

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

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Committee Introduction

The Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee, or the SOCHUM, also known as the Third Committee, is one of the six main committees that operate under the authority of the UN General Assembly. Established in 1945, it contains a universal membership of all 193 UN member states. The committee was created immediately after World War II to address global social, humanitarian, and human rights challenges in the aftermath of the war.

Initially, the purpose of SOCHUM was to draft international standards in order to protect fundamental human dignity. Now, serving as the primary UN body dedicated to drafting international human rights policies, protecting marginalized populations, and addressing global social and humanitarian conflicts, SOCHUM helps to strengthen existing regulations and create new regulations and treaties such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

Examining a broad range of ongoing issues that affect people worldwide, the committee works for the protection of human rights, the advancement of women, the rights of children, refugees, and migrants. SOCHUM addresses agendas that combat racism, discrimination, human trafficking, and more to not only control the social and humanitarian issues, but prevent overall crime worldwide. Over the past decades, SOCHUM has adopted numerous resolutions addressing the provision of humanitarian assistance and the protection of vulnerable populations, playing an essential role in the international community.

For delegates, the discussions made in the committee is a great opportunity to debate global issues and review reports from other councils and UN bodies to provide member states with opportunities to evaluate global human rights. As international cooperation is the most crucial aspect, rather than creating legally binding international law, the committee is encouraged to enhance common standards and coordinated response through consensus building and diplomacy.

Agenda Introduction

Armed conflicts have long inflicted devastating human costs, but they also leave behind another, often irreversible consequence; the destruction of cultural heritage. Across the Middle East, wars and political instability have resulted in the deliberate targeting, looting, and collateral destruction of the sacred mosques, bustling *souqs*, and physical architects that have survived empires long gone.

The issue has become increasingly prominent since the beginning of the twenty-first century, when armed conflicts throughout Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Palestine, and other parts of the region transformed the cradle of civilization into a battlefield. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was accompanied by the looting of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, where approximately 15,000 artifacts were stolen. In following years, extremist organizations such as ISIS intentionally destroyed internationally significant heritage sites, including the ancient cities of Palmyra and Nimrud, while simultaneously profiting from the illicit trafficking of antiquities. Meanwhile, ongoing armed conflicts have subjected these same locations to repeated damage through aerial bombardment or shelling. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), hundreds of cultural sites across the Middle East have sustained damage or remain at significant risk due to conflict, with many designated World Heritage Sites now classified as endangered.

Although often ignored as a subordinate problem compared to territorial disputes or mortality, the protection of cultural heritage in the midst of conflict remains and has increasingly been recognized as both a humanitarian and international security concern. Cultural heritage, in its many forms, is often a source of national pride and identity. When destroyed, it can not only deepen social divisions and hinder post-conflict reconciliation, but may also prolong violence by fueling the illegal trafficking of cultural property and providing financial resources for armed groups engaged in violence.

Of course, the international community has addressed these concerns through legal instruments such as the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its accompanying protocols, as well as numerous United Nations Security Council resolutions condemning the destruction and illicit trafficking of cultural property. Still, enforcement is inconsistent particularly in regions that continue to experience the twin issues of prolonged conflict and limited capacity of the state.

Although this agenda focuses specifically on the Middle East, its implications extend far beyond the region, especially as the world dawns upon a new era of global conflict. The Middle East is home to hundreds of recognized cultural sites and artifacts whose preservation is of global significance. The destruction of these sites affects not only the populations living within these conflict zones, including local communities, religious and ethnic minorities, archaeologists, and displaced people, but also the broader international community that shares responsibility for humanity's common cultural legacy. Therefore, the committee should consider these threats to cultural heritage in their own nations to mitigate this ongoing conflict.

Letter from the Chairs

Dear esteemed delegates,

My name is Saeyoon Sim, a senior at Yongsan International School of Seoul, your Head Chair for this year's SOCHUM committee. I am elated to welcome you all to a committee I am convinced addresses one of the most pressing yet ignored issues of our times. GECMUN XIII will conclude my four years in Model UN, an experience shaped by both domestic and international conferences. I look forward to guiding delegates through the dynamic platform that is MUN and hope that all delegates leave with a better understanding of what it means to be a global citizen.

