

Background Guide

UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
**Preserving Historical Sites in War and
Climate Change**



JACKRABBIT MUN VI

L.B. POLY - MAY 25th, 2024

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CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

Hello Delegates!

My name is Tika Jonnum and I'm so excited to be your co-Chair! I'm currently a junior at LB Poly and part of the PACE program. I've been in Model UN since freshman year and I had a great time vice chairing last year at Jackrabbit!

I also love international affairs/politics and traveling! My bucket list includes Japan, Thailand, and India (if you have any additions let me know)! Outside of school, I like playing volleyball, guitar, and cooking, mostly Italian food.

This topic is very intricate and I can't wait to hear your ideas and possible solutions! To have a good flow of debate, please make sure to research your country's policy. From past experience, committee is always more fun when everyone participates! If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me! I am more than happy to help out with position papers or any general questions!

Sincerely,

Tika Jonnum

UNESCO | Co-Head Chair

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CO-HEAD CHAIR LETTERS

Hello delegates!

My name is Brynn and I'm happy to meet yall! As a junior here at Poly in my first year of MUN, I've already gained lots of experience that has greatly enhanced my understanding of global issues and honed my public speaking skills. MUN has provided me a way to explore my passion for politics and expand my worldview.

Some other things about me are that I am on varsity cross country and track. My favorite event is the 1600m! I am an avid member of book club and my favorite author is Kurt Vonnegut. My favorite subject currently is Chemistry and Biology.

I believe that historical sites and cultural heritage play a crucial role in shaping our identities and understanding of the world. In today's rapidly changing landscape, it's more important than ever to preserve and celebrate our diverse cultures. I'm eager to hear your thoughts on why culture is important in addressing global challenges and how we can ensure its preservation for future generations. I am genuinely excited to hear your solutions and engage in meaningful discussions throughout the conference. See you soon!

Sincerely,

Brynn Jolly

UNESCO| Co-Head Chair

brynn.jolly@gmail.com



POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 19th**.
- Delegates **must** submit position papers to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Position Papers can be submitted through the google form:
 - <https://forms.gle/9Y2CJygwoAwKXPmw7>
- At the top of each paper, include your character/country name, first and last name, school name, and appropriate committee.
 - Country Name
 - First Last
 - School Name
 - UNESCO
- Papers should be submitted as a PDF file
 - Please name the file [Committee_Country]
 - Ex. **UNESCO_United States**
- Papers should be 1-2 pages in length with an additional Works Cited page in MLA format
- Papers should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
 - Background & UN Involvement
 - Position of your Country
 - Possible Solutions

If you have any questions or concerns, please email one of your chairs.



COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. They work to secure peace through educational tools that foster mutual understanding of cultural heritage, scientific thought, and freedom of expression. UNESCO helps to preserve more than 1,000 world heritage sites and cultural diversity and strives to increase access to quality education. Through their multifaceted education and conservation programs, UNESCO ensures that peace is built on tolerance to create a truly global community.



TOPIC SYNOPSIS

From the Taj Mahal to the Parthenon, world heritage sites are some of the most important vestiges of culture and history, but are often the most difficult to protect. After the Taliban destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, the preservation of cultural sites came to the forefront of the international dialogue. How much money should be devoted to infrastructure meant for maintaining these sites? How do indigenous and private land rights factor into the equation? What are the legal obligations under international law, and how can the international community create accountability? In this committee, delegates will discuss the legal, political, and economic implications of cultural sites as they work to preserve world heritage for future generations.



BACKGROUND

An international movement for preserving historical sites began in the 1950s, with the building of the Aswan High Dam. Many of the governments in the area collaborated to protect the ancient sites and monuments in the vicinity, like the large temple of Kalabsha, the Roman period temple of Maharraqa, and the temple of Ramses at Aksha, that could have been submerged in about 50 meters of water. This international cooperation over protecting sites of cultural importance inspired many, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and individuals in the United States to push for larger, well-funded efforts to maintain historical places and artifacts. As UNESCO became more involved in this preservation movement, formal progress was made with the creation of the World Heritage list in 1975, which now incorporates sacred sites from Ethiopia to Ecuador.



