

Blue Shield Annual Report 2024

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BLUE SHIELD
International



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“Almost 30 years of protecting heritage in crisis has given us time to reflect not only on what we’ve achieved, but on how we got there, and on where we want to be. ... Together with our heritage, humanitarian and uniformed partners, we have built on the creation of the Blue Shield by the founding four organisations in 1996 to establish the Blue Shield as a worldwide organisation.”

Peter Stone, President of the Blue Shield



A Letter from the President

As we all know, 2024 marked the 70th anniversary of the 1954 Hague Convention and its First Protocol and the 25th anniversary of the Second Protocol to the Convention. There were a plethora of meetings, events, and conferences held to commemorate these anniversaries, many organised by national committees of the Blue Shield as explained later in this Report and many attended by myself and others in the central team. I thank you all for your hard work in commemorating these anniversaries.

2024 was also a year when armed conflicts multiplied and dragged on. Last year the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) commented that *“The world is experiencing an unprecedented number of conflicts, which appear increasingly intractable due to the growing involvement of both domestic and external actors, a complex array of underlying drivers, and escalating geopolitical tensions”*¹. In the same document the IISS reported that *“fatalities from violent events rose by 37% year-on-year during the reporting period (1 July 2023–30 June 2024)”*. The UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) estimated that the number of people forced to flee their homes by conflict and persecution reached nearly 123 million by the end of June 2024.² These are appalling statistics. 2024 also saw proceedings at the International Court of Justice, where South Africa accused Israel of genocide in the Gaza Strip; an accusation also levelled by Ireland.

Anniversaries are a time to reflect and for looking forward. I think, in particular, we need to reflect on and look forward to the role the Blue Shield will play in the protection of cultural property in this conflict obsessed world.

We should reflect that; on 21 July 1953, Luther Evans, Director General of the newly established UN agency, UNESCO, addressed representatives of 37 countries who had assembled to draft what was to become the 1954 Hague Convention. He stressed that they had also come together to create the *“Red Cross for Cultural Property”*, and, he went on, *“...have it accepted by all States and by public opinion, that property of cultural value is entitled to the respect which civilised peoples recognise as due to civilians, prisoners of war, medical personnel and hospitals”*.

Over the following weeks, the assembled experts named Evans’ proposal the ‘Blue and White Shield’, after the formal emblem of the Convention, referring perhaps to a new organisation be established alongside the new Convention in 1954. Sadly, it was not to be. The Blue Shield was only established in 1996 in anticipation of the Second Protocol to the Convention: it is named in that Protocol as an eminent professional advisory body to the Inter-Governmental Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property. As well as the international team, Blue Shield national committees were established to parallel the Red Cross Societies around the world. The first committees were formed in 2000, shortly after the organisation’s creation, and will celebrate their 25th anniversary next year. Today we are proud to count 33 national committees and one regional committee (comprising 14 countries) in all inhabited continents, with more under construction, including in some of the most crisis-affected countries on the planet. Through them, the Blue Shield is protecting heritage on a global scale.

Almost 30 years of protecting heritage in crisis has given us time to reflect not only on what we’ve achieved,

¹ Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/publications/armed-conflict-survey/2024/editors-introduction>

² Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/year-turmoil-conflicts-crises-and-displacement-2024>



but on how we got there, and on where we want to be. In 1996 the Blue Shield was unfunded, and it was only in 2017 that limited funding was provided for a core team through a collaboration with Newcastle University (UK), via the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection & Peace. A remarkable support from an academic institution, albeit ultimately unsustainable long-term. But, thanks to that support, the Blue Shield central team has been able to establish donor funded projects in Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, supporting colleagues in devastating situations, along with partnerships with key organisations who have a role to play in protecting heritage in crisis. Of course, core funding remains critical to enable Blue Shield to deliver its work that is so desperately needed in our world beset by conflict.

In 2024, the Board and central team began multi-year project to look at how we can develop a Blue Shield that can face the challenges the future might hold, and be a dynamic responsive organisation who are there for the communities who need us. Considerable time, resource, and effort went into developing an application to the J M Kaplan Fund and, shortly before Christmas, Blue Shield was delighted to be awarded a grant to carry out *“a robust review of the aspirations, vision, mission, structure, governance, policies, activities, and working practices of the Blue Shield in the short, medium, and long term”*. This review will be reported on at the 2025 General Assembly. In parallel, we have begun a strategic fundraising initiative to finance a central team for the Blue Shield that we hope will continue and develop our work under our six areas of activity, delivering comprehensive heritage protection in all stages of a crisis.

Together with our heritage, humanitarian and uniformed partners, we have built on the creation of the Blue Shield by the founding four organisations in 1996 to establish the Blue Shield as a worldwide organisation that *“has gained strength and stature and is now undeniably a major global CPP player”*.³

With my best wishes,



Professor Peter G Stone
President

³ Erik Kleijn, Senior advisor to UNESCO on Cultural Heritage Protection in Armed Conflict 2018-2022.

Meet the Blue Shield

The Blue Shield is an association of NGOs around the world, all working for a common goal. It is committed to



the protection of the world's cultural property, and is concerned with the protection of cultural and natural heritage, tangible and intangible, in the event of armed conflict, natural- or human-made disaster.

(Article 2.1, 2016 Articles of Association).

The Blue Shield has its roots in international law – in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. When the international community came together in 1953 to draft landmark legislation, exclusively dedicated to protecting cultural heritage in conflict, they saw a role for people dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage in the same way the Red Cross societies protected people.

That vision ultimately led to the founding of the Blue Shield in 1996 by its core partners:



It was founded by, and continues to work closely with, the International Council on Archives (ICA), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

Today the Blue Shield is independent, impartial, neutral, and non-profit, seeking to protect cultural heritage in conflict and following disasters by

- » advocating for the implementation of international humanitarian law in national law,
- » providing capacity building and training,
- » promoting proactive protection measures before conflict and disaster,
- » responding during crisis, and
- » providing assistance after conflict and disaster.

The Blue Shield works in partnership with the major international heritage organisations around the world, coordinating across the cultural heritage sector to work with partners in the armed forces, emergency response, border and customs, and all those uniformed partners, and colleagues in the humanitarian sector, in conflict and disaster. We advocate for, support, and train in the implementation of International Humanitarian Law, especially the 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols, but we also work within the UN and UNESCO's strategic agenda, promoting the UN Security Council Resolutions, and UNESCO's cultural conventions. Key international frameworks for Disaster Risk Reduction, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, are also central to the Blue Shield's work. The protection of heritage cannot be left until a crisis occurs: proactive preparation of protective measures is just as important as response in combat and crisis.



Working in its international capacity, the secretariat has employed numerous specialist consultants and support personnel, carrying out field missions, situational analyses, capacity building, and training around the world.

Blue Shield International has formal agreements with the International Committee of the Red Cross, NATO SHAPE, the United Nations Interim Deployment in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, Cultural Emergency Response, Biladi, and the GyeongGi Cultural Foundation (Republic of Korea). In early 2024, we were excited to sign a formal Letter of Intent with UNESCO's Culture and Emergencies Sector, to work together on heritage protection in crisis. However, the Blue Shield works cross-sector with all those involved in heritage protection, including humanitarians, the armed forces, and emergency services.



Cooperative action is no less important for the Blue Shield's national committees: in this report you will see work spanning the globe that relies on local, regional, national and international partnerships. Just as the 1954 Hague Convention [Preamble] tells us

” ...any damage to cultural property, irrespective of the people it belongs to, is a damage to the cultural heritage of all humanity, because every people contributes to the world's culture...

This statement recognises a core value of the Blue Shield that underpins all its work, bringing all those working to protect heritage in crisis together.

The Blue Shield Board

The Blue Shield Board



...is the principal governing body of the Association. It will identify and set priorities and policies for the Association and provide a framework for the work of National Committees. It will provide an annual report to National Committees and Founding Organisations and will maintain good communication with the Founding Organisations, National Committees, and those under formation and post relevant information on the Association's website. The Board will also ensure the good management of the organization, oversee its resources, set its budgets and safeguard its reputation, international esteem, and public regard.

Articles of Association, Article 6.1

The Board is composed of an elected President, and an even appointment of elected members of national committees and representatives from the Blue Shield Founding Organisations. It is elected every three years. In 2024, the international Blue Shield Board was

- » Peter Stone, President.
- » Medea Ekner, ICOM Director General.
- » Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly, from the Lebanese Committee of the Blue Shield
Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly unfortunately resigned in February 2024 to focus on Lebanon. We thank her for all her hard work for the Blue Shield.
- » Emilie Gagnet Leumas, from the ICA, Chair of the ICA Expert Group on Emergency Management and Disaster Preparedness.
Carlos Eduardo Serrano Vásquez, the Executive Director of the International Council on Archives (ICA), replaced Emilie in Autumn 2024. We thank Emilie for all her hard work and we welcome Carlos to the Blue Shield Board!
- » Hamady Gaye, from the Senegalese Blue Shield Committee.
- » Sharon Memis, Secretary General and IFLA CEO.
- » Anna Puhr, from the Austrian Blue Shield Committee.
- » Klaus Weschenfelder, Treasurer, from the German Blue Shield Committee.
- » Michał Wosiński, expert member of ICOMOS ICLAFI – International Scientific Committee on Legal Administrative and Financial Issues.





Left to Right: Peter Stone, Medea Ekner, Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly, Emilie Gagnet Leumas, Hamady Gaye, Sharon Memis, Anna Puhr, Carlos Eduardo Serrano Vásquez, Klaus Weschenfelder, Michał Wosiński.

[Go online to Meet the Board!](#)





Members of the same species sharing a common genetic ancestry ,We the peoples of the United Nations' (to use the opening words of the United Nations Charter ...) have a common culture and patrimony in which the loss of the physical or spiritual cultural heritage of one people is a loss for the whole of humanity....

It is not unreasonable for the world community to seek to protect its cultural inheritance, and pass it on to future generations, even in the most extreme emergencies of war. Indeed, the need to minimise the effect on both the spiritual and physical heritage has been recognised in a growing body of International Humanitarian Law during more than a century. ...

Non-governmental organisations have the potential to play a most important role in providing direct assistance in terms of professional and technical labour, specialised equipment and materials for protection and emergency conservation, and for assisting with the temporary evacuation of important movable cultural property in times of actual or threatened armed conflict.

Patrick J. Boylan

Review of the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (The Hague Convention of 1954)
UNESCO, 1993



Patrick Boylan – a truly remarkable legacy

The Blue Shield was deeply saddened by the passing of Patrick Boylan, a leading figure in cultural property protection and one of the founders of the Blue Shield association, aged 84. He passed away in February 2024 following a short illness, after struggling for some time with health problems including dementia.



” Born just two weeks before the start of World War II in the English port city of Hull, Yorkshire, that was to suffer the most severe and sustained bomb damage of any town in the United Kingdom, my earliest memories are of war: the destruction of our family home when I was only eighteen months old: a single but clear memory of my paternal grandparents before they were killed along with over sixty neighbours less than three months later in a communal shelter just two hundred metres from the main railway line to the docks of the country’s third most important port. However, even the worst of those experiences left me unprepared for the vast areas of total destruction seen during my first visits to Rotterdam and Koln [Köln] in the early 1950s.