My name is Raphael Collas, a senior at American School In Japan, and I am thrilled to be your Deputy Chair for the SOCHUM committee this year. By this year's GECMUN conference, it will have been four years since I first started MUN, and it will be my first time chairing at an MUN conference. The protection of cultural heritage may seem less critical than other problems in the Middle East, but I think the more research you do, the more you will realize that providing a solution to this issue may be a door to solving the other problems in the Middle East, like war and genocide, leading to a more humane world. Good luck, delegates, and I hope you find this committee fulfilling on your MUN journeys.

My name is Minseo Kim, a freshman at Branksome Hall Asia, and it is my greatest honor to be serving as your Associate Chair for the SOCHUM committee at GECMUN XIII. This iteration of GECMUN marks my 19th Model UN conference and my 9th conference serving as a chair. I know that MUN might be intimidating and jarring for some delegates, but I still hope that this conference will not only expand your knowledge on protecting cultural heritage but also help you to grow as a MUNer. All of us on the dais are looking forward to meeting you all and your discussions on innovative solutions. Good luck and see you at the conference!

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to any of us as we're here to help (and we don't bite)!

Best Regards,

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Key Terms

Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritages can be described as the legacy of physical artifacts, monuments, traditions, languages, customs, and knowledge inherited from past generations that hold significance both historically and socially.

Illicit Trafficking

Illicit Trafficking, especially in terms of illicit trafficking of cultural property, means the illegal theft, sale, or export of any cultural objects such as artifacts and antiquities, often used to finance armed groups or organize crimes.

Intangible Heritage

Intangible Heritage refers to the living traditions, cultural identity, and skills that are passed down from generation to generation. These cultural norms are not physical objects, but they are still considered as cultural heritage.

Armed Conflict

Armed Conflicts are a state of organized violence between governments, international groups, or both that causes widespread destruction and threatens civilian populations and cultural heritage. These conflicts usually refer to warfare that involves military forces and power.

Collateral Damage

Collateral Damage is the unintentional destruction caused during military operations and armed conflicts against a target that is considered militarily legitimate. For instance, during warfare, mosques, churches, libraries, and historic neighborhoods are often damaged even though these places were not the intended targets.

Iconoclasm

Iconoclasm is the deliberate destruction of any religious symbols, statues, monuments, artworks, or even historical sites and important areas. These actions are viewed as offensive, heretical, and politically undesirable, as they erase the cultural identity of affected communities.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Post-Conflict Reconstruction is the process of rebuilding physical infrastructure, institutions, and communities after the end of a conflict. This includes reviving damaged cultural heritage, repairing historical sites, and restoring museums and archives that were interrupted by war.

Preservation

Preservation is the act of protecting and maintaining historical objects, sites, traditions, or any cultural heritage in their existing condition without deterioration or loss. These efforts involve physical conservation, legal protection, and educational initiatives to prevent construction.

Displacement

Displacement is the forced movement of people from their homes because of warfare, persecution, or violent disaster. When civilians from different communities are displaced, they often lose access to the places where traditions, languages, or social rituals are taught and maintained.

Historical Background

Throughout history, the destruction of cultural heritage during armed conflict has posed a continuous threat on society both culturally and socially. In the 20th and 21st century, from World War II to recent Middle East Conflicts, armed factions have been frequently pillaging cultural heritage around the globe. As methods for illicit trafficking have continuously evolved over time, the international community has begun to recognize it as a crime policed by strict regulations under international law. Illicit trafficking has gained its association with armed conflicts since the beginning of World War II, when the Nazis plundered countless numbers of Jewish art and culture.

Illicit trafficking during World War II crossed multiple distinct domains, being involved in historical objects such as traditional antiques and cultural property. With no reparations for any of the destroyed cultural heritages, nations started to lose their social power. Seeing this, the international community began creating legal frameworks such as the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which was the first international treaty dedicated to safeguarding cultural heritage during wartime.

The 1954 Hague Convention first introduced measures such as the Blue Shield emblem, which was marked as an efficient solution to protected sites and obligates nations to reduce any unintentional damage of physical cultural heritage, as symbols are clearly marked in all physical heritages, and this visual representation directly shows that the object or site is legally protected under international law, meaning that severe consequences will follow. This was successfully implemented, and the Blue Shield emblem was first successfully used as a tool in 1996, still active until now. In modern times, there have been more calculated destructions that target identities intentionally, and more modern explosive weapons are used in populated areas, historical buildings, museums, and places of worship have also been unintentionally harmed.

