

Afghanistan

Section I of the Periodic Report

Afghanistan has played fundamental and vital role in the development and promotion of mankind's culture through history and as a cross roads of civilization has had outstanding and unique role.

Afghanistan as a country with ancient culture and civilization has played special and important role in this region of the world. Studies of past history of Afghanistan and archaeological research that has been carried out witness this fact.

Ancient Bronze Age, Neolithic and iron in the past has been considered as a crossroad for bringing together the civilizations of East and West. The periods of Greek Bactrian, Greek Buddhist, Kuhsan, Sassanian and Yaftal civilization were rich, that they have drawn the attention of world's scientists and researches. Since 1922 hundreds of historical sites and monuments have gone under scientific researches and restoration.

Unfortunately the last two-decades of political changes in the country have brought many adversities, disorders and the efficient institutions could not continue their work in these fields as required.

Looting of historical and cultural heritage, destruction of archaeological sites and historical monuments, plundering and looting of National and provincial Museums heritage, lack of controlling, preserving and protection archaeological sites, not being able to prevent illicit excavations in the historical sites by different armed groups and the 23 years of war are the main factors that have severely affected Afghanistan's cultural heritage.

However, for years Afghanistan's department of Preservation of Cultural heritage have attempted and requested that at least some of Afghanistan's cultural and historical be included to the list of UNESCO's world heritage. Regrettably, until last year only one monument, the Minaret of Jam was listed as a World Heritage.

We hope that other historical sites of Afghanistan like:

1. Mosque of Nu-Gunbad in Balkh Province.
2. Herat Monuments.
3. Aii Khanum.
4. Historical sites of Kharwar.
5. Helamnd Monuments.
6. Ghazni monuments.
7. Guldara Stupa.
8. Historical sites and monuments of Bamiyan.

Should be considered as historical sites in UNESCO's world heritage list as well.

It is obvious for all, that a country has been in twenty-two years of destructive war the flames of war have destroyed all its valuable properties. The same applies to Afghanistan's cultural heritage as more than 70 percent of Kabul Museum's collections have been stolen or ruined and its building has completely been destroyed. The

Archaeology heritage, which was from different historical sites of Afghanistan, has been completely looted. Moreover, some unique monuments of the country such as Buddha sculptures in Bamiyan province, Chakari Minar, Watch Tower, Darul Aman palace, Jabal Saraj palace, Queen's palace, Minaret of Sipahi Gumnaam, Taq-I-Zafar, the Buddhist temple of Shutur Haddah and hundreds of other archaeological sites like Mirzak, Kharwar, Aii Khanum, Dilberchin, Khum Zargar, Bagram, Ofian, Top Dara, Guldara Stupa, Caves of Bamiyan and etc, are ruined and the movable culture heritage have been smuggled to foreign countries.

The establishment of the Interim Government of Afghanistan has facilitated ways of rehabilitation and reconstruction of cultural heritage monuments. Archaeological, historical monuments and the National Museum have been focused on by the Ministry of Information and Culture of Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan with attempts at cooperation of National and International institutions in different fields. Example are the repair of historical monuments like Bagh-I-Babur, Timurshah mausoleum, Taq i Zafar, Minaret of Sipahi Gumnaam, Delkusha palace, restoration of Kabul National Museum building including some of its destroyed heritage. Some illicit excavations, smuggling, exporting and trafficking of cultural heritage that have been carried out in many parts of the country have been prevented. More 200 new objects have been delivered to Kabul National Museum and also surveys and research of some historical sites are also worth to mentioning.

Holding the International seminar of preservation and restoration of Afghanistan's cultural heritage at the initiative of the Ministry of Information and Culture and with financial cooperation of UNESCO from 27 to 29 May 2002 in Kabul opened a new page to the restoration of Afghanistan's cultural heritage that has been critically affected. A plan for the consolidation of the cliff faces of destroyed sculptures of the Great Buddhas, caves and archaeological sites of Bamiyan through UNESCO, ICOMOS, and International community have been taken. Other sites and unique monuments should be included on the list of UNESCO world heritage not one unique monument, the Minaret of Jam, which was listed in the world heritage conference in Budapest in April 2002.

Moreover, results of the above mentioned seminar have provided facilities for reconstruction of different cultural heritage in the field of Museum, Archaeological and historical monuments by financial support of International organizations and countries interested in Afghanistan's cultural heritage, the reconstruction of some of Afghanistan's cultural heritage Institutions had been made available to some extent, here we can mention the financial support of UNESCO and countries like Germany, Japan, Greece, France, UK, Italy, America, Korea, Iran and Aga Khan Trust for Culture institution, with appreciation.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Information and Culture of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan is eager to sign the UNESCO Convention for the prevention of smuggling, exporting and trafficking of historical and cultural heritage objects, serious efforts are in progress in this regard. In addition, upgrading of cultural heritage capacities in the capital and provinces by considering and ensuring social justice at the national level are one of

the main and important policies of this Ministry and work on this process is in progress, we hope that by financial support and cooperation of International community we obtain this goal successfully.

Creation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage Community is also the result of the efforts and attempts of the Ministry of Information and Culture and work on the implementation of making a positive cultural policy for the preservation of Afghanistan's historical and cultural heritage in its national legislation is nearly completed.

All that was mentioned above and the efforts that have been carried out for the promotion and improvement of cultural heritage. But the existence problems in the mentioned fields can be described as follows:

1. Illicit excavations of historical sites for the purpose of exporting historical objects to foreign countries by armed groups continue.
2. Lack of professional cadres in the field of Archaeology, Museum, Preservation and restoration of historical monuments.
3. Collecting the heritage objects which have been looted and returning the heritage that has been exported to foreign countries.
4. Limited financial and technical resources and laboratory equipment.

Suggestions

1. In order to prevent illicit excavations from Archaeological sites, emergency excavations need to be carried out in the historical sites with the financial support of International Community.
2. Training of professional cadres, providing long and short terms scholarships through international organizations.
3. Cooperation with Interpol and the international community in returning the looted historical and cultural heritage.
4. Reinforcing financial backing and equipping cultural institutions through financial and technical support of international organizations and countries interested in Afghanistan's cultural heritage.
5. Inclusion of historical sites and monuments on the world heritage list.
6. Sending professional cadres to developed countries for training and training young cadres in the field of Archaeology, Museology, restoration of historical monuments and completion of forms for UNESCO's World Heritage Convention.