Patrick J. Boylan, London, 30 April 1993 (Foreword to the Review of the Hague Convention, 1993)

In addition to illustrious careers in heritage management and academia, Patrick Boylan was instrumental in developing heritage protection in armed conflict as we know it today. In 1993, Patrick was hired by UNESCO to undertake a Review of the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (The Hague Convention of 1954). This vital legislation was the first widely internationally signed treaty regulating the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflicts, placing obligations on states parties and their armed forces to make preparations for safeguarding cultural property in peacetime, and then to also take measures during conflict to protect it and to minimise the effect of combat. At the time of the review, however, just 82 States were party to the Convention, and 68 to its First Protocol (also 1954). Patrick’s pivotal review found that the Convention was *“still entirely valid, [...] applicable and relevant”* but with some deficient areas, and he made a large number of valuable recommendations. There were two major outcomes, which he was instrumental in realising.

The first was the founding of the Blue Shield, an aspiration of the drafters of the 1954 Hague Convention that was not realised. His review found that:

” Non-Governmental Organisations also have an important role to play [as their] status can also give them a very considerable advantage over governmental and inter-governmental organisations in cases where there are serious political problems making the practical involvement of bodies such as UNESCO impossible. [...] Non-governmental organisations ... are ... exploring the possibility of creating some form of non-governmental ‘Blue Shield’ international organisation for cultural property, as a direct parallel of the Red Cross in relation to other areas of humanitarian assistance.’ [...] Non-governmental organisations have the potential to play a most important role in providing direct assistance in terms of professional and technical labour, specialised equipment and materials for protection and emergency conservation, and for assisting with the temporary evacuation of important movable cultural property in times of actual or threatened armed conflict.

Following a number of conversations in which Patrick was heavily involved, in 1996, Patrick, as Vice-President of ICOM, came together with George MacKenzie, the ICA Deputy Secretary-General, Dinu Bumbaru, of the ICOMOS International Executive Committee, and Marie-Therese Varlamoff, Director of IFLA Preservation and Conservation Core Activity, to found an organisation that could bring together the heritage sector to react quickly to the destruction of heritage in conflict and crisis, promoting coordination and the sharing of cross-sectoral expertise – the Blue Shield.

” Our vision is that in time the Blue Shield should become for cultural heritage protection what the Red Cross is for humanitarian protection.

George MacKenzie, Founder

That organisation has continued to grow: 2024 saw the approval of the Blue Shield’s 34th committee, in Sweden, with more under construction in every inhabited continent. It is active in conflicts, disasters, and safeguarding preparations around the world, and has Memorandums of Understanding with a number of major organisations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross. In 2021, the Blue Shield founders were presented with an Advocacy Award by the International Institute for Conservation.

The second outcome was the creation of a new international Protocol in 1999 to augment the 1954 Hague Convention and its 1954 Protocol. The new Protocol, which Patrick was prominent in drafting, supplemented apparent deficiencies in the Convention, provided definitions over areas that lacked clarity, and updated the legislation in line with advances in international law. It also created a new category of protection for cultural sites, called enhanced protection. 2024 was the Protocol’s 25th anniversary (and the 70th anniversary of the Convention): its founding drafter was well remembered.

Patrick’s contribution of the field of heritage protection in conflict cannot be overstated. However, he also directed museums, arts and archives services in England before becoming Professor and a Head of Department at City University, London. In that time, he was devoted to supporting the next generation of heritage professionals, supervising 25 successful PhD students and over 200 MA projects. He authored numerous publications on the protection of culture in times of war, and worked as a consultant to UNESCO, EU, World Heritage Committee, Council of Europe, World Bank and many national governments. He was the Centenary President of The Museums Association (UK) 1978-1980, and Vice-President of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) 1992-1998, amongst other posts.

In addition to his academic legacy, Patrick's influence on international law remains profound. In December 2024, the Convention had been ratified by 136 countries, covering most of the area of the world, and Patrick's work across five continents is in no small part responsible for the 90 ratifications of the Second Protocol, increasing each year. In December 2024, the number of sites placed under Enhanced Protection rose to 91, as States Parties are realising the value of the protective system Patrick helped develop. Working in partnership with our founding four organisations, the Blue Shield has become a global association, bringing together heritage professionals to work in crisis and conflict around the world.

Patrick knew

” The loss of the physical or spiritual cultural heritage of one people is a loss for the whole of humanity. This loss is not just a loss for the people or community directly deprived of the evidence of their own past and present culture: the consequence is ultimately no less grave for those who may have deliberately brought it about. [...] It is not unreasonable for the world community to seek to protect its cultural inheritance, and pass it on to future generations, even in the most extreme emergencies of war.

(Foreword, 1993 Review)

We hope we can continue to promote his remarkable legacy.⁴

⁴ Links to his work, and the materials and videos referred to here, are available on the Blue Shield website: <https://theblueshield.org/patrick-boylan-a-truly-remarkable-legacy/>



Blue Shield International: Reflections



Blue Shield International: Highlights

Proactive Protection and Response

- » Remote monitoring of 4 conflicts.
- » Support to create a Cultural Property Protection Unit in Ukraine.
- » Working with heritage professionals in Sudan and Syria.

Capacity Building, Education, and Training

- » Support for 10 partner military cultural heritage protection courses and exercises.
- » Supported 2 partner Illicit trafficking workshops.
- » Developed and ran 2 cultural heritage protection training courses and workshops.
- » 1 workshop report published.

Law, Policy and Implementation, and Advocacy

- » Spoke at 17 events worldwide on cultural property protection, including conferences, seminars, workshops and panels; many of them were invited keynote addresses or in plenary sessions.
- » Delivered 4 presentations on illicit trafficking.
- » Published case studies from those directly affected by war and its legacy with **Blue Shield Türkiye**.
- » Published 5 peer reviewed academic publications: 3 illicit trafficking publications and 2 publications on international law and the Blue Shield, with others in press.
- » Advocated for Lebanon with the inter-governmental Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict as an expert advisory body.

Coordination

- » Approved 2 new National Committees in **Armenia** and **Sweden**
- » 1 new Letter of Intent with UNESCO
- » Continued to build on Memorandums of Understanding / Letter of Intent partnerships with UNESCO, NATO and the GyeongGi Cultural Foundation
- » Co-organised the Blue Shield's in person General Assembly, bringing together National Committees from around the world for *Shielding the Past: 70 years of the Hague Convention*.



2024 in Review

Blue Shield International is the international arm of the Blue Shield organisation. 2024 was another exciting year for the team, involving collaborations with international and multi-national agencies and organisations to raise standards, advocating for national implementation of international humanitarian law, and providing support to a broad spectrum of crises on the ground through monitoring and capacity building, working to assess damage and providing support to crisis-affected peoples. Multi-sector capacity building and training in how to protect cultural property in crisis was a core focus, alongside the development of new partnerships - comprehensive heritage protection requires support from a wide variety of stakeholders.

The foundation of the Blue Shield is in the 1954 Hague Convention, and especially in the 1999 Second Protocol. 2024 was the 70th anniversary of the Convention, and the 25th anniversary of the Second Protocol. Given these historic links to a Convention with the goal of encouraging States Parties *“to take all possible steps to protect cultural property”* (Convention, Preamble), BSI has been active worldwide in advocating for adherence to the critical guidance these instruments provide, which are equally valuable in disasters. The lesson is clear: protection will be much more successful if implemented in peacetime – a motto that underpins BSI's work.

The anniversary celebrations have inspired numerous reviews of the worldwide implementation, applicability and challenges facing the Convention, and international humanitarian law in general. BSI has played an active part in that, exploring State Party activity and working with those in active conflicts and crisis situations to understand their needs. BSI has played an active part in advocacy throughout the year attending numerous Convention anniversary events. The Blue Shield's message is clear – the Hague Convention remains just as valid today as it did when it was first written in 1954; the problems are the widespread failures in implementation – and the wider decline in adherence to international humanitarian law (IHL). Advocacy for higher standards is more important than ever.

This isn't to say BSI's other work has stopped. BSI, through its expert Working Group, and partners like the OSCE, is also heavily involved in work to counter illicit trafficking of cultural objects, raising awareness and contributing to training around the world.

Partnership is critical to our approach. BSI is proud to work with heritage professionals, defence and security sectors, and humanitarians to ensure the heritage of those in crisis is protected, enhance capacity, and address heritage damage and protection as a national security issue. As an independent, impartial, neutral NGO, BSI is also able to work with governments and non-state actors, as well as recognising the importance of the humanitarian sector: for some crisis-affected people, heritage is a basic need. Memorandums of Understanding and Letters of Intent form a key basis for Blue Shield's cross-sector partnership approach, with key agreements with the ICRC, NATO, and others. 2024 also saw the expansion of our key partners, as the Blue Shield signed a formal agreement with UNESCO.

2024, however, was a time of transition for Blue Shield International. BSI took the opportunity to pause most active fieldwork and evaluate where its energies are most needed. In order to look outwards, BSI knew it needed to look inwards. BSI's financial turnover is increasing at a rapid pace, and future financial projections show this trend continuing, in recognition of the organisation's significant achievements pro-



tecting heritage worldwide. With immense thanks to the J M Kaplan Foundation for their financial support, BSI is undertaking a full governance review: this began in 2024 and is expected to be completed in 2026. BSI will review its management and reporting structures, making sure the organisation has everything it needs to carry the organisation into this new phase of future work. It has consolidated existing work and is looking at where BSI's time could best be spent, and how resources could be acquired for that work.

In 2024 BSI submitted 8 major grant applications (with more in preparation) with global partners to continue its critical work providing active support to crisis-affected countries, resilience preparations, and advocacy in IHL implementation. BSI received several notifications of success in 2024, including the J M Kaplan Found's grant, (and more in 2025!), supporting our vital work.



Proactive Protection and Response

Proactive Protection

In his review of the 1954 Hague Convention, Patrick Boylan identified that lack of implementation of the safeguarding measures was a key contributor to the continuing destruction of cultural property in armed conflict, which is no less true for disasters. Sadly, despite his recommendations, thirty years later, little has changed. As a result, significant work goes towards the promotion of peacetime protection, because once a crisis begins, it's often too late.

BSI has reached out to governments and heritage professionals to raise awareness of the importance of safeguarding measures, speaking at numerous events and forums. We have spoken at many events to lobby for the importance of much-needed protective measures (see [Law, Policy, and Advocacy](#)). However, a major achievement in 2024 was running the Blue Shield's training course on proactive protection at Palatul Mogoșoaia, in partnership with the National Institute for Heritage in Romania, where attendees explored the measures needed for venue protection in a crisis (see [Capacity Building](#)) as part of the *Shielding the Past: 70 Years of the Hague Convention* event.



Exploring venue protection at Palatul Mogoșoaia, Romania, as part of the *Shielding the Past* event © Blue Shield / National Institute of Heritage.

Response

Monitoring and response remain critical in areas affected by crisis, conflict, disaster, and occupation. BSI knows that the protection of cultural property during conflict contributes to healthy, peaceful, secure, stable, sustainable communities, and that IHL – along with Human Rights Law, UN Security Council resolutions and other key legal instruments – are fundamental cornerstones.

