



**Statement by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums
(DGAM)**

Syrian Cultural Heritage

Three and a Half Years of Suffering

A year has passed since we last sent an international call out to all those concerned with defending Syria's heritage. At the time, we warned against a possible cultural disaster that might be inflicted on an invaluable part of the human heritage existing in Syria. We also added that the latest development of the painful events in Syria as well as the absence of the specialized government institutions and the archaeological authorities in some regions contributed greatly to the aggravation of the risk befalling the Syrian cultural heritage. Consequently, systematic clandestine excavations, carried out by professional armed gangs, doubled. In addition, smuggling cultural objects grew remarkably across borders seeing that the neighboring countries were not making enough efforts to put an end to smuggling taking place across their borders and within their territories.

Moreover, we pointed out that the increasing magnitude of the danger threatening the Syrian cultural heritage was beyond the DGAM's capabilities to contain alone. We also called upon international organizations to support our national efforts to rescue our cultural heritage and prevent the occurrence of a painful cultural disaster affecting the human heritage as a whole together with its heart lying in Syria.

Much of what we had feared happened; for example, vast regions extending along the geography of Syria are now classified as 'distressed cultural areas' due to the exacerbation of the clandestine excavation crimes and deliberate damage to our historic monuments and cultural landmarks in those regions, such as southern Hasaka, Deir ez-Zor Rural – Salhiya Euphrates "Dura Europos", Idlib Rural – Ebla, some historic villages in the Dead Cities, a part of Aleppo Rural – Simeon Castle and its surroundings, Yarmuk Valley in Daraa, a part of Hama Rural – Apamea, etc.

Under all sorts of such dire and exceptional circumstances, the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums is still carrying out its responsibilities relying on the persistence of its devoted employees and armed with the will to defend Syria's cultural heritage, which is the unifying factor of all Syrians and the key component of their cultural and national memory. Its 2500 employees (archaeologists, engineers, legislators, inspectors, administrators, guards, etc.) are all over the different Syrian governorates. Most of them, as

well, are working tirelessly and diligently, and some of them have given up their lives for the sake of duty.

Thus, we hope that those who are keen on our cultural heritage in Syria and the world will help us to protect and safeguard it, as much as possible, against imminent dangers, to prevent using it for cheap political purposes affecting its respectable world reputation and to lend a hand to the DGAM's employees in order to enable them to resume their duties.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all those who have assisted us in the task of defending our heritage by means of their expertise, directions and support to our institutions and personnel. Hence, our special thanks go to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its regional offices, ICCROM, ICCOM, ICOMOS, ARC_WH, World Monuments Fund in New York, most of the archaeological expeditions working in Syria, some archaeologists, Associazione Priorità Cultura in Rome, the INTERPOL and World Customs.

Finally, we would like to assure you that we will do our best and cooperate with dedicated people everywhere using all the energy and determination available so as to protect and rescue our cultural heritage.

Damascus, July 21, 2014

General Director of Antiquities & Museums

Prof. Dr. Maamoun Abdulkarim