The 2003 Iraq War highlighted the vulnerability of cultural heritage during modern conflicts. Amid the U.S.-led invasion dubbed Operation Iraqi Freedom, widespread looting of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad resulted in the theft and destruction of approximately 15,000 artifacts. These threats to cultural heritage only intensified with the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 and the subsequent rise of the Islamic State (ISIS), which intentionally targeted cultural heritage as part of its extremist ideological campaign in the region. In particular, the destruction of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Palmyra became a symbol of this iconoclasm. Even beyond ideological motives, ISIS also gained 150 to 200 million dollars through the illicit trafficking of antiquities through international black markets, which it used to fund its operations.

Other modern conflicts have made the protection of intangible heritage another imperative issue to consider. The displacement of millions of civilians across Syria, Yemen, and more recently, the Gaza Strip and its surrounding areas has disrupted the transmission of intangible cultural heritage which depends on knowledge shared by a community over generations. Even though damaged monuments and artifacts may eventually be restored or preserved through various methods, the living traditions that make up intangible heritage are often far more difficult to recover once communities are fragmented. Thus, it is clear that despite its ancient beginnings, the issue at hand has evolved from simply protecting physical cultural property alone to preserving the cultural identities and practices that characterize and sustain communities during and after conflict.

Current State of Affairs

Although international awareness of the need for the protection of cultural heritage has increased exponentially over the past decade, cultural heritage across the Middle East remains under severe threat. Ongoing armed conflicts and the myriad problems that accompany them present a two-fold challenge. Not only do they continue to injure tangible heritage, which includes historic monuments and archeological sites, but they also do irreparable damage to intangible heritage, encompassing the traditions and cultural practices such as cuisine, agricultural practices, craftsmanship, and music that give communities their identities.

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become one of the most significant contemporary threats to cultural heritage in the region. Since its onset in October 2023, military operations in Gaza have damaged or destroyed numerous sites of historical and religious significance, ranging from centuries-old mosques and churches to archeological sites. Simultaneously, the displacement of nearly 1.9 million people in the region has disrupted the transmission of cultural traditions. Families forced to leave their homes often lose access to spaces where knowledge and local customs are passed down and practiced. Similar concerns persist in Syria and Yemen. Years of civil strife have left historic cities like Aleppo, Palmyra, and the Old City of Sana'a vulnerable to neglect, looting, and the elements, while the deliberate iconoclasm by groups like ISIS in Syria and criminalization of living heritage such as music, art, and dress by the Houthis in Yemen target the area's intangible heritage. Broader regional instability has further complicated efforts to safeguard cultural heritage. Conflicts between Israel, Iran, Lebanon, and other actors like the United States have expanded the number of areas at risk.

The international community has nevertheless made meaningful efforts in addressing these challenges. Notably, UNESCO has provided emergency assistance and support for the transport of valuable artifacts whilst documenting and condemning damage to cultural heritage and knowledge in conflict-ridden areas. Advances in satellite imagery and 3D modeling have helped UNESCO and similar organizations like the Institute for Digital Archaeology to monitor endangered heritage sites and digitally preserve standing buildings such as the Krak des Chevaliers and the city of Palmyra before further destruction occurs. Coordinated crackdowns prompted by bodies like the G7 and G20 on the illicit trafficking of antiquities from the Middle East have also been particularly valuable, as such black markets have historically funded armed groups such as ISIS, rival militant groups, and organized gangs.

Despite these developments, significant limitations continue to exist. For one, as governments prioritize civilian protection and military operations during conflicts, the preservation of cultural heritage is frequently relegated to a secondary concern and issued limited funding despite its vital role in post-conflict reconciliation and the protection of a collective identity. Similarly, while technology has made preservation relatively straightforward, digital archives cannot replace the historical authenticity of physical sites and artifacts and the aura they exude, much less cultural traditions. It would also be remiss to dismiss the difficulty of protecting intangible cultural heritage. While structures or artifacts can sometimes be reconstructed, intangible heritage, such as traditional recipes, indigenous farming techniques, languages, music, and even oral histories are considerably more difficult to recover once interrupted by conflict due to their incorporeal nature.

