

**ST.PETERSBURG DECLARATION ON THE PROTECTION OF  
CULTURE IN THE AREAS OF ARMED CONFLICTS  
(St.Petersburg, 16 December 2015)**

We, participants of the IV St.Petersburg International Cultural Forum dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of UNESCO,

1. noting the growing need of modern society for unifying humanistic principles on the basis of which UNESCO was created 70 years ago and which the Organization has been pursuing in every possible way since 1945;
2. emphasizing the unique role of this Organization in promoting the ideals of peace and nonviolence, developing international humanitarian cooperation, establishing a broad intercultural dialogue, promoting cultural diversity, protecting from criminal encroachments the world cultural heritage and cultural property accumulated by mankind;
3. acknowledging the fundamental importance of culture for shaping consciousness of a new, creative person free from thoughts about war or violence, for ensuring progress in the social, economic and other spheres of the life of peoples, for achieving the strategic goals of sustainable development of mankind adopted by the UN General Assembly last September;
4. recognizing also that culture in all its forms and diversity is particularly vulnerable in the times of armed conflicts and terrorist attacks, which are ever more often targeting specific groups of the population on ethnic, national or religious grounds; that culture is an essential source providing sustainability of communities due to its important role in strengthening their identities, social cohesion and potential that represent a prerequisite for possible reconciliation, recovery and development in the future;
5. reaffirming our deep concern and strong condemnation of continued encroachments of terrorist groups upon the culture of the countries in the Middle East and Africa, in particular Syria, Iraq, and Libya, through the destruction of their cultural heritage, organized pillage and illicit trafficking in cultural property

that have acquired unprecedented dimensions and are used, inter alia, to finance the terrorist groups involved in these activities;

6. convinced that the damage to archeological, historical, cultural and religious heritage of the countries in the Middle East and Africa is damaging the cultural heritage of all mankind and that, under the international law, intentional attacks on buildings which are not military targets and are used for religious, educational, artistic, scientific or charity purposes, as well as on historical monuments, may be considered a war crime;

7. recalling the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, such as Resolution 2199 (2015) that bans trade in antiquities and cultural property for financing terrorism and assigns UNESCO with an important role in countering illicit trafficking in cultural property from Syria and Iraq, as well as Resolution 2170 (2014) on the destruction of cultural and religious sites and prevention of the subversion of educational, cultural, and religious institutions by terrorists and their supporters;

8. recalling further the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) and other UNESCO conventions on culture, as well as the UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage (2003) and other relevant international instruments, including the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Geneva Conventions;

9. strongly condemn the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage and the looting of cultural property in Iraq, Syria, Libya and other conflict-stricken or post-conflict countries, including purposeful destruction of religious monuments and sites carried out by, inter alia, the Islamic State and other terrorist groups, and demand to stop these criminal actions immediately;

10. express our strong concern over the condition of such cultural and historical sites as Hatra in Iraq, Palmyra, Aleppo, Bosra, Crac des Chevaliers in Syria, Leptis

Magna, Sabratha, Cyrene, Ghadamès in Libya, and Marib, Bab Al-Yaman in Yemen, which have been and are destroyed as cruelly and senselessly as were the monuments in the Bamyán Valley, Afghanistan, and in Timbuktu, Mali;

11. welcome the UN Security Council Resolution 2199 (2015) and call upon all the UN Member States to take necessary measures to prevent trade in the cultural property of Syria and Iraq as well as in other objects of archeological, historic, cultural, scientific and religious value illegally removed from Iraq since 6 August 1990 and from Syria since 15 March 2011, including by banning cross-border trade in such objects and thereby allowing for their eventual safe return to the Iraqi and Syrian people;

12. welcome the UNESCO Executive Board decisions 196 EX/29 "Culture in conflict areas: a humanitarian concern and a safety issue. UNESCO's role and responsibilities" (2015) and 197 EX/10 "Reinforcement of UNESCO's action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict" (2015);

13. share concerns outlined in the Bonn Declaration of the World Heritage Committee and support the "Unite for Heritage" Global Coalition launched at the 39<sup>th</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee (2015) and aimed at creating a broad partnership in response to the threats posed to cultural heritage at conflict flashpoints, first of all in the Middle East;

14. support the Strategy for Reinforcing UNESCO's Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in November 2015 and call upon the UNESCO Member States to facilitate the implementation of the Strategy, including through appointing national experts that can work together with UNESCO on the application of its conventions in the cultural sphere and on contributions to the Heritage Emergency Fund established by UNESCO, as well as through suppressing the activities of terrorist and extremist organizations;

15. call upon the Director-General of UNESCO to further intensify the efforts of the Organization to protect culture in times of armed conflicts and transition, in

particular by strengthening UNESCO's potential for prompt response to emergency situations in the cultural sphere and for the practical application of the relevant UNESCO conventions in order to counter illicit trafficking in cultural property and the destruction of cultural heritage sites;

16. also support the efforts undertaken by the Director-General of UNESCO to strengthen the role of the Organization in the UN system as a facilitator of the intercultural dialogue, the prevention of illicit trafficking in cultural property, the protection of heritage and the preservation of cultural diversity in conflict areas and in countries in transition.