

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

UK alone in Heritage Protection omission

London, UK – 4 December 2008. The UK National Commission for UNESCO is extremely saddened and concerned that the anticipated Heritage Protection Bill has been omitted from today's Queen's Speech.

The Bill's omission from the Queen's speech means that the UK will be the only international power, and the only major combatant in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, not to have legislation under discussion to enable it to sign and ratify the 1954 (Hague) UNESCO *Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* and its two *Protocols* of 1954 and 1999. The United States has legislation before Senate that will enable it to sign and ratify the Convention in the near future.

Professor Alec Boksenberg, Chair of the UK National Commission stated "The loss of this anticipated Bill is very worrying. That we appear to have lost enhanced recognition and protection for World Heritage sites in the UK is deeply frustrating; that we have lost the legislation concerning protection of cultural heritage in times of armed conflict will reflect very badly on the UK's standing internationally. We are soon to be the only international power not to have ratified the 1954 Hague Convention. This cannot be right and I have written to the Minister today asking for a meeting to try to remedy this situation".

Peter Stone, Professor of Heritage Studies at Newcastle University and the advisor to the UK military in the immediate build-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and a member of the UK National Commission's Culture Committee commented "This is most depressing news – especially as concerns were raised over the amalgamation of the two draft Bills in the summer. We must find a way to ratify Hague as soon as possible. To be one of the only major countries not to have ratified is really impossible. UK forces continue to be deployed overseas and our failure to ratify the Hague Convention is a significant issue".

ENDS

Notes to Editors

For further information, or to arrange an interview, please contact Ian White at the UK National Commission for UNESCO on +44 (0)20 7766 3492 or iwhite@unesco.org.uk.

- **The UK National Commission for UNESCO** is the focal point in the UK for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)-related policies and activities. As an independent body, the UK National Commission brings together a network of nearly 250 experts from across the UK in the fields of education, culture, sciences and communication. Working closely in partnership with HM Government and UK civil society, the UK National Commission aims to provide expert advice to the Government on UNESCO related matters, develop UK input into UNESCO policy-making, promote reforms within UNESCO, and encourage support in the UK for UNESCO's ideals and work.
- **The Draft Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Bill** is required to enable the UK to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (the Hague Convention) and accede to its two Protocols (1954 and 1999). The Convention, adopted following the massive destruction which took place during the Second World War, provides a system to protect cultural property from the effects of international and domestic armed conflict. Parties to the Convention are required to respect cultural property situated within the territory of other Parties by not attacking it, and to respect cultural property within their own territory by not using it for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage during armed conflict.