

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Destruction of Cultural Heritage Should Not be Left Out of Iraq Inquiry

LONDON, UK – 5 August 2009. A group of leading cultural heritage organisations have called on the Committee of Inquiry into Iraq to include problems faced by British forces in safeguarding cultural heritage in Iraq in their investigation. In a letter to Sir John Chilcot, chair of the Inquiry, the UK National Commission for UNESCO, the British Academy, the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, the Council for British Archaeology, the European Association of Archaeologists, the Institute for Archaeology, International Council of Museums UK, the Museums Association, the Society of Antiquaries of London and the UK & Ireland Committee of the Blue Shield urge the Commission to investigate these matters.

The signatories of the letter have expressed their concern over the damage and loss inflicted on the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad and other museums, libraries and archives, the looting of archaeological sites, and the damage to historic monuments that took place during the war and subsequent occupation.

The signatories encourage the Inquiry to look at the extent of provision of generic and theatre-specific cultural property awareness training for UK armed forces. Such training will help ensure UK forces are better prepared to identify and protect cultural property.

The signatories further raise the pressing issue that the UK has not yet ratified the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols of 1954 and 1999. The UK is the only major international power, and the only major combatant in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, not to have relevant legislation under discussion. The US ratified the Convention earlier this year.

Professor Alec Boksenberg, Chair of the UK National Commission said, “The Inquiry is an excellent opportunity to examine problems faced by British forces in safeguarding cultural heritage in Iraq. The UK urgently needs to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict to ensure the armed forces receive appropriate cultural property awareness training in preparation for any future deployments.”

Sir Adam Roberts, President of the British Academy said: “The Iraq Inquiry must not neglect the damage, destruction and looting of Iraq’s archaeological sites and ancient artefacts. In this, as in other matters, it will need to look at the adequacy of plans made in the run-up to the war, the particular problems faced by UK forces in their areas of responsibility in the occupation and post-occupation phases, and the extent to which the UK acted in accord with its existing legal obligations. Fifty-four years after the UK signed the text of the Hague Cultural Property Convention, it is time that we took the key step of ratifying it, as the United States finally did earlier this year.”

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For further information, or to arrange an interview, please contact Ian White at the UK National Commission for UNESCO on +44 (0) 20 77 66 34 92 or iwhite@unesco.org.uk.

Notes to Editors

- **The UK National Commission for UNESCO** is the focal point in the UK for UNESCO-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 Government on UNESCO related matters, develop UK input into UNESCO policy-making and programme implementation, promote reforms within UNESCO, and encourage support in the UK for UNESCO's ideals and work.
- **The Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict** was adopted at The Hague (Netherlands) in 1954 in the wake of massive destruction of cultural heritage during the Second World War and is the first international treaty with a world-wide vocation focusing exclusively on the protection of cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict. The Convention covers immovable and movable cultural heritage, including monuments of architecture, art or history, archaeological sites, works of art, manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest, as well as scientific collections of all kinds regardless of their origin or ownership. The UK has not ratified the Convention nor either of its two Protocols. In December 2008, the UK National Commission voiced its concern when the Heritage Protection Bill, which would have allowed the UK to ratify the Convention and its two Protocols, was omitted from the Queen's Speech.