The Middle East has long been considered the cradle of civilization. Today, though, the region's cultural heritage faces a mixed trajectory, with international efforts toward preservation stronger than ever in the midst of an era of an unprecedented level of conflict. It is clear then that the international community must address ever-increasing threats to some of humanity's oldest cultures before it is too late.

Stances of Parties

Cambodia
The Kingdom of Cambodia strongly supports international protection of cultural heritage, particularly because of its own experience with the destruction and preservation of historic sites following decades of conflict. Not only has its physical cultural heritage been a point of contention during and following the Cambodian Civil War, the destruction of intangible heritage through practices like Pol Pot's genocide of the Cambodian people is also relevant. Since its commitment at the 1954 Hague Convention, Cambodia requested enhanced protection for Angkor, making it one of the cultural sites receiving the highest level of protection under the Hague framework.

China
The People's Republic of China is one of the world's leading cultural powerhouses, with extensive archaeological and historical heritage such as the Great Wall of China or the Terracotta Army, making it likely to support UN-led documentation, preservation, and anti-trafficking initiatives. Simultaneously, though, China places strong importance on state sovereignty, meaning it may oppose measures that allow international organizations to directly intervene in a state's territory without its consent.

Egypt
The Arab Republic of Egypt strongly supports the protection of cultural heritage because of the country's extensive archaeological heritage and its long-standing efforts to prevent the illegal removal of antiquities, which has been a problem since the birth of the pyramids themselves. Egypt has passed domestic legislation specifically protecting antiquities, including its 1983 Antiquities Protection Law and later amendments, as well as agreements concerning the return of cultural objects taken abroad, and continues to push for this movement in light of the recent opening of the Grand Egyptian Museum in November of 2025. Egypt is therefore likely to support stronger international cooperation against illicit trafficking and the subsequent recovery of stolen artifacts.

France
The French Republic strongly supports active international intervention to protect cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict. France is a party to the 1954 Hague Convention and both of its protocols, and it demonstrated its commitment to emergency cultural preservation during the 2013 conflict in Mali by assisting in the protection and evacuation of the endangered Timbuktu manuscripts. However, this stance is complicated by ownership of smuggled artifacts, particularly those from Sub-Saharan Africa taken during the colonial period. Still, the country has taken steps to facilitate the return of looted cultural property to their countries of origin.

Germany
The Federal Republic of Germany supports a strong rules-based international system for protecting cultural heritage during armed conflict. Germany is a party to the 1954 Hague Convention, its First Protocol, and its 1999 Second Protocol, which strengthened protections and introduced mechanisms for enhanced protection and criminal responsibility for serious violations. However, public and private institutions across the country continue to possess the remnants of Nazi rule, who seized more than 200,000 cultural objects from Jewish owners within Germany alone, and upwards of 650,000 across wider occupied Europe. Despite this issue of contention, however, the nation still does not have a federal restitution law forcing the return of looted items.

Greece
The Hellenic Republic strongly supports international cultural heritage protection due to the importance of archaeological and historical sites to Greek national identity. Notably, the nation has continued to fight for the return of the Parthenon Sculptures to Athens from the British Museum, although such efforts have thus proved futile. In line with this, Greece is particularly likely to emphasize the prevention of illicit trafficking and the return of cultural objects removed from conflict zones, as well as cooperation between governments, museums, and international organizations like the UN.

India
As the Republic of India develops and renews its government systems, it is likely to support the international protection of cultural heritage, which the country is wealthy in. With a large number of archaeological sites, monuments, religious traditions, and other forms of cultural heritage of its own, India has a strong interest in preventing the destruction and illegal trafficking of cultural property. However, such interests may be complicated by constant border disputes with actors like Pakistan, as well as domestic division on culture by geography.

Iran
The Islamic Republic of Iran has become one of the world's most notorious battlefields, with its land and people becoming targets of foreign invasion and geopolitical influence. Thus, Iran views cultural heritage as an important component of its national and civilizational identity and supports its protection under international law. Iran is a party to the 1954 Hague Convention and has repeatedly emphasized the importance of protecting historical and religious sites during regional conflicts. In the context of the war, the country is likely to support stronger international condemnation of attacks against cultural heritage and greater documentation of damage, while also emphasizing national sovereignty and objecting to approaches that selectively hold certain states responsible while ignoring other actors, including those that may have more international power.

