

The EHHF demands that Russia respect the conventions protecting the cultural heritage of Ukraine

We, the Heads of the state heritage authorities assembled in the European Heritage Heads Forum (EHHF), hereby declare our solidarity and support for Ukraine's cultural heritage institutions.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is causing enormous human suffering. In addition to the threats to life, health and civil structures, the invasion also poses an acute threat to the cultural heritage of Ukraine. There is now increasing testimony to how museums and historic monuments have been damaged by shelling, and the threat of theft and looting is ever-present.

The cultural heritage of Ukraine is closely linked to that of Europe and the rest of the world. There are seven UNESCO World Heritage sites in the country. They are an inalienable part of the cultural heritage which can create a sense of belonging, comprehensibility and security for us humans; this is especially important in times of vulnerability. Historical values in Ukraine are in danger of being lost. That loss affects all of us.

Cultural heritage is therefore protected by international law. The 1954 Hague Convention states that "damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind."

The destruction of cultural heritage is a violation of the laws of war. After the Second World War left much of Europe in ruins, rules on the protection of the victims of war were adopted in 1949 through the four Geneva Conventions, which also concern cultural property. The additional protocols clearly state that it is prohibited to commit any acts of hostility directed against the historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples, and to use such objects in support of any military effort. This applies to all warring parties.

The 1954 Hague Convention was approved by the UNESCO General Conference. It seeks to protect cultural property and preserve cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict. Military personnel are obliged to show consideration so that cultural property is not unnecessarily harmed.

The EHHF strongly condemns the unprovoked invasion of the democratic and free Ukraine.

The EHHF demands that Russia respect the 1954 Hague Convention and the Geneva Conventions on the protection of cultural heritage in Ukraine.

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