

**ISRMUN** 2021

**UNESCO**

**United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural  
Organization**

**Committee:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

**Topic:** The preservation of cultures and traditions in post-conflict societies

**Written by:** David Kim, Martha Sofía Marroquín, Maria Andrea Nuñez, Ana Paulina Gorrzegz and Ana Paola Rodríguez

## I. Committee Background

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Science, and Cultural Organization. The United Nations established this committee on November 16th, 1945, in London, United Kingdom. The main building hosting the UNESCO headquarters was inaugurated on November 3rd, 1958 in the Place de Fontenoy in Paris, France). This organization has 193 members and 11 associate members. The committee works closely with non-governmental, intergovernmental, and private sector organizations to accomplish its mandate which primarily consists of addressing issues related to education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication (UNESCO in Brief, UNESCO, 2020. The United States and Israel left the committee on January 1st, 2019 accusing it of an “anti-Israel bias” after granting the Palestinian Territories full membership (Countries, UNESCO, 2019).

## II. Topic Information

### A. History of the Topic

A post-conflict society is the United Nation’s goal for every country currently in conflict, a society where there is rising peace, justice and the will to change. Respecting

a country's culture and tradition are base factors for keeping a country stable. When the culture is preserved in a country, it is more likely that the community is united. Cultures and traditions are purposely destroyed or targeted during an armed conflict because those who aim to harm, tend to go for the base of a country first. To be able to properly achieve peace and reconciliation in a country, it is required to have recovered the damaged culture and traditions left behind. There is no town without its people, and there are no people without its culture (Success of 2030 Agenda, UN, 2019).

Several countries are targeted or have already become a "victim" of the destruction of cultural traditions, either purposely or accidentally. In Mosul, Iraq, the artifacts and culture are displaced by the effects of the Battle of Mosul. Currently, Mosul's long-lived heritages of arts, traditions, and cultures are quickly vanishing (Abdelmonem, The British Academy, 2017). Also, in Mali, many historical features located in the city of Timbuktu have been purposely destroyed. Many historical monuments, traditional materials, and rituals have been "erased". Fortunately, the process of conservation is happening in Timbuktu mobilized by some international communities (PBS Newshour, 2016).

On the other hand, there are a number of countries that the cultures and traditions affected positively, uniting countries and moving forward following an armed conflict. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Mostar Bridge located in the city of Mostar connected communities and access to jobs and services. During the Bosnian War, the Mostar Bridge was destroyed, shocking all of the Bosnians in Mostar and prioritized the reconstruction of the bridge. In addition, the Mostar Bridge then became the cultural icon of society (Old Bridge Area, UNESCO, 2021). Also, in the Cyprus region, the Turkish Cyprus people and the Greek Cyprus people are making joint efforts to restore

cultural heritages that matter to both. There are already projects that succeeded in strengthening the harmony between alliances and cultures (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).

## B. Current Issues

**Afghanistan:** Much of Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage was destroyed by the Taliban during its rule in the 1990s. The United Nations has called the group's attacks on the country's history "cultural genocide" aimed at erasing the importance of art, dance, music and poetry to Afghanistan's culture and history. UNESCO, in conjunction with the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) and the Foundation for Cultural Heritage in Japan, is "currently taking Afghan cultural property found on the international art market into protective custody, particularly objects stolen from museums or discovered during illicit excavations." Moreover, since the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan's democratically elected government has taken steps to prevent the illegal smuggling of illicitly acquired artifacts. The Law on the Protection of Historical and Cultural Properties was revised with the assistance of UNESCO, in May 2004. Furthermore, the Afghan Interior Ministry established a special police force to protect the country's historical sites in Logar and Kapisa provinces (Activities, UNESCO, 2021).

**Iraq:** In September 2019, a special meeting was held at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, France to "review the state of Iraq's cultural heritage before opening discussion on how to best protect it." Decades of armed conflict and terrorism within the country have placed thousands of years of cultural heritage at risk. During the Iraq War between 2003 and 2011, as well as when large areas of the country were under the

control of the Islamic State group in the 2010s, thousands of artifacts from the country's museums and archeological sites were either destroyed or sold on the black market. The UN committee's director, Irina Bokova, stated that the preservation and protection of Iraq's cultural heritage is an important part of the peace process as it helps to end terrorism and unite Iraq's various cultural and religious groups (A Call, UNESCO, 2019).