The Board have continued to monitor conflicts and disasters with national and international partners in four additional conflicts, including working closely with **Blue Shield Georgia**, where on the ground activity was not possible.

Improving capacity to implement international law is fundamental to activity, and it can't always be done remotely. BSI teams have been out to conflict affected areas, continuing to speak directly with those affected, and advocate for improvements in heritage protection amongst senior officials.

Ukraine

Ukraine has remained a key area of focus as the conflict continued into its third year: BSI's Director of Operations continued meeting with key officials, including the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Principal Deputy National Security Advisor in Kyiv, and the Commanding General for the Territorial Defense Forces (TDF), to uphold the implementation of international humanitarian law, and support capacity building work. He also continued to attend the UNESCO Emergency Coordination meetings for Ukraine as a valuable partner alongside other international organisations, and to hear from and work directly with the Ukrainian government and heritage protection organisations. Blue Shield is now waiting on the outcome of major funding applications to provide much-needed support on the ground.

BSI has been working since 2023 to support the establishment of a Cultural Property Protection capability within the Ukrainian military – an effort which was realised in December 2024 when the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine announced the creation of a new unit that will specialize in the protection of cultural heritage. The main task of the unit will be to provide advice and recommendations on planning the operations of the Armed Forces, taking into account policies for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage sites that may be threatened by hostilities. The newly created unit will consist of military personnel with specialised education and experience in culture, archaeology, history, and museum work – including a member of the **Blue Shield National Committee of Ukraine** which is currently **under construction**.

Sudan

Sudan has become a new priority area as Blue Shield seeks to support the new **Blue Shield Sudan National Committee (Under Construction)** in providing heritage support during the ongoing conflict and crippling effects of climate change. Nearly 13 million people—one in three Sudanese—have been displaced by the devastating conflict. Half of Sudan's population – some 25 million people – need humanitarian assistance and protection. The country is facing extreme shortages of food, water, medicine and fuel and more than half the population (25.6 million) are facing acute food insecurity, including 8.5 million of them at emergency levels.⁵ Cultural heritage has become another victim in a conflict with no end in sight: there have been numerous reports of significant heritage damage to monuments and museums, yet the true scale has almost certainly been under-reported.

⁵ April 2025 figures: <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/sudan-crisis-explained/>



On 18 April, 2024, the UNESCO Regional Cairo Office for Egypt and Sudan, in liaison with the League of Arab States, organised an expert meeting to assess the Impact of War on Sudanese Cultural Heritage, which the Blue Shield's Director of Operations attended. He explained the mission and activities of Blue Shield International, stressing its ongoing support for evacuating artefacts from war zones, and called for the urgent establishment of **Blue Shield Sudan** to respond to the humanitarian crisis affecting Sudanese people and endangering its heritage. As access into much of Sudan is extremely difficult for heritage professionals and humanitarians alike, BSI is concentrating on how it can best support its Sudanese members, working together with international partners like Heritage for Peace to develop joint projects.

Syria

Syria also remains a key area of BSI's work: the conflict has generated poverty on a massive scale, alongside the world's largest refugee crisis. BSI field teams undertook Assessment Missions supported by the UK Cultural Protection Fund (CPF) to review pressures on cultural property in Syria caused by the earthquake in 2023. As an independent, impartial, neutral NGO, BSI was able to visit areas outside government control, documenting the conditions at sites under the control of the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham / Islamic Salvation Government (HTS), the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The impact on the Syrian people from 14 years of conflict has been devastating: the team saw first-hand how many refugees are forced to reoccupy abandoned cultural heritage and archaeological sites, and that looting has become commonplace.

Whilst the political changes in late 2024 have brought a tentative peace to parts of Syria, the unstable situation continues to affect the cultural heritage. BSI teams have continued to monitor the situation. BSI understands that protection needs cannot be identified externally – it is critical to hear from those affected. In December 2024, BSI, together with its partner Heritage for Peace (a Syrian-run NGO also dedicated to heritage protection) co-hosted the first part of a two-part webinar – giving voice to Syrians from across the different regions. Speakers outlined the situation before the war, and the situation facing cultural heritage and cultural heritage workers now. In Part Two (hosted in January 2025), speakers outlined the challenges and obstacles to heritage protection in their regions, and their specific needs to continue to protect Syria's rich cultural heritage. The webinars (which are available online in English and Arabic⁶) were attended by over 100 experts and organisations: it is BSI's firm hope that the international community will use this opportunity to address the critical needs outlined directly by Syrian heritage protection workers.

” We are really grateful to Blue Shield that we were able to organize this very fast webinar, to reflect and to think about the actual situation in Syria. There is a need; and this webinar was organised in order to reflect on the situation of cultural heritage in Syria. We have a very difficult situation now, after 13 years of a civil war ... but again, the country is still facing many challenges, and our heritage in Syria is still in a very big risk.

Isber Sabrine, Chair, Heritage for Peace (Syrian)

⁶ Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/supporting-syrians-and-their-heritage-webinars-parts-1-2/>



”

As part of the Mobile Training Team, Blue Shield International delivered an excellent virtual briefing on the organization’s mission and areas of activity. In addition to significantly contributing to the overall learning outcomes of the training, [the] highly professional participation was instrumental in raising awareness of responsibilities related to the protection of cultural and natural heritage - tangible and intangible - from the effects of conflict and other emergencies.

Angelo Malizia, OF-5 ITA A, Branch Head, J9 CIMIC



Capacity Building, Education, and Training

The Hague Convention can only be successful if its *“principles are made known to the whole population, especially the armed forces and personnel engaged in the protection of cultural property”* (Article 25). To realise this, training and capacity building are a core part of BSI’s activity: staff work to support governments, heritage professionals, and national and multi-national armed forces in understanding and upholding their obligations under international humanitarian law – focussing on the principles of the 1954 Hague Convention. BSI’s training focusses on developing the principles of cooperation that underpin the Convention, bringing the heritage and defence sectors closer together. Understanding and relationships developed in peace can avoid critical misunderstandings during conflict. Staff training and advocacy has reached armed forces and civilians from dozens of different countries.

Courses include the Cultural Property Protection Courses run by the Multinational Peace Support Education Center (Greece), and the European Security and Defence College Course at the Centro Alti Studi Difesa, Italy. These courses are attended by civilians and armed forces, and are excellent examples of the mutual training require to achieve cooperative heritage protection, developing Convention Article 7(2): *“cooperation between armed forces and the civilian authorities responsible for safeguarding”*; and Article 25: *“study of the Convention in programmes of military and civilian training - especially those engaged in the protection of cultural property”*.



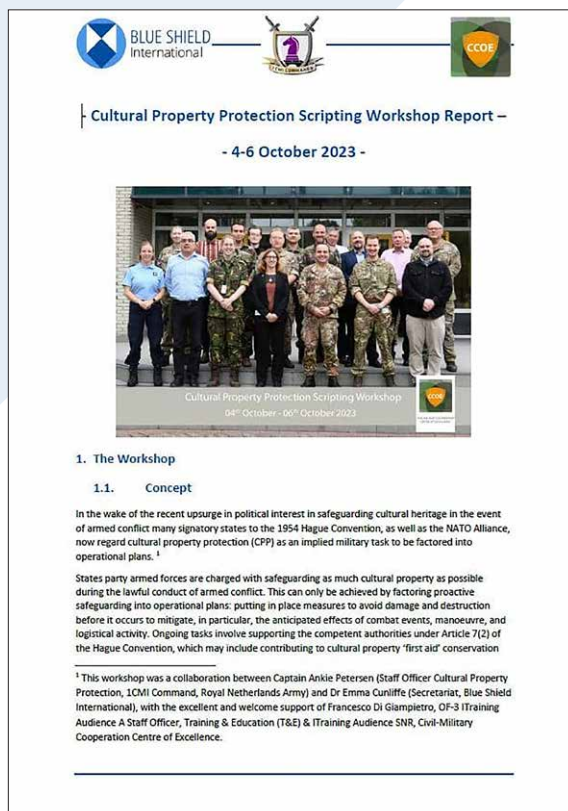
The President of the Blue Shield, Professor Stone, was proud to support the annual Multinational Peace Support Education Center Cultural Property Protection Course in September 2024. © BSI / MPSOTC

Through BSI's Letter of Intent with NATO to deliver education relating to cultural heritage protection, BSI also supported five different NATO training events, covering CPP integration into operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, for NATO staff and their international partners. BSI has also continued to support NATO in three high level, large scale, command post and tactical exercises, engaging with commanders and their senior staff to develop understanding of their legal and moral obligations. These exercises include scenarios of collective defence and crisis response – assisting NATO staff in preparing to respond in a wide variety of situations. Cultural property protection is not only factored into senior staff decision-making, but encourage staff to develop processes that ensure it is factored into activities including not only targeting, but military police activity, CIMIC, intelligence collection, stability policy, and host nation partnerships. This work is underpinned by academic research carried out in partnership with Newcastle University, to ensure that heritage protection methods are robust, and based on cutting edge understanding of the issues involved.

BSI knows it is vital to continue to advance CPP standards. In October 2023, BSI staff and the Netherlands 1 CMI Command hosted a Scripting Workshop in October with the CIMIC Centre Of Excellence which aimed to

- » Explore and understand relevant CPP challenges at the level, differentiated from strategic level tasks;
- » Explore and understand relevant CPP challenges in all phases of a mission and all types of deployment;
- » Share good practice and experience; in order to
- » Develop expertise in providing CPP exercise support.

These were realised through two key training formats: wargames and large-scale exercises at the tactical level, with the ultimate goal of enriching training so that CPP is encountered as a planning factor with true operational impact. In early 2024, BSI was pleased to publish the report and recommendations on the BSI website⁷.



⁷ Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/scripting-workshop-report-available/>



However, BSI hasn't only focussed on the 1954 Hague Convention: the humanitarian sector are also key partners. The protection of people is inextricably linked to the protection of their cultural heritage. Cultural heritage destruction, whether deliberate or unintentional, can have profound impacts on people affected by crisis, exacerbating the impact of an emergency and increasing other humanitarian needs, such as security and mental health. However, cultural heritage can also be an opportunity for the humanitarian ecosystem. If cultural heritage needs are included in a humanitarian response, research findings suggest that this helps build the capacity of affected communities to meet their own needs, contributes to durable solutions and supports reconciliation, peace, and security.


Jennifer Price-Jones, BSI's humanitarian lead, together with Swansea University and Newcastle University, developed a brief four-part online video series⁸ for humanitarian actors to

- » demonstrate the links between cultural heritage protection and the humanitarian ecosystem,
- » explain why cultural heritage protection is important to people affected by crisis and why it should be considered a humanitarian issue, and
- » explore why and how it might be included in humanitarian response.

Each video in this series is presented by a different person connected to the Blue Shield from around the world, showing the global impact of this vital issue.