The Selection Process

The measurement of a site worth saving is based on its “outstanding universal value,” which means it has enough cultural worth to “transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity.” Much of this is stated within the World Heritage Convention of 1972, a document that combines natural and cultural preservation, outlines the roles of State Parties and defines the



process for choosing future sites and allocating resources through the World Heritage Committee. After signing the document, countries are eligible to nominate possible sites within their borders. This would involve making a tentative list, which is by advisory bodies, like ICOMOS, IUCN, and the International Centre for the Study of the



Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). Additionally, in 1994, the World Heritage Committee adopted the Global Strategy, which redefined, and mainly broadened the criteria for sites, as studies had shown how the committee's lens had been very Eurocentric. As conditions have drastically changed over

the past fifty years, especially in terms of global warming and conflicts, it is essential that UNESCO and the global community reconsider what is necessary to preserve these works.

Climate Change

When preserving artwork, one of the main preventative conservation considerations is the agents of deterioration. The agents of deterioration include pests, light, incorrect temperature or humidity, fire and water, thieves or vandals, and dissociation.

Although many of these seem preventable, climate change could have a major impact on the continual protection of key cultural sites.



One of the major issues is the inequity between sites in the West and sites in developing nations. In terms of cultural sites, Europe and North America, has 485 cultural properties, whereas the entirety of Asia and the Pacific has 206, and Africa has 56. Although UNESCO primarily relies on the state governments to maintain or apply for sites, the staggering difference could have terrible implications with the impacts of climate change. With rising temperatures and more destructive natural disasters, developing nations, which will be some of the most devastated, will not have the same international funding and protection meant for maintaining the sites that many of the



developed nations already possess.

In terms of actual effects on the sites, the exacerbated agents of deterioration, specifically the environmental ones, will lead to major destruction of cultural sites. Archeological material preserved in the Earth, like the cultural sites in the Yukon territory, is maintained by a

delicate chemical and biological balance, so sporadic changes will harm sensitive material. Organic building material, like wood, has a higher chance of infestation with climate change. Plus, historical building material tends to be more porous and weakens with greater absorption of water, and with most structures not being made to withstand “prolonged immersion”, flooding will prove harmful. Post-flood, there is a higher chance of mold build-up and greater erosion. On the opposite side of the



spectrum– in places like Chinguetti and Mauritania– increased humidity, UV levels, temperatures, desertification, and salt weathering are damaging.

Conflict

Since the cementing of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage treaty, there have been a multitude of conflicts where significant cultural property is at risk. For example, in countries such as Georgia, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, groups have utilized the tactic of attacking cultural sites, to harm international identity.

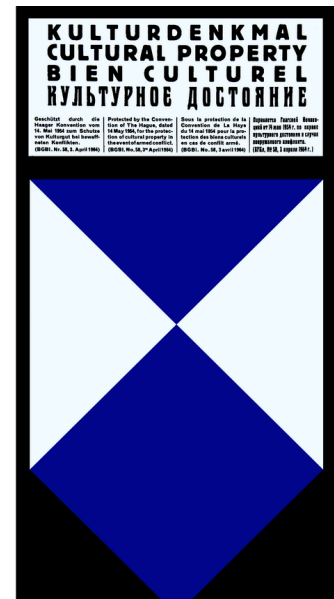
Under the List of World Heritage in Danger, the committee considers sites threatened by armed conflict and indicates that conservation action must be made quickly.



International views on inscription on the list vary, from it being a means to gain global attention, to a dishonor or sanction. On the other hand, reaction to the inclusion of sites on the World Heritage List can also be controversial. Both internationally, and internally, the diversity within nations, whether it be religion, ethnic group, or any other minority, leads to disputes over who is entitled to specific cultural products. However, if the site has lost some of the key characteristics that relate to its identity, it could be removed from all cultural heritage lists altogether.



In terms of protections for cultural heritage, there have been numerous agreements centered around the topic. In 1935, the Roerich pact was signed by a multitude of countries in the Americas. It outlined that the “cultural treasure of peoples”, should be “considered as neutral and as such respected and protected by belligerents...in times of peace as well as in war.” The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict then built off this pact and was later edited in the 1990s. Post-WW2, the 1954 Hague Convention incorporated protections for the transportation of cultural property, the significance and uses of the emblem of the Convention, and the measures required if the parties in conflict are not “international characters”. However, this treaty places much responsibility on the states. In tandem, little is actually done for the safeguarding of the sites prior to conflict. Precautions like moving collections or closing museums are often regarded as a sign of defeat or harmful to morale, even though most strategies are cost-efficient and only require having enough time to implement. The cultural workers attempting to salvage artifacts and sites are also usually considered “second responders”, and the mere concept of protecting threatening or controversial ideas and items puts them in danger.