**Syria:** Since Syria's civil war started in 2011, multiple cultural sites across the country have been looted and destroyed. One of the most significant sites impacted by the conflict was the ancient Roman-era temples in the city of Palmyra. In 2015, militants belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) blew up large parts of the city's main archeological sites and looted its museums to sell artifacts on the black market. UNESCO, along with dozens of museums and archeological associations around the world, has organized a fund to raise money to restore the ancient ruins. However, all work has been put on hold until the conflict ends and it is safe to begin restoration work. Small artifacts and artwork have been sent to Rome, Italy for restoration work and are currently being held in the National Museum of Damascus (Palmyra, Reuters, 2017).

### C. UN Action

The United Nations is working to strengthen links between cultural heritage and peacebuilding missions (Protecting Cultural Heritage, UN, 2016). For example, in Timbuktu, Mali, multiple historic texts, objects and buildings were destroyed by armed groups in the 2010s. In 2015, the Malian government and UNESCO launched a restoration project that will continue into the mid-2020s. According to UNESCO, rebuilding Mali's cultural heritage is important because a "community's cultural heritage

reflects its life, history and identity. Its preservation helps to rebuild broken communities, re-establish their identities, and link their past with their present and future” (Re-building, UNESCO, 20121). Furthermore, to protect cultures and traditions, in November 1972, UNESCO established the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. This convention outlines the responsibilities signatories have in protecting cultural heritage and aims to prevent the destruction of important sites and traditions during armed conflict (Convention, UNESCO, 2021).

### III. Essential Questions

1. What is a post-conflict society?
2. What is culture? What is a tradition?
3. What is the United Nations doing to preserve cultures and traditions in post-conflict societies?
4. Has your country had its cultures and traditions destroyed during an armed conflict? If so, in which way?
5. Are there any international laws or conventions which protect cultures and traditions during an armed conflict? If so, which ones?
6. Why are cultures and traditions often targeted during an armed conflict?
7. How do armed groups benefit from the destruction of cultures and traditions?

### IV. Resources

“A call to save Iraq’s cultural heritage.” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). United Nations, 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://en.unesco.org/news/call-save-iraqs-cultural-heritage>>.

“Activities to protect Afghanistan’s moveable cultural property.” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). United Nations, 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/257/>>.

“Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). United Nations, 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>>.

“Countries.” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). United Nations, 2019. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://en.unesco.org/countries>>.

“Cyprus.” Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-cyprus-issue-overview.en.mfa>>.

“Heritage.” U.S. Department of the Interior. U.S. Department of the Interior, 2021. Web. 15 Mar. 2021. <<https://www.doi.gov/international/what-we-do/heritage>>.

“Man who destroyed artifacts in Mali gets nine years in prison.” PBS News Hour. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 2016. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/man-destroyed-artifacts-mali-gets-nine-years-prison>>.

“Old Bridge Area of the Old City of Mostar.” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). United Nations, 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2020. <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/946/>>.

“Palmyra statue damaged by Islamic State goes on display in Damascus.” Reuters. Reuters, 2017. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-statu/palmyra-statu-damaged-by-islamic-state-goes-on-display-in-damascus-idUKKCN1C61FA?edition-redirect=uk>>.

“Preserving the Disappearing Cultural Heritage of Post-War Mosul, Iraq: Valuing Diversity in the Urban Recovery of Mosul’s Old Districts.” The British Academy. The British Academy, 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/heritage-dignity-violence-preserving-disappearing-cultural-heritage-post-war-mosul-iraq/>>.

“Projects.” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). United Nations, 2019. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<http://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/projects>>.

“Protecting Cultural Heritage Threads through United Nations Peacekeeping Strategy, Secretary-General Tells Yale University Colloquium.” United Nations (UN). United Nations, 2016. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sghsm17664.doc.htm#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20system%20is,took%20over%20Timbuktu%20in%202012>>.

“Re-building Cultural Heritage in Mali.” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). United Nations, 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://en.unesco.org/news/re-building-cultural-heritage-mali-0>>.

“Success of 2030 Agenda for Post-Conflict Countries Largely Uneven, Speakers Tell Economic and Social Council, as High-level Segment Closes.” United Nations (UN). United Nations, 2019. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/ecosoc7009.doc.htm>>.

“Two UN agencies team up to protect cultural heritage with geo-spatial technologies.” UN News. United Nations, 2016. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/07/533622-two-un-agencies-team-protect-cultural-heritage-geo-spatial-technologies>>.

“UNESCO in Brief - Mission and Mandate.” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). United Nations, 2020. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<https://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco>>.

“UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.” United Nations (UN). United Nations, 2013. Web. 12 Mar. 2021. <<http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/08/unesco-united-nations-educational-scientific-and-cultural-organization/>>.