Cultural
Heritage
Protection and
the
Humanitarian
Ecosystem

Video Series





Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

**Impact
Acceleration
Account**









⁸ Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/blue-shield-leads-with-humanitarian-cultural-heritage-protection-course/>

However, BSI's biggest focus was the training it ran alongside the Blue Shield General Assembly in September 2024, together with our partners, the Romanian Institute for Heritage of the Romanian Ministry of Culture (see [Coordination](#)) - *Shielding the Past: 70 Years of the Hague Convention*. Attendees came from around the world, and BSI hosted several panels and workshops during the event, including:

[A Panel Discussion on the 70th anniversary of the Hague Convention](#). Key topics included the challenges facing Romania in implementing the Convention, including a lack of civil or military preparation, and the issue of the scale of heritage in Romania; suggestions to improve safeguarding; synergies between the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, and the 1954 Hague Convention in preventing the illicit trafficking of cultural property during and after conflict; and a discussion of the challenges in protecting heritage in conflict. The need to plan for conflict – and the ways in which that requires different planning to other disaster preparations – was a key theme stressed by the international Secretariat, and explored in depth in the field trip workshop. Cross-sector advice is critical – the heritage sector cannot operate in isolation, but must work with the security and defence sectors.

[A Panel Discussion on Mentoring New Committees](#). National Committees aim to coordinate the heritage sector, and ensure no heritage is forgotten in a crisis. They have the ability to look beyond legalistic definitions of heritage to the communities on the ground, those who make and use heritage – tangible and intangible. They can often reach further than government agencies, working in partnership with them, but advocating for change when needed. When the Blue Shield was founded in 1996, it was with a vision for a national committee in every country of the world. With that in mind, BSI was encouraged to provide a panel that would share perspectives on: what the Blue Shield expects from its committees; the processes to create a committee; what the challenges are in doing so and what are the perspectives from the newest committee; and membership structures and ways of working. As well as speakers from BSI, speakers included [Blue Shield Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden](#) and [USA](#).

[A Workshop on Implementing Respect in the 1954 Hague Convention](#). The Convention tasks armed forces to “work with the competent authorities responsible for safeguarding” (Article 7.2). That cooperative relationship is a fundamental principle of the Convention. However, misunderstandings about the obligations of the Hague Convention and its Protocols, and about the constraints armed forces operate under have long hindered the relationship between the heritage sector and defence. This workshop deepened the understanding of participants in building those relationships. This was followed by a [Case Study](#) building on [Implementing Respect using the example of Monte Cassino](#).

From a training perspective, the highlight of the event was the [field trip](#). Attendees were taken to Palatul Mogoșoaia, a Palace built between 1698 and 1702. The site consists of the palace itself, several historic outbuildings (some of which were used to showcase modern and religious art), the family mausoleum, a large glass conservatory, and a very historic church. The aim of the workshop was to explore how to implement the safeguarding obligations of the 1954 Hague Convention, using the site, specifically focussing on risk assessments for conflict. The workshop took place in a fictional scenario to help participants think about the foreseeable effects of conflict and consider appropriate measures.

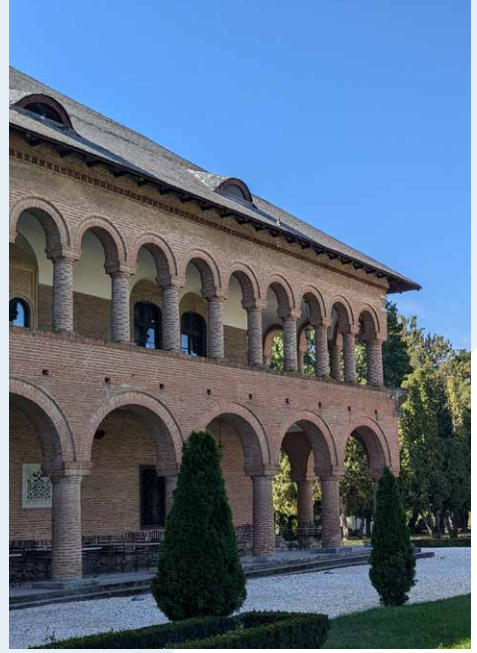
The workshop was designed and facilitated by Emma Cunliffe, supported by President Peter Stone and Andreea Pop, with thanks to the staff of the Palace, and to the National Heritage Institute staff for their tireless and skilful translation.

Participant feedback rated the training highly:

- » *The workshops and field trip were all excellent.*
- » *I really enjoyed the workshop and hope to be able to do something similar.*
- » *The quality of the Training Day and workshop on MonteCassino and the other case studies was very rewarding since they had provoked some excellent thoughtful discussion in small groups that reflected the complexity of delivering good CPP during armed conflict.*
- » *The workshop and scenario was great exercise and [I] would like to do more of these.*
- » *The workshop was a unique experience: no-one else really addresses these challenges. It really made me think about heritage protection in a new way: more people need to be exposed to these ideas.*



Conference panels and field trip to Palatul Mogoșoaia, Romania, as part of the *Shielding the Past* event © Blue Shield / National Institute of Heritage.



Heritage Crime and Illicit Trafficking

States Parties who have ratified the 1954 Hague Convention, its Protocols, and / or the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (which is most of the world at 148 states parties) all agree that the looting of cultural objects is a crime, as is the unnecessary damage or destruction of cultural heritage during conflict, whether caused by illegal looting or military activity. The ensuing trafficking of cultural objects has been linked to organised crime, terrorism, and the continuation of conflicts - as well as depriving communities of their cultural heritage. The prevention of looting and unnecessary damage are legal obligations, but more importantly, they protect the heritage of at-risk communities. Evidence from around the world tells us that it is often the most vulnerable communities, with the least resources to act, whose heritage is most threatened in a crisis. It is vital to treat these situations as heritage crime, and investigate and prosecute them accordingly, to bring justice for affected populations, and ensure accountability.

The BSI Working Group on Countering Trafficking, led by USCBS Chair Professor Patty Gerstenblith, has continued its important activity, including:

- » Supporting police with live investigations and prosecutions, acting as a source of referrals and coordination with experts and countries of origin;
- » Continuing to support heritage professionals in their efforts to prevent looting and protect movable cultural property in conflict zones;
- » Advocacy and awareness-raising via four presentations, exploring antiquities market regulations, and national and international countering trafficking legislation.

Professor Gerstenblith has also authored or co-authored several important academic publications:

- Patty Gerstenblith and Morag M. Kersel, „Cultural Heritage and Security Policy,“ *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 209-37 (2024).
- Patty Gerstenblith and Wang Yunxia, „Article 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention,“ in *The 1970 UNESCO Convention and 1995 Unidroit Conventions on Stolen or Illegally Transferred Cultural Property: A Commentary*, edited by Ana Filipa Vrdoljak et al., 280-297 (Oxford University Press, 2024).
- Patty Gerstenblith, „Returning Illegally Trafficked Cultural Objects: Civil Forfeiture at the Intersection of Private and Criminal Law,“ in *Cultural Property Crime and the Law: Legal Approaches to Protection, Repatriation, and Countering Illicit Trade*, edited by Michelle Fabiani et al., 81-97 (Routledge, 2024).

Forensic evidence collection is a vital part of heritage crime: BSI has continued to support the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) with their highly successful Heritage Crime Task Force (HCTF) workshops on Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property. The programme aims to tackle organised criminal and terrorist networks profiting from this growing area of crime by focussing on the critical intersection of law enforcement, border security, and museums cooperation in the global fight against heritage trafficking, and its direct links to organised crime and terrorism financing, money laundering, and corruption networks. BSI are proud to support this course, which provides practical skills in forensic investigation and prosecution techniques, whilst enabling the development of the partnerships and networks that are critical to developing the cross-border cooperation needed to combat transnational crime. The course is attended by police, border guards, financial and forensic investigators, museums staff, academics, and staff from Ministries of Culture. This unique structure encourages the coordination of operational efforts in real-time across Europe and North America to bolster law enforcement capacity, map and target trafficking networks, and assist countries in heritage crime investigations.



International Legal Framework for Preserving the Archaeological Heritage

Patty Gerstenblith
DePaul University College of Law



Frontiers and Emerging Challenges
in Cultural Heritage Preservation
Image courtesy of John Russell

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May 19, 2025

University of Chicago ISAC (Paris)

The Blue Shield: Preserving Cultural Heritage
Patty Gerstenblith
Distinguished Research Professor
DePaul University College of Law
Chair, Working Group on Countering Trafficking of Cultural Materials
President, U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield



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March 5, 2025



Securing Yemen's Cultural Heritage: Challenges and Solutions

Dr. Patty Gerstenblith
Professor, DePaul University College of Law

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U.S. Mission to Yemen
U.S. Department of State
Speakers' Bureau
Aden Again Cultural Fndtn
August 15, 2024

”

They „spoke of how this made them unbelievably sad – many shed tears when they mentioned the destruction of their heritage. ...

Among these war sufferers, my postgraduate students in particular seem to have discovered a way to express their feelings in their work. It is my belief that this helps their healing process and, at the same time, it becomes a way for them to show people what they are going through, and to raise awareness about war damage. By reading these papers, our readers will not only see how these young people suffer, but the situations in their home countries will come a little closer to you – and you will come a closer to what historic heritage means for human beings“.

Dr Zeynep Aygen, Blue Shield Türkiye, and Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University



Law, Policy and Implementation, and Advocacy

The anniversary of the 1954 Hague Convention and its Second Protocol brought advocacy to the forefront of BSI's work. A core principle underpinning the Convention is that it cannot be successful without wide dissemination of its principles throughout armed forces and civilians involved in its protection, and amongst the whole population. Other laws underpinning the Blue Shield's mission are no less important – the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) and other international legal instruments, which together strengthen the full spectrum of cultural heritage protection.

As an expert advisory body to the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Protection in the Event of Armed Conflict (Article 27, Second Protocol), BSI was pleased to take an active role in supporting the addition of Lebanese sites to the International List of Cultural Property Under Enhanced Protection. BSI staff supported states parties to advise on protection strategies for enhanced protection registrations, and wrote to the Committee at the request of colleagues in Lebanon to endorse the urgent registration of 34 Lebanese sites under enhanced protection, and to support the request for support funding from the International Fund for Cultural Property. Both requests were unanimously granted by the Committee.

In addition, BSI has actively contributed to a wide programme of events to build partnerships, advocate for collaborative CPP, and raise awareness of the Blue Shield's mission and work, much of which was livestreamed, or is available on YouTube.

BSI is committed to the Convention's principle that

” the preservation of cultural heritage is of great importance for all peoples of the world and that it is important that this heritage should receive international protection (Preamble), as are States around the world.

This year, as well as running its own anniversary conference alongside the General Assembly, BSI attended and spoke at 17 conferences, seminars, workshops, and panels, many of them keynote addresses or plenary sessions, reaching across Europe, the Caucasus, Asia, the Arab Gulf States, and Africa. Events convened global experts on culture, heritage, education, human rights, interfaith dialogue, religious freedom, new technologies, and sustainability to discuss current issues, strategies to address them, and the potential for collaboration. Discussions aimed to generate new ideas for heritage protection in crisis and to establish improvements in implementing the 1954 Hague Convention. It was equally important to speak to governments, heritage professionals, armed forces, emergency responders, and all those with a role to play in heritage protection. Advocacy must be representative to be successful.