UNITED NATIONS INVOLVEMENT

World Heritage Convention

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations and was first founded on November 16, 1945. It was founded with the mission of contributing to peace and security by promoting international collaboration. Roughly three decades later, in 1972 the World Heritage Convention was created. This convention states that each country who signs on thereby pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage sites situated on their respective territory, but also to protect its national heritage. With its 194 signatory Member States, it is one of the most ratified and endorsed conventions.

In the World Heritage Committee, States Parties have an obligation to regularly prepare reports about the state of conservation and the various protection measures put in place at their sites. These reports allow the World Heritage Committee to assess the conditions at the sites and eventually decide on the necessity of adopting specific measures to resolve recurrent problems. The Periodic Reports – submitted by the States Parties themselves – are prepared on a regional basis and are examined by the World Heritage Committee on a pre-established schedule based on a six-year cycle.



UNESCO's Preservation Works

This is exemplified in the restoration of the Temple of the Rising Sun (Abu Simbel) in Egypt. The temple honors one of the greatest Egyptian pharaohs of the Nubian people and



was at risk of flooding due to the River Nile. According to UNESCO, “The race against time began in 1964 when experts from 50 nations started working together under the coordination of UNESCO in one of the greatest challenges of archaeological engineering in history.” The temple still stands today and is open to the public.

Another such success story was the restoration of Angkor Wat located in Cambodia. Threats posed by floods and civil war due to the rise of the Khmer Rouge regime made it difficult for UNESCO to preserve this cultural heritage site. Accredited to Angkor Wat’s inclusion in UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1992, after the civil war subsided, UNESCO was able to aid in nation-building and national reconciliation.



BLOC POSITIONS

African Bloc: African countries are some of the hardest hit by climate change, with extreme floods in Somalia, food insecurity in Chad, and an influx of diseases in the Central African Republic. In many cases, the climate impacts also coincide with disputes, like the consistent conflict in the DRC, which weakens stability, as seen through the long-lasting impacts of civil war on South Sudan. Currently, Africa has 98 properties inscribed on the World Heritage list. With the scale of culturally significant art in this region, it is essential to provide greater security for pieces.

Asia-Pacific Bloc: Pacific island nations are some of the most heavily damaged by the rising sea levels and increasingly sporadic weather conditions. Despite having quite a few environmental world heritage sites, the cultural aspects are largely not acknowledged on an international level. In terms of Asia, climate change is also a problem, from exacerbated monsoons in the south and southeast to intensified droughts in West and Central areas. However, internal conflict, especially in relation to religious or ethnic minorities, could be threatening to save key cultural heritage.

Western European and Developed Bloc:

Western Europe and developed nations are at an advantage when it comes to World Heritage Sites due to the increased likeliness of monetary self-sufficiency. In Europe alone, there are 412 World Heritage Sites. It is significant to note that many countries under this bloc have colonized other nations.



Middle Eastern Bloc:

The Middle East has a long history involving the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, as the collaboration of the Nubian preservation campaign (with the Aswan Dam) inspired the original push for cultural conservation. With 19 State Parties, and 84 cultural properties on the World Heritage list, these sites only scratch the surface of the rich cultural history of the region. Besides a plethora of regional conflicts, many of the devastating impacts of climate change like the Libyan flood, rising temperatures, and water scarcity could lead to extreme damage to important monuments.

Latin American and Caribbean Bloc:

Latin America and the Caribbean are furthering collaboration with UNESCO World Heritage Sites. As of December of 2023, the Action Plan for Latin America and the Caribbean (2023–2029) was drafted and formally adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its 45th-extended session. This bloc consists of 33 state parties and 104/150 properties that are under the cultural category.

The next step of the Action Plan for Latin America and the Caribbean (2023–2029) would be to see the World Heritage Convention being implemented at national as well as local levels while promoting the educational importance of preserving national sites.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do you identify what needs attention or what is worth preserving? Who gets to decide that?
2. What internal changes are essential to making the conservation process more efficient and equitable to all nations, not just the West?
3. What is the best way to motivate developing nations to put resources into protecting culture? What NGOs, or other organizations are working towards this goal?
4. How has your country carried out preservation projects in the past? Were there any roadblocks or concerns pertaining to the environment?
5. What does the protection of historical sites look like? Who will enforce these protections? Where will the funding come from?
6. What else is threatening these sites?
7. How can UNESCO not only protect physical sites but also the intangible heritage, that might represent a larger national identity?



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