

Council: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Topic: Preservation of Cultural and Historical Sites and Artefacts in Conflict Zones

Country: The Republic of Cyprus

Living currently in a time of current domestic disagreement relating mainly due to neighbouring countries,^[1] the Republic of Cyprus understands wholeheartedly the effect of conflict on a nation, along with the loss of both lives, pieces of history and culture.^[2] With tumultuous conflict occurring just next to the Republic of Cyprus in the Middle East through the Syrian Civil War, and the 2016 Turkish coup d'état attempt,^[3] Cyprus fears that little has been done since the 1999's Second Protocol procedure except the UNSC Resolution 2347 on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in 2017.^[4] However, The Republic of Cyprus reminds the council that this was a resolution written by the UNSC and not the UNESCO, feeling from 1999 to present day, not enough substantial modifications to the original Hague Convention in 1954 were made despite several conflicts in war-torn countries worsening in degree. In 1974, just 20 years after the Hague Convention during the invasion of Cyprus from Turkey, some 36.2% of Northern Cyprus' churches and heritage buildings were destroyed in the period of 4 weeks while not being punished up till this day.^[5] Following the experience of having its heritage damaged, Cyprus stands strongly in the council for the improvement and protection of Heritage Sites, introducing stricter regulations and surveillance of UNESCO sites, and demands a call to action from all other countries in the council.

While the Republic of Cyprus has not been directly related in actions of armed aggression in recent years, instead of recalling to one of the only armed conflicts Cyprus has been involved in during the 1974 coup staged by Turkey, Northern Cyprus had suffered immensely in one of the most valuable cultural forms present.^[6] Resulting in the looting and hoarding of various religious and historic monuments, leading to over 60,000 relics being stolen,^[7] and vandalism of churches. Deeply concerned over the progressive escalation of conflict happening to the neighbouring Eastern country of Syria and invasion by the Turkish government,^[8] constant bombardments have left Palmyra and The Old City of Aleppo both of which are religious sites,^[9] in ruin. The Republic Of Cyprus stands not only with the rest of the Middle Eastern countries in conflict but also the rest of the council in providing devoted attention to preventing further destruction.

Vividly aware of the importance of heritage sites all over the world, recognising the efforts member states have put in in recent years,^[10] the Republic of Cyprus encourages the further implementation of constant surveillance and defensive protocols in place of every UNESCO Heritage Site through the use of Peacekeepers from the UN to engage in both defensive and counter-offensive roles during armed conflict to minimize damage done to Heritage sites as soon as physically possible.^[11] Cyprus believes the enforcement of regulations should also be further reiterated. Due to an escalation of severity in recent years of conflict, further actions must be taken to enforce the rules set forth in the 1999 Second Protocol, along with restoration and protection efforts in the rules.

The aforementioned examples are only a sample of what The Republic of Cyprus hopes can be done not only in conjunction with the rest of the council but also with the help of other UN councils such as the UNSC and ICC to further enforce the boundaries of UNESCO sites.^[12] The Republic of Cyprus looks favourably upon

joint coordination efforts to supply both the manpower and jurisdiction to punish those who have conducted war crimes against the heritage of a nation.^[13] With that said, Cyprus urges a call to action from all countries to further combat the issue.