Panellists at the „Documenting the Destruction of Heritage & Seeking Solutions“, 15 May 2024. Left to Right: Emma Cunliffe, Blue Shield International; Vasyl Rozhko HeMo: Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab; Marina Lostal, University of Essex, moderated by moderated by Bijan Rouhani, Chair of the CER Board, and University of Oxford. Photo: Almicheal Fraay.



Blue Shield President, Professor Stone, speaks at the International Meeting on Protection and Restoration of Cultural Heritage with New and Emerging Technologies, Yerevan, Armenia, Oct 2024, alongside Seda Grigorian, Chair of **Blue Shield Armenia** © Blue Shield Armenia.

⁹ <https://theblueshield.org/blue-shield-and-the-hague-convention-at-70/>

A highlight of the year was the UNESCO / Kingdom of the Netherlands International Conference *Cultural Heritage and Peace: Building on 70 years of The Hague Convention*, from 13-15 May 2024, at the Peace Palace and the World Forum in the Netherlands. Blue Shield President Professor Stone was an invited speaker in *Plenary session III Panel 1: Shaping a peaceful future: Collaborations in preservation of cultural heritage in emergencies*. The Blue Shield was excited to demonstrate the strength of its network at the event, with representation from 10 national committees, as well as its Board. It was a real pleasure to have members from Blue Shield National Committees in **Lebanon, Croatia, Netherlands, Germany, United Kingdom, USA, France, Austria, Guatemala, Curaçao** & the **IFLA Board representative**. Global cooperation for heritage protection!



The Blue Shield at *Cultural Heritage and Peace: Building on 70 years of The Hague Convention* © BSI

BSI seeks to give voice to those directly affected in conflict. With **Blue Shield Türkiye** and Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Blue Shield International was proud to present

“Effects of War Trauma on Students from War Areas: Heritage Destruction and Collective Memory”.

Each case study represents a personal insight into those directly affected by war and its legacy, from colonial era impacts in North Africa through to the recent destruction in Iraq by the Islamic State, as well as an academic study of the wider impacts. A variety of perspectives are offered including spatial and architectural analyses of destruction, eyewitness testimony, and – offering hope – the potential of physical and digital reconstruction to reconnect communities (and the wider world) with their lost heritage.¹⁰

The Hague Convention anniversary was an opportunity to write about the history and mission of the organisation. The Blue Shield produced an anniversary brochure that explores the obligations of the 1954 Hague Convention and its close relationship with the Blue Shield organisation.

» BSI (2024) *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict - 70th Anniversary*. 14 May 1954 – 14 May 2024. Information Pack. Blue Shield International.¹¹

Blue Shield was also invited to write an article for the Swiss Federal Section for the Protection of Cultural Property for their CPP journal:

» Cunliffe E. (2024) The Blue and White Shield: Blue Shield International and the 1954 Hague Convention. *KGS PBC PCP 41 Journal (special issue: Cultural Property Protection Globally)*, Section for the Protection of Cultural Property of the Federal Administration of Switzerland.¹²

BSI’s work is informed by the latest research, developed in partnership with Newcastle University and NATO. To ensure BSI’s work is theoretically rigorous and at the forefront of heritage protection, Blue Shield staff supported and contributed to academically peer-reviewed research looking at the role and utility of the Hague Convention’s Enhanced Protection regime, testing it in a major NATO exercise.

» Cunliffe, E. (2024). Revisiting Enhanced Protection: Implications from a Practical Case Study. *Santander Art and Culture Law Review (Special Issue, 1954 Hague Convention)*, 2/2024 (10), pp.155-180¹³

10 Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/new-research-heritage-destruction-and-collective-memory/>

11 Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/1954-hague-convention-anniversary-information-pack-available/>

12 Available at: <https://www.babs.admin.ch/en/publication?id=tNafmC3D25Qi>

13 Available at: <https://ejournals.eu/en/journal/saaclr/issue/2-2024-10>



”

Climate change, identity wars, sustainability - these are some of the global issues of our time all of which impact heavily on communities and their heritage. Blue Shield is working to make sure that our cultural heritage is still available for the next generation. As much as heritage can be a marker of exclusion, it can also promote inclusion and pluralism, and shared understanding of each other. Threats to cultural property can be significantly mitigated if action is taken and partnerships are developed in peacetime. This approach needs government and cross-sector support from the heritage, humanitarian, and uniformed sectors, together.

Professor Peter Stone, President



Coordination

Successful cultural heritage protection is built on cooperation and coordination. No individual or single organisation has the skills to do it by themselves. BSI has developed a wide network of partners across the heritage, humanitarian, and military sectors who we rely on and work closely with, a network that continues to expand.

On 13 May 2024, Blue Shield President Peter Stone was delighted to sign a Letter of Intent with Ernesto Ottone, R., the Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO. The Letter declares the organisations' intent to strengthen their cooperation to encourage worldwide ratification and implementation with respect to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols of 1954 and 1999. Under the 1999 Second Protocol, Blue Shield is an official expert advisory body to the Committee in matters of armed conflict.

The two parties signed the Letter in the Peace Palace in the Hague on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Convention, which was opened for signature at the Peace Palace on 14 May 1954.

” I am delighted to cement the long history between UNESCO and Blue Shield in this declaration of Intent. It is my firm hope that this represents not only our increasing cooperation, but the future increasing ratification and implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention - the most important piece of international legislation protecting cultural property in conflict today.”

Peter Stone, President of the Blue Shield



Peter Stone, President of the Blue Shield, signs a Letter of Intent with Ernesto Ottone, R., the Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO, May 2024. © BSI / UNESCO

BSI built on this partnership with cooperation discussions at UNESCO's major conference following the signing, *Cultural Heritage and Peace: Building on 70 years of The Hague Convention*, and throughout the year, culminating in attendance at the annual meeting of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, in recognition of BSI's expert advisory role under the Second Protocol.

BSI continued to meet regularly with the UNESCO Culture and Emergencies team throughout the year, and in December attended the 19th Meeting of the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, a crucial opportunity to understand how states parties are implementing the 1954 Hague Convention.

Existing partnerships also remain strong across the military, humanitarian, and heritage sectors. Blue Shield continues to champion heritage protection and international humanitarian law at NATO, supporting military training, exercises, and policy to promote the highest standards amongst NATO personnel; work which NATO is keen to support.

After the signing of the MOU with the Republic of Korea (RoK)'s GyeongGi Cultural Foundation (GGCF) in October 2023 in the UK, BSI returned the visit in the summer of 2024. The President and Secretariat spoke at the *DMZ Cultural Heritage Preservation Forum* about protection for this important cultural site, but also about the Blue Shield and heritage protection methods more widely. They also met with the ROK government advisor responsible for the 1954 Hague Convention to discuss ratification. The visit generated significant discussion and positive experience sharing with our Korean colleagues.

” The GGCF highly respects and appreciates the efforts of Blue Shield International in preserving the cultural heritage of the Korean DMZ. The partnership with Blue Shield International is promising, and their visit to South Korea will serve as a foundation for future initiatives. The insights gained by the Blue Shield researchers during their on-site visit have prompted us to rethink our future strategies. Our commitment to peace will continue in the future.

Hyunuk Park, Senior Researcher of GyeongGi Cultural Foundation

But the Blue Shield isn't just one organisation: the national committees are part of a global network of heritage protection who work closely together, and which continue to grow. Four new nominated representatives were approved to create committees, with more indicating interest, and two new national committees were approved in **Armenia** and **Sweden**, bringing the total number of committees to 34! (See [National Committees: Blue Shield Accreditation Committee](#)).

Our General Assembly and Conference was a key event - President Peter Stone and Oana Zaharia of the National Institute of Heritage, Bucharest, welcomed guests at Art Safari, where guests were treated to a tour of the collections. The event itself opened with distinguished speakers from the Romanian heritage protection field highlighting the crucial importance of heritage protection. All of the national committees were invited to give a presentation on their heritage, the challenges facing it, and their greatest achievement of the year in protecting it. We were excited to host presentations (virtually and in person) from **Czechia, Guatemala, Lebanon, Mali, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Austria, Italy, France, Iceland, Ireland, Belgium, Greece, USA, Australia, Pasifika, Côte D'Ivoire, Niger** and **Cameroon**. These presentations (and more information about the event) are all available online.¹⁴

¹⁴ Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/blue-shield-conference-videos-available-online/>

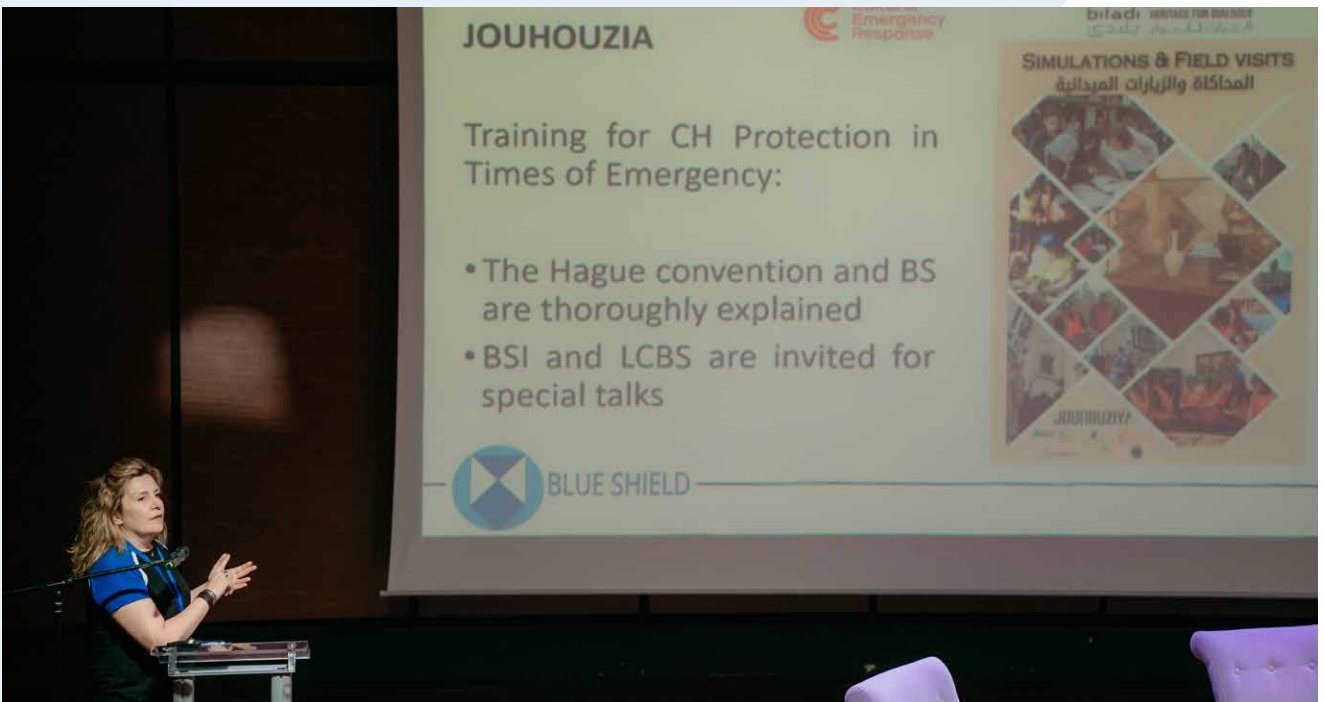


Attendees reported that the opportunity to come together was hugely valuable.