Iraq
The Republic of Iraq strongly advocates for international protection and reconstruction of cultural heritage because of the extensive damage its heritage has suffered during recent conflicts. The 2003 Iraq War resulted in the looting of approximately 15,000 artifacts from the Iraq Museum, while ISIS later deliberately destroyed major sites and participated in the illicit antiquities trade. In response, UNESCO has worked with Iraq on the reconstruction of Mosul's cultural and religious heritage through the Revive the Spirit of Mosul initiative. Iraq is therefore likely to strongly support solutions such as emergency funding, artifact recovery, reconstruction, and international assistance for conflict-affected heritage.

Israel
Currently at war, the State of Israel supports the protection of cultural and religious heritage particularly while emphasizing the importance of national security. Israel's position is particularly controversial because of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which numerous historical and religious sites have been damaged and questions concerning military necessity and proportionality have become central to international discussions. Israel is therefore likely to support heritage protection in principle while arguing that any international framework must also account for security concerns and the threat that armed groups like Hamas or Hezbollah pose.

Italy
As the origin of some of the world's most famous pieces of artwork and cultural heritage, the Italian Republic strongly supports international protection of cultural heritage and has developed specialized national expertise in combating damage and trafficking of cultural property such as the Carabinieri TPC, the world's first dedicated national art crime police force which recovers tens of thousands of assets annually. At the same time, organized crime or *mafias* in the country have also played a pivotal role in the illicit trafficking of artifacts from the Middle East, ultimately funding conflict in the region.

Japan
With extensive remaining cultural heritage, Japan supports the protection of cultural heritage through preventative measures and technological preservation. Earthquakes, which have long plagued the nation, continue to damage historic sites, including in July 2026, when a 7.1 magnitude earthquake caused the collapse of the iconic 19th-century worship hall of Yatsushiro Shrine. The country is therefore likely to emphasize solutions that prioritize preventative documentation and archivization alongside investments into natural disaster-resistant engineering.

Jordan
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan strongly supports the protection of cultural heritage, particularly regarding the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls, for which Jordan maintains a special religious and administrative role through the Jerusalem Waqf. Jordan has recently remained highly involved in international discussions over the site's preservation, with UNESCO retaining the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls on the List of World Heritage in Danger in July 2026 amid concerns over changes to the historic status quo and access to religious sites in light of the current conflict. Jordan is therefore likely to strongly support international monitoring and protection of religious and archaeological sites while emphasizing the preservation of the historic status quo in Jerusalem in particular.

Lebanon
Lebanon is home to major UNESCO sites including Baalbek, Byblos, and Tyre, with Baalbek and Tyre both receiving provisional enhanced protection under the 1999 Second Protocol following recent hostilities. In April 2026, following a request from the Lebanese government, UNESCO granted 39 Lebanese cultural properties provisional enhanced protection and provided more than $100,000 in emergency assistance in addition to reporting damage near Tyre, Chama' Citadel, and Beaufort Castle during the current conflict. Thus, Lebanon is therefore likely to strongly advocate for emergency international assistance and frameworks that prevent military operations from damaging cultural heritage.

Libya
Libya strongly supports the international preservation of its archaeological heritage, although years of political instability and limited resources have made this increasingly difficult. The country possesses five UNESCO World Heritage cultural sites, including the ancient Roman cities of Leptis Magna, Sabratha, and Cyrene, the Old Town of Ghadamès, and the Rock-Art Sites of Tadrart Acacus several of which remain on the List of World Heritage in Danger. In the midst of this instability, Libya has also experienced damage to heritage from crises beyond armed conflict, including the 2023 Derna floods, which affected the nearby archaeological heritage of Cyrene.

Myanmar

As a country that has been in a continuous civil year for the past 5 years, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar has a clear stance on protecting cultural heritage through digital documentation, emergency preservation training, and international assistance. Throughout the country's own prolonged internal conflict, Myanmar has worked to support all solutions that help to preserve historical monuments, religious buildings, and cultural traditions that are often destroyed during warfare. Therefore, one of the country's most important factors when tackling this issue is national sovereignty and international cooperation with other nations.

