

11. August 2022

Destruction of Ukrainian cultural heritage - call for public statement

Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the list of partially damaged and completely destroyed cultural sites has grown longer and longer. As of 8 August, UNESCO has verified damage to 175 cultural sites such as churches, museums, historical buildings, monuments, libraries and other cultural buildings. The number of unreported cases is probably much higher; the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture counts more than 430 incidents.

The NC's of ICOM Germany, Switzerland and Austria have participated in the protection of cultural property in Ukraine through a variety of aid activities, as have numerous actors in the international community. Among many other initiatives, donation accounts have been set up and transports organised. The suffering of the museum professionals affected is just as much a concern as the protection and rescue of the cultural property.

In light of the facts, it must be stated that the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to which Russia is a signatory, is not being respected. With this international treaty, Russia undertook to protect cultural property from damage, destruction, theft, looting and unlawful seizure during war or armed conflict.

If there was no evidence of deliberate destruction of cultural property at the beginning of the war, it can no longer be dismissed. This is exemplified by the methodical bombing of the historical centre of Kharkiv or the museum of Hryhorii Skovorda destroyed in a Russian missile attack. In their joint declaration of 27 June 2022, the G7 state that the deliberate damage to Ukrainian cultural sites is judged and condemned as an attempt to erase Ukraine's history and cultural identity. Since 24 February, the solidarity of the international community has been strong, including that of the undersigned, who are actively engaged in the protection of cultural property in Ukraine.

However, it is not merely enough to support this commitment but not to take a clear public position beyond that. The international cultural community has to make it unequivocally and clearly understood that the continued deliberate destruction of cultural property is intolerable.

We therefore urge ICOM International to clarify its position and release a public statement. The General Conference in Prague offers the appropriate format to discuss and agree with ICOM members on the possible consequences of such a position.

Signing NC's: ICOM Germany, ICOM Switzerland and ICOM Austria

Supporting representatives of the German „Netzwerk Kulturgutschutz Ukraine“:

- Prof. Dr. Kilian Heck, Universität Greifswald
- Prof. Dr. Matthias Müller, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz
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