- » *I was delighted to be there and I learned a lot about the Blue Shield and its operation and got a deeper understanding of the Hague Convention from 1954. My world view expanded as well as I heard reports from other national committees.*
- » *Overall great conference and wonderful to meet everyone.*



Icebreaker at Art Safari, Bucharest Old Town, as part of the Shielding the Past event; welcome by distinguished speakers, and presentations from the national committees © Blue Shield / National Institute of Heritage.



Promoting the worldwide work of the Blue Shield remains important: giving voice to the activities of the national committees and showcasing the amount of expert work is an exciting opportunity, developed further with a regular internal newsletter. Enabling global communications amongst its national committees, the discussion Forum is going from strength to strength with new members registering all the time.

The Board would like to thank Tim Schnarr and his Limes Group for always going above and beyond in their technical support in maintaining the Blue Shield's website, forum, email communications, and design support. The Board is also trialling an Emergency Response Coordination network amongst the national committees.

Thanks are also due to Newcastle University, UK, for its ongoing support to the Blue Shield, and specifically the international Secretariat, without whom much of this work would not be possible.



”

If you have a threat or an actual disaster you need to look to the whole of the conservation and cultural heritage family for support.

Patrick Boylan, Founder



Blue Shield National and Regional Committees: Reflections



National and Regional Committees: Highlights

Proactive Protection and Response

- » 6 situational surveys of available resources and national and institutional preparedness.
- » 3 climate change assessments.
- » Continuation of civil responder accreditation.
- » Creation of multiple new resources, and development of existing resources, including:
 - » 2 emergency response support phone lines, and one in development
 - » 2 depots and mobile response units for emergency equipment
 - » Publications and manuals providing guidance on e.g., fire risk in wooden mosques.
- » 2 proposals to establish national refuges for collections in emergencies.
- » 5 post incident-monitoring programmes in conflicts and disasters (including flooding and earthquake).
- » Response to 15 emergency incidents, including:
 - » 3 fires
 - » 2 storm damage
 - » 2 indirect hurricane support
 - » 1 overseas deployment of a team to support hurricane response.
- » 1 x post-flood follow up support.
- » Support to internally displaced people (IDPs) post-conflict following significant disruption to their cultural traditions and loss of intangible cultural heritage.
- » Multi-country support to Ukraine with expertise, information, and financial and material support.

Capacity Building, Education, and Training

- » 76 training courses organised, co-organised, and supported.
- » Hundreds of heritage professionals, armed forces, and government workers trained.
- » Invited expertise to military training for:
 - » Centre of Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU) in Italy
 - » European Security and Defence College (ESDC) Cultural Property Protection (CPP) Course, organised by the Centre for Cultural Property Protection at the University for Continuing Education Krems
 - » ICCROM
 - » NATO / Dutch 1CMI
 - » OSCE Heritage Crime Task Force
 - » Peace Operations Training Centre in Slovenia
 - » United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI),
 - » United Nations Training School in Ireland (UNTSI).
- » Extensive training with and for first responders and staff of museums, libraries, archives and art museums, as well as young people, covering tangible and intangible heritage protection of all types.



Law, Policy and Implementation, and Advocacy

- » Extensive focus on the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols.
- » Nationally recognised expertise
 - » Widely recognised source of advice in policy, regulations, and legal cases relating to countering trafficking,
 - » lobbying governments for ratification of new laws and improvements to existing laws.
- » Extensive government dialogues on legal and policy implementation on heritage in conflict and crisis, including membership of national Working groups on:
 - » Illicit Trafficking
 - » Cultural heritage protection in conflict / crisis
 - » Floods
 - » Civil Defence
 - » Emergency Management
 - » Humanitarian law
 - » Safeguarding
 - » Atrocity Crimes.
- » Internationally recognised expertise
 - » 2 x collaborating with UNESCO in Countering Trafficking projects and workshops
 - » 1 x support for university course on countering trafficking.
- » 1 x touring museum exhibition on countering trafficking.
- » Reached thousands of attendees across
 - » Ran / co-ran numerous policy events
 - » Ran or co-organised 27 advocacy events
 - » Spoke at another 33 events.
- » 9 new publications.

Coordination

- » Extensive volunteer networks with hundreds of highly trained, deployable volunteers.
- » Numerous university and UNITWIN UNESCO Chair partners for teaching and research.
- » Formal national agreements with Heritage and Civil Response Ministries, emergency services, and humanitarian partners, e.g., Red Cross Societies.
- » Regional and global partnerships with major international organisations, and regional network memberships.
- » Regional networking throughout the Blue Shield to provide regional support
- » Support to Blue Shield International, and to national committees under construction and between the committees worldwide.



2024 in Review

The Blue Shield's national committees are the association's teams on the ground, directly dealing with the crises that threaten cultural heritage, whether tornadoes, floods, fires, conflict - or even volcanoes! It would not be possible to showcase all the work being done around the world – this report only offers a selection of the extensive activity that took place in 2024. However, all the national committee reports are available on the Blue Shield International website, and many have very active websites. ¹⁵

Blue Shield Accreditation Committee

The Blue Shield national committees are accredited by a sub-committee of the Blue Shield International Board, and approved by the Board. For several years, the Accreditation Committee has been composed of: Emma Cunliffe (Blue Shield Secretariat), Klaus Weschenfelder (Elected Board Member) and Chaired by Sophie Delepierre (ICOM Board Representative).

The Committee's mandate is to accompany the creation (and sometimes the reaccreditation) of Blue Shield national committees. It analyses, evaluates, and approves the creation and the accreditation of Blue Shield national committees, based on the process publicly available on the Blue Shield website.

The Accreditation Committee's work is divided into three stages.

1. It supports and approves Nominated Representatives to undertake the work of the Blue Shield and begin the creation of new national committees.
2. In the second stage, it is dedicated to advising and accompanying the Nominated Representatives in the formal administrative and legal steps to create their national committee ready for approval. Creating a new national committee is a complicated process, requiring cross-country support and legal statutes.
3. Sometimes, the Accreditation Committee also assists former national committees in their reaccreditation process.

At every stage, the Accreditation Committee is there to help.

In 2024,

- » Nominated Representatives were approved in **Hungary, Portugal, and Sudan**. We were especially pleased to support an application from our partners for the General Assembly – a proposal for a National Committee in **Romania**, which is now officially under construction!
- » Two new national committees were approved in **Armenia and Sweden**, bringing the total number of committees to 34!
- » National Committees are now Under Construction and receiving support in **Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, Hungary, Mozambique, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sudan, and Ukraine**.
- » The Accreditation Committee also received several expressions of interest, which are considered 'in progress' or 'pending'. At the end of 2024, five new candidates had approached us about potentially creating national committees: the Accreditation Committee is dedicated to helping them begin the journey to become part of the Blue Shield.

The Accreditation Committee has also invested significant time into revising the accreditation process, to develop clearer and better guidelines and documentation. This review is taking place as part of the wider governance review, and is expected to be completed in time for the 2026 General Assembly.

¹⁵ Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/download/national-committee-annual-reports-2024/>



Network and reporting

At the end of 2024, the Blue Shield had 33 national committees and one regional committee (**Pasifika**). **Sweden** received accreditation late in 2024, and is not part of the 2024 reporting round; neither are National Committees Under Construction. Although **Blue Shield Italy** was accredited in 2023, their General Assembly to appoint officers and begin work was not until October 2024, so no report was required.

No attempt is made to compare committees or committee activities: both are highly variable. Each of the national committees reflects their national circumstances and legislation, with a variety of legal statuses and membership models. Some are voluntary, others exist in partnership with a hosting organisation (often the national branch of ICOM or ICOMOS), and others are full legally registered entities. Membership models allow volunteers, individuals, and institutions, and member numbers range from less than 10 to several hundred.



”

I really appreciate Blue Shield Türkiye’s contribution to the protection of our cultural assets from disaster risks such as fire and earthquake and the work done afterwards, and I believe that these contributions will continue and increase in the future

Yahya Coşkun, Deputy Director General of Cultural Assets and Museums, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye



Proactive Protection and Response

Proactive Protection

Prevention is the best way to protect cultural property in crisis. That's why the Hague Convention mandates that:

“...protection cannot be effective unless both national and international measures have been taken to organise it in times of peace”.

(Preamble)

The Blue Shield's national committees are working with national and regional governments, institutions and other heritage agencies to put measures in place long before an emergency so that, if the worst should happen, cultural heritage has the best protection possible.

In order to act, it's important to understand what is required. **Blue Shield France** undertook a Risk Awareness Survey¹⁶ among heritage managers. **The United Kingdom National Committee** Emergency Planning & Response Working Group have been assessing existing sector resources and approaches in emergency planning and response, including guidance, training materials, case studies, prior to beginning a GAP analysis on existing resources and information. **Blue Shield Czechia** is undertaking ongoing consultations for selected cultural institutions in the field of cultural property protection. **Blue Shield Belgium** is part of a two-year Flemish research project on disaster management. In Germany, identification of what is protected, and what needs to be protected is key: following a preliminary review of the situation, **Blue Shield Germany** created a new working group on 'Digitisation and Cultural Property Protection'. Recognising a core skill gap, **Blue Shield Mali** is looking at training Committee members and Malian cultural heritage managers in drawing up and managing an emergency plan in the event of a disaster. Following the success of their safeguarding project in Gori's museums, **Blue Shield Georgia** completed a preliminary study on the current state of Kaspi Museum Collections. With big thanks to ALIPH, this next safeguarding project has been approved and will start in 2025. They are also continuing to inventory the losses to intangible cultural heritage of internally displaced people (see [Response](#)). **Blue Shield United Kingdom** is one of the only other national committees to report on intangible cultural heritage. Their ICH Working Group focuses on how to protect and engage with ICH in conflict and emergencies, looking at how to help communities approach ICH protection. They have also started to put together an information sheet on best practices with a focus on localism.

Climate change is an increasing issue: **Blue Shield Norway** continued to survey resources on securing museum buildings from damage caused by climate change, and is now seeking funding. **Blue Shield Ireland** are part of a working group developing Guidance for the Climate Change Adaptation Sectoral Plan for Built and Archaeological Heritage Planning. The **UK National Committee** have established a Climate Change Working Group, which looks into the effects of climate change on cultural heritage protection to better understanding the risk environment of the UK and The British Overseas Territories, and are developing recommendations.

But it's not just about the Blue Shield understanding the risks: the whole of the heritage sector needs to

¹⁶ Available at: <https://www.bouclier-bleu.fr/documents/categorie/bouclier-bleu-france/domaine-de-competence>

know the risks so they can prepare as well. To raise awareness of need for proactive planning, **Blue Shield Netherlands** initiated a National Heritage Resilience Action Day on the 14 May.

Committees like **Blue Shield Australia** have many resources developed with partners, like the AICCM Disaster Preparedness Calendar, to help cultural organisations respond to crisis, which they continue to promote. **Blue Shield Greece** and **Blue Shield France** engaged in the PROCULTHER program via meetings, and scientific council. Many Blue Shield websites contain resources in national languages for supporting emergency planning and response.¹⁷

Existing work is also being developed: **Blue Shield Belgium** coordinated closely with regional and national partners to strengthen emergency heritage protection, renewing funding agreements, and agreeing new ones, along with formal collaborations with provinces like Luxembourg, Walloon Brabant, and Namur for pilot projects and storage facilities. They are also working closely with churches to help develop emergency plans for evacuation. Perhaps their most important achievements is a new protocol for use in emergency situations. The Blue Shield Belgium mobile number is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for emergencies and enquiries. This number is becoming increasingly known to authorities, emergency services and heritage organisations. Blue Shield France has also renewed its civil security approval and can be requisitioned by authorities (ORSEC) or contacted directly via SDIS. They have launched the Blue Shield France Emergency Response Organisation (ORU). To ensure their members are trained to the highest standards, they are holding drills across their local chapters. **Blue Shield USA** is working to establish a contact person for the Heritage Emergency National Task Force, which deals with domestic US heritage emergencies.



Blue Shield France Training of Operational Managers (ROP) as part of their civil accreditation © Blue Shield France

¹⁷ Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/what-we-do/national-committees-around-the-globe/>

Effective response needs the right equipment, available at the right time, prepared before crisis strikes. **Blue Shield Belgium** completed a full inventory of its emergency equipment, and now have a new secure depot to store and organise it, with additional PPE ordered to strengthen stock. The standardised heritage evacuation forms developed last year are also being rolled out to various authorities. Likewise, following several years of devastating floods and wildfires, most recently the Lismore floods which demonstrated the need for materials to be available and ready to be moved to disaster-hit regional areas in such cases, Blue Shield Australia are working with partners to establish a cultural heritage first response mobile facility: this has been a main area of focus, along with appropriate training.

The creation of new tools and ways of working is critical to an adaptive response to new crisis situations. **Blue Shield Greece** is part of an initiative of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme dealing with the issues of natural disasters. The goal is to compile an index of natural and humanmade dangers regarding Greek World Heritage monuments, aiming to provide specific instructions in a Manual to significantly contribute to the protection both of monuments and visitors. Blue Shield Belgium contributed to the development of a practical emergency guide for municipalities, and co-produced region-specific versions of a heritage water damage poster with several partners. Given the increasing risk from wildfires, **Blue Shield Türkiye** completed their Project Book: Evaluation and Reduction of Fire Risks of Historical Wooden Mosques in Konya - Karaman Region of Türkiye (with Konya Chamber of Architects and Konya Regional Directorate of Foundations, Ministry of Culture and Tourism). **Blue Shield Netherlands** has begun explorative meetings with various heritage institutions (like the Mauritshuis) about possibilities to establish refuges for collections during crisis. **Blue Shield Czechia** likewise discussed the need for cooperation with the military and building large-capacity storage facilities in accordance with the Hague Convention within the Ministry of Culture.

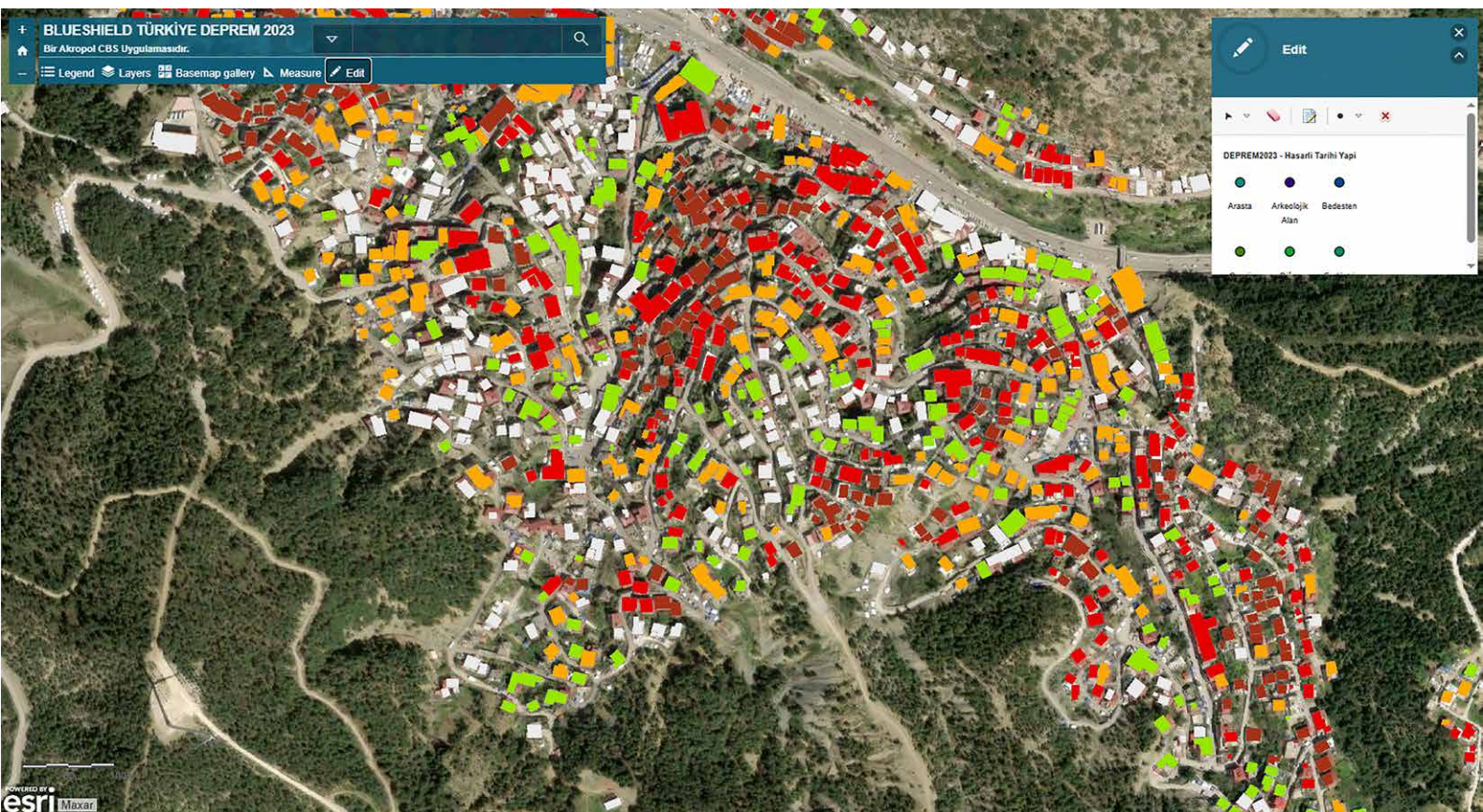
Response

Wildfires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and conflicts – cultural property is under increasing threat around the world, and the national committees of the Blue Shield are at the forefront of trying to protect it. Once the immediate emergency ends, it is no less important to consider what happens next: many of these crises have effects which last for years. Even in countries which are well prepared for crisis, and which have good heritage response mechanisms, the scale of the challenge is significant. The on-call service set up within the ORU (Emergency Response Organisation) by **Blue Shield France** handled nine incidents, two of which required people to be sent to the site. The BLUESHIELDALERT system created by **Blue Shield Belgium** handled 4 calls relating to 3 fires in churches, and storm damage.

Monitoring damage when crises occur is essential if support is to be delivered to where its most needed. **Blue Shield Germany** established a Working Group *Cultural property damage monitor*. The first result is the activation of a survey that will be continuously analysed in the coming years. **Blue Shield Türkiye** have continued to update the GIS database *Documentation of February 2023 Earthquake Damages Project*¹⁸, providing information about the damage level of monuments. They have also completed a new research project to provide a novel documentation technique for post disaster documentation of damages on cultural heritage monuments (supported by Istanbul Technical University).

¹⁸ Available at: <https://akropolproje.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=db67b1b68a284e11829a9594e77147c3>





Blue Shield Türkiye Documentation of February 2023 Earthquake Damages Project © Blue Shield Türkiye

Flooding, exacerbated by climate change, is causing critical problems in Africa, where many buildings are made of mudbrick. **Blue Shield Niger** identified several historically significant buildings in Niger that have been impacted by flooding, including the 16th century houses in Agadez, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2013, an 18th century mosque and traditional houses in Zinder, a site on the Tentative List since 2005, the Zinder regional museum building from 1986, and Niger's first primary school established in 1902 in Filingué. Images and information were collected to address the issues, but lack of resources prevented any repair work from being carried out. Likewise, in Mali, parts of the Tomb of Askia (a World Heritage Site which is also under Enhanced Protection), and which is managed by the President of **Blue Shield Mali**, collapsed following excessive rain in August. Thanks to ALIPH's flexibility, they were able to repair the collapse, but the historic centre of Gao, which is all mudbrick, is under serious threat. **Blue Shield Mali's** Chair is working to raise awareness of the risks.



The Old town of Zinder (Birni district and the sultanate) was founded around 1736, and registered on the UNESCO Tentative World Heritage List in 2005. The Sultan's Palace and the old mosque dating from the 18th Century and some traditional houses were badly affected by the effects of heavy rains. © Blue Shield Niger

Blue Shield Curaçao reported that the 2024 hurricane season *“was, against all expectations, quite mild in their part of the Caribbean region”*: yet two cultural sites suffered devastating damage - the Carriacou Museum and the Barbados Historical Archives Building. The national committee was able to provide support leading to a funding application for aid. These disasters resulted in the creation of response mechanisms for long-term support: Blue Shield Curaçao are receiving support through CER and UNESCO to participate in the CER-programme and increase their disaster readiness.

Mayotte, a French department located in the Indian Ocean, northwest of Madagascar, also experienced significant damage. On 9 December, 2024, the island was hit by Cyclone Chido, which severely affected infrastructure. **Blue Shield France** was requested by the Mayotte Museum (MuMA), located on the Dzaoudzi peninsula, on 26 December, 2024, via the Directorate of Cultural Affairs, for an emergency intervention. Following the damage caused to its structure, the ethnographic collections of the MuMA were particularly threatened. Two **Blue Shield France** members deployed to provide support for a month, and following the Appeal, the Director of the BSF Emergency Response Service was able to take a truckload of equipment to the airport. The volunteers provided tarpaulin to cover the objects until roofs could be repaired – a wise foresight as another cyclone occurred shortly after, but causing no further damage. They worked with the museum staff to catalogue the damage, and support repairs and restoration. A full photo report of their response is available online (and will be featured in 2025, when most of the response took place).¹⁹

Yet, even when the crisis has past, water impacts can continue to affect buildings and collections for many years. Two **Blue Shield Belgium** trainees took part in a post-crisis practical experience at the Centre de Conservation et d'Etude - CCE's temporary repository in Jambes; they were involved in the conservation of material impacted by the floods of 2021 by re-inventorying, checking the integrity of the crates and labelling them, and repackaging certain archaeological items. As well as ensuring no further damage is occurring, such training is a vital way to learn critical skills for emergency response.

¹⁹ Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/saving-heritage-in-mayotte/>

Conflict is also directly affecting national committees. Cameroon's security situation has deteriorated since late 2017, with deadly violence in the Northwest and Southwest regions, compounded by the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram in the Far North. These crises, alongside political, economic, social, and cultural instability, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have displaced over 460,000 people. The crises have caused significant human, material, and cultural damage, with the cultural heritage facing severe threats from both destruction and illicit trafficking. To restore culture and hope, **Blue Shield Cameroon** conducted a rapid damage assessment at seven cultural sites and museums, focusing on preserving built heritage and securing museum collections. The assessment found damage to sites like the Bafut Royal Palace, Goto Goulfey Tower, and Babungo Museum, all on UNESCO's World Heritage tentative list, as well as the destruction of stone sanctuaries, bullet-damaged monuments, and museum collections. The ongoing violence also displaced entire communities, disrupting intangible cultural heritage practices.

Following the conflict in Georgia in 2008, a quarter of a million Georgians were displaced, causing significant disruption to their cultural traditions and loss of intangible cultural heritage. **Blue Shield Georgia** has been continuing their door-to-door interviews with internally displaced peoples (IDPs) as part of the project *Preserving the Cultural Heritage of the Occupied Regions (Tskhinvali Region- PCHOR)*, and transcribing them. Two videos were produced based on these interviews, highlighting key cultural elements. The committee also opened a travelling museum exhibition: Traditions of the Great Lakhvi Valley - village Kekhvi. The material presented in the exhibition showed visitors the life of Keshveli village before the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, and its rich heritage, traditions and life after the war.

National committees aren't only looking to their own heritage: Ukraine continues to receive support. In January, the chair of **Blue Shield Denmark** travelled to Ukraine to visit cultural heritage sites and institutions affected by the war. He travelled with a film crew, and the documentary film *Den ukrainske skat (The Ukrainian Treasure*²⁰) premiered on 24th February 2025 on national Danish television. **Blue Shield Netherlands** is providing information in expert meetings; **Blue Shield Norway** gathered information on fire protection of wooden buildings for a coordinated information package delivered by Norwegian cultural institutions to Ukraine; **Blue Shield Czechia** is in a partnership with its Founding Four member institutions. Together with ICOM Czechia, and supported by the Czech Ministry of Culture, they are providing financial and material support for threatened cultural institutions in Ukraine.

Blue Shield Germany are looking to Ukraine's future: they completed their *Recommendations for action for the reconstruction of Ukraine* with reference to the significance of monuments and their context, which were published on 25 March 2024.²¹ The team developed concrete recommendations for monument protection and urban development in cooperation with German and Ukrainian stakeholders. The recommendations for action combine the knowledge and wealth of experience of monument protection and preservation in the states of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Berlin and Saxony from decades of active practice with the successful urban monument protection programmes. In particular, the project includes recommendations on the significance of the monuments and their context. In addition, technical, legal and structural requirements relating to the treatment of monuments in Ukraine, collated in partnership with Ukrainian authorities, were recorded, analysed, and integrated into the recommendations.

20 Available at: https://www.dr.dk/drtv/program/den-ukrainske-skat_504851

21 Available at: <https://theblueshield.org/recommendations-for-action-on-reconstruction-in-ukraine/>



Capacity Building, Education, and Training

Like the Hague Convention (1954), the Second Protocol (1999) is just as clear that “*educational and information programmes*” are essential “*to strengthen appreciation and respect for cultural property by their entire population*” (Article 30). It goes on to obligate the development and implementation of peacetime training and education programmes in cooperation with relevant non-government organisations. Given the anniversary, the Hague Convention has been a key focus. However, many of the programmes that train people in conflict response are equally valuable in disaster, though both have their own unique aspects to account for.

In 2024, Blue Shield national committees ran and contributed to **over 76 training courses**, reaching hundreds, if not thousands, of heritage professionals, soldiers and government workers. That’s in addition to the dozens of lectures and awareness-raising activities discussed in *Law, Policy and Implementation, and Advocacy*.

Military training in cultural property protection in conflict is increasing. **Blue Shield United Kingdom, Blue Shield USA, Blue Shield Slovakia**, and **Blue Shield Austria** have supported numerous military training courses with their defence forces. Several committees have run their own events: **Blue Shield France** have continued their collaboration with DELPAT, running four webinars on heritage protection, and **Blue Shield Germany** led a full-day workshop on cultural property protection in armed conflict at the Bundeswehr’s Centre for Operational Communication. **Blue Shield Netherlands** also works closely with the Dutch Cultural Property Protection team, hosting a workshop for them. **Blue Shield Poland** have a long history of cooperation and training with their armed forces, consulting on the content of information and training materials; supporting the work and training of the Ministry of National Defence, Military Training Centre for Foreign Operations in Kielce, and Military Centre for Civic Education in military training. **Blue Shield Ireland** carried out the planning for the 2024 iteration of the Cultural Property Protection course at the United Nations Training School in Ireland (UNTSI): however, the course was postponed to January 2025.

Blue Shield national committees are becoming widely recognised for their expertise. **Blue Shield Austria** were invited to support the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) Cultural Property Protection (CPP) Course, organised by the Centre for Cultural Property Protection at the University for Continuing Education Krems. It brought together military, police, and civilian participants from across Europe to strengthen their knowledge and skills in the protection of cultural heritage during armed conflict and crises. The **United States Committee** supported the Centre of Excellence for Stability Police Units (Co-ESPU) in Italy, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the Peace Operations Training Centre in Slovenia, and advised on an ICCROM project on effective military training for cultural property protection. **Blue Shield Netherlands** was invited to attend the major NATO exercise Common Ground as Subject Matter Experts (SME). This exercise is a combined CIMIC and Psychological Operations Field Training Exercise, organised by the Dutch 1CMI (who also house the Dutch CPP unit).





Fictional Blue Shield office as part of **Blue Shield Netherlands'** participation in Exercise Common Ground © A. Dellebeke, Blue Shield Netherlands

Civilian training for safeguarding heritage, whether in conflict or disaster, is no less important. Training for first responders in particular is vital: **Blue Shield Belgium** supported a fire department heritage evacuation exercise, reinforcing ties with emergency response actors. The organisation also gave six information sessions to provincial security units and emergency coordinators, and held or contributed to eight training events, including the launch of a new Crisis Response Team module, as well as participating in five external training courses and exercises around Europe. Likewise, **Blue Shield Australia** focussed on capacity building and skills development for first responders. **Blue Shield Poland** have also been supporting civilian training with the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, School of Aspirants of the State Fire Service in Krakow and the National Library in Warsaw, such as co-organisation of the training entitled *Protection of monuments, museum, library and archival collections in the event of war and crisis threats - practical aspects*.

Staff members of museums, libraries, archives and art museums are also key targets for training. Emergency support was key in **Blue Shield Germany's** two-day event *Cultural Property Protection: The Emergency! And now?* Simulation training is an effective learning method: **Blue Shield Iceland** co-hosted a workshop in September on *Salvaging Museum Items from Water Disaster*. **Blue Shield Curaçao** ran a Simulation Drill at the Barbados Regional Workshop on *Safeguarding Historical Records in Times of Emergencies*, and

a workshop on mapping cultural heritage using GIS. **Blue Shield Armenia** ran a five-day autumn school as part of *Guardians of Heritage: Strengthening Armenia's Cultural Safeguards*. They also conducted a special workshop with international experts for 50 students as part of the international conference *Museum Professionalism in Difficult Times*. **Blue Shield France** have run multiple workshops, training not only their own volunteers to the high standards of an accredited response agency, but also running external events on, e.g., handling fire-damaged objects.



Blue Shield France Exercise Invalides 2024 with the Fire Service © Blue Shield France

Some committees have a particular focus, prioritising the national needs in their different circumstances. Mud-brick was a key focus not only for **Blue Shield Türkiye** where the national committee hosted a seminar on *Earthen Construction Tradition as Cultural Heritage*, but is a particular problem in Africa, where buildings are heavily threatened by flooding that is strongly exacerbated by climate change. **Blue Shield Niger** ran two events to examine the problem, and look at how to better protect their mud-brick architecture. **Blue Shield Czechia** ran training on *Protection of Historical Wooden Buildings* at an open-air museum, in addition to a seminar on protection of audiovisual documents and photographs.

Blue Shield Georgia have been working with the next generation, running workshops with strong youth engagement covering tangible and intangible cultural heritage protection. Dozens of students from internally displaced people (IDP) and minority groups were trained in cultural heritage protection across five regions. IDPs have been a core focus: workshops explored coalition-building for IDP support and heritage protection. Likewise, **Blue Shield Senegal** partnered with Gaston Berger University of Saint-Louis to train

students of UFR CRAC (Civilizations, arts and communications) through the Heritage Trades Department (MDP) in the various UNESCO Conventions, and **Blue Shield Belgium** staff taught on the interuniversity certificate in disaster management (universities of Liège, Louvain-la-Neuve, Mons and Université libre de Bruxelles) in Louvain-la-Neuv. **Blue Shield Croatia** presented the activities of the Blue Shield at the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica.

These training events, taking place across professions and at all levels of society, are a critical contribution to heritage protection, equipping heritage professionals and armed forces with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently. Too often, heritage is lost because those dealing with the crisis are unprepared: the National Committees of the Blue Shields are at the forefront of raising standards in heritage protection.



Heritage Crime and Illicit Trafficking

The trafficking of cultural objects is a crime that crosses borders. It doesn't matter whether your country is in war, or at peace; criminals seize opportunities. Countries in conflict face the most serious looting of museums and cultural sites, but thieves are active around the world. Even once objects which are being trafficked are seized, then governments must deal with the challenges of repatriation. National committees are active in training, and in the development of new tools to combat this problem, which denies communities access to their heritage, and identity, and which is linked to the financing of conflict and terrorist activities.

National committees are recognised nationally as sources of expertise. Members of **Blue Shield United Kingdom** are members of the UK Government Working Group on Prevention of Illegal Trade. The Committee's Illicit Trafficking Working Group held their 10th Working Group Meeting. They have submitted an engagement strategy to the trustees and have an ongoing database of contacts of agencies / individuals in development. **Blue Shield Norway** has continued to be a driving force to change policy and regulations for the import and export of cultural objects to and from Norway as a member of the Ministry of Culture's Cultural Crime Group. Both committees also provide advice and support to governments on policies, police, and law courts, advising on criminal cases and acting as expert witnesses, and supporting repatriation.

Blue Shield national committee expertise is widely recognised: **Blue Shield France** was invited to participate in the CERIS day (Community for European Research and Innovation for Security) in Brussels on 5 December 2024, on the illicit trafficking of cultural goods, whilst **Blue Shield Belgium** engaged in the ANCHISE project, funded by the European Commission, organised as part of the *Advancing the Fight Against Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Goods Forum* in Brussels. **Blue Shield Slovakia** proudly collaborates with UNESCO on the project *Combating Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Heritage: Monitoring and Preventive Measures to Secure Museum and Archive Collections* to underscore a shared commitment to protecting cultural treasures from unlawful exploitation and trafficking. A key outcome of the initiative will be the development of a multimedia tool — a web-based platform that will serve as a practical guide for handling collection items. **Blue Shield North Macedonia** also participated in a UNESCO illicit trafficking workshop *Fighting illicit trafficking in cultural