Palestine
Palestine, being a country that is part of the Israel-Hamas war, usually seeks the protection of cultural heritage by focusing on the preservation of a nation's identity, historical memory, and the rights of the countries after an armed conflict. During the Israel-Hamas war, Palestine has faced significant damage, with UNESCO reports that 164 cultural sites in Gaza have been damaged as of March 2026. Therefore, Palestine strongly supports all international mechanisms for documenting any damages, protecting cultural sites during wartime, and providing emergency funding for reconstruction or aid.

Russia
The Russian Federation protects cultural heritage during armed conflicts by emphasizing the importance of international law, while still maintaining national sovereignty. As a country that is part of the 1954 Hague Convention and its First Protocol, Russia has been working to enforce responsibility to states in order to prevent the destruction or illicit trafficking of cultural property. Even though there are some controversial ideas regarding how the country has left extensive damage on Ukrainian cultural sites, Russia's official stance is to support mechanisms for documenting and combating illicit trafficking.

Saudi Arabia
As one of the main countries that work to preserve historical and religious identity across the Middle East, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports the strengthening of existing international frameworks rather than creating unnecessary new laws. As a country that is part of the 1954 First Hague Convention, 1970 UNESCO Convention, and the 1999 Second Hague Convention, Saudi Arabia strongly advocates for increased funding for emergency conservations, protection of religious sites, and regional cooperation between the Middle Eastern nations to create international organizations, while still respecting national sovereignty.

Somalia
Continuously signing the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Somalia has been supporting greater international assistance in strengthening safeguarding measures to protect cultural property during emergencies such as armed conflicts. By also focusing on intangible heritages such as traditions, the country has been prioritizing capacity-building measures instead of imposing systems that cannot be implemented within states due to severe institutional limitations, allowing the enforcement of realistic solutions.

Republic of Korea
The Republic of Korea is one of the main countries that considers cultural heritage as an essential part of national identity and supports any international cooperation regarding the protection of cultural property during armed conflicts. Having participated in numerous international cultural heritage frameworks such as the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the Republic of Korea has been actively working to safeguard the country's cultural identity during armed conflicts. Therefore, the country

strongly encourages the replacement of physical conservations to technological measures such as satellite imagery, digital archives, and artificial intelligence assisted documentation systems which can help preserve and document cultural heritage.

Sudan
Recently, the Republic of Sudan has been facing severe threats to the country's cultural heritage due to its ongoing armed conflicts such as the most recent civil war. With continuous reports of extensive damage in the Sudan National Museum, the country has been supporting efforts to document, digitize, and safeguard surviving artifacts. As a country advocating for the emergency protection of museums, archaeological sites, and cultural objects, Sudan has been making continuous financial and technical preservation efforts focusing on local participation rather than being dependent on international foreign organizations.

Syria
With extensive damage caused during the Syrian civil war, Syria has been continuously working to preserve cultural heritage through the support of international cooperation in order to restore damaged monuments, museums, cultural archives and sites. By also advocating for stronger measures against illicit trafficking and documenting those destructions, Syria has been strongly advocating for continuous international assistance regarding conservation, documentation, training, and reconstruction, while still maintaining national sovereignty.

Türkiye
The Republic of Turkiye is also one of the main nations that believe that cultural heritage is an essential component of regional identity, supporting the strengthening of international cooperation to prevent any destruction or illicit trafficking of cultural heritage during armed conflicts. By working to document important cultural sites, improve border controls, and training military power to recognize protected cultural properties, the nation has been strongly advocating regional cooperation in order to provide technical assistance to support reconstruction programs that preserve historical context rather than simply rebuilding the destroyed objects and sites.

Ukraine
As a huge party of the 1954 First Hague Convention Protocol and the 1999 Second Hague Convention, Ukraine is one of the nations that has been suffering from extensive loss of cultural heritage. Therefore, the country strongly supports all international protection on cultural heritage for documenting mechanisms, emergency conservations, and technical assistance to ensure that displaced or stolen artifacts are eventually returned. By focusing on technical support such as satellite imagery, digital archives, and documenting damaged sites, Ukraine has been working to mitigate this issue.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)
The United Arab Emirates strongly supports all international cooperation in order to protect the cultural heritage of nations through the combating of illicit trafficking of cultural heritage. Being an active party of both the 1954 and 1999 Hague Convention Protocols, the UAE has been working to strengthen international networks that track stolen artifacts to prevent further illicit trafficking. The country also actively advocates for regional cultural cooperation such as emergency storage facilities and financial support, while still maintaining national sovereignty.

United Kingdom (UK)

The United Kingdom has been strongly supporting the protection of cultural heritage through international humanitarian and cultural heritage legalizations. Also ratifying both the 1954 and 1999 Hague Convention, the protocols have been working for the implementation of military training, cultural registers, and sanctions against individuals, the nation has been working for international cooperation to support international funding and technical assistance for countries that especially have weakened due to continuous armed conflicts.

United States of America (USA)

Through the past few years, the United States of America has been working to protect its culture by participating in international efforts to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural heritage. By being one of the main parties of the Hague Conventions and the 1970 UNESCO Convention, the country has been seeking for practical and realistic protocols that involve technologically advanced approaches that are future-oriented. Therefore, the United States advocates for the cooperation between governments, museums, and private cultural organizations to implement sanctions and legal measures, while strictly stressing that the international mechanisms must respect national sovereignty.

Vietnam

Vietnam is also one of the major countries that value cultural heritage as an important part of a nation's identity. Therefore, in previous armed conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the country has been continuously looking for international cooperation that can help to preserve cultural heritage even during conflicts. By focusing support on protecting monuments, museums, and even cultural traditions, Vietnam has been working to build preventative measures such as documentation mechanisms, training systems, and emergency preservation techniques. By also supporting Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) that lack the financial and technical capacity to protect their cultural heritage, the country encourages all international cooperation against illicit trafficking.

Yemen

The Republic of Yemen is also one of the nations which has suffered from extreme destruction of cultural heritage during years of armed conflicts. Being a strong party for protocols against illicit trafficking, Yemen has been supporting all emergency conservations, international funding, and technical assistance for damaged historical sites, traditional practices, and cultural objects that have been disrupted by displacement and armed conflicts. Therefore, the country is advocating for stronger monitoring systems of military action near heritage sites to prevent this continuous issue.

Possible Solutions

1. **Evacuating and Safeguarding Cultural Heritage from conflict zones**
   One solution would be to create an international network of safe-havens to temporarily safeguard cultural heritage in the form of property(like artifacts, jewels etc) that are directly endangered due to conflict or terrorism. This proposed clause should include guidelines for the host country to follow and a way in which these endangered cultural items can be funneled through to those countries. This solution is heavily reliant on the on-field capacity to protect cultural heritage and mutual trust among nations to secure property that holds extreme value, and a guarantee of return when the conflict is over. One real-life example of this that you could take inspiration from would be the evacuation of Timbuktu manuscripts in Mali by the French special forces in 2013.

2. **Integrating the blue shield initiative with existing UN Peacekeeping and Humanitarian missions**
   For context, the blue shield is an NGO committed to the protection of cultural heritage and works on policies to protect cultural heritage in areas of conflict. This solution essentially proposes that the goal of the blue shield should be integrated into UN peacekeeping operations and Humanitarian missions in order to maximize the effectiveness of efforts aiming to protect cultural heritage. It is one thing to pass policies urging member states to allocate funds that they don't have into something they don't prioritize, and it is another thing for the United Nations to take a more active role in protecting cultural heritage, because many would argue there is an indivisible link between the protection of people and their cultural property.

Questions to Consider

1. How can local communities be involved in the decision-making and active process of protecting their own cultural heritage?
2. If your country has significant economic ties with the middle-east, how may this relationship change your support for heritage protection - what trade-offs might your country be willing to make?
3. If your country hosts refugees from the middle-east, how might their knowledge of their culture be integrated into heritage-protection efforts?
4. How has your country's own experience with cultural loss and preservation influenced its policy towards cultural preservation elsewhere?
5. How could your country use diplomatic pressure (e.g. sanctions, aid cuts) to encourage Middle Eastern states to prioritize cultural heritage protection and what possible consequences could an aggressive approach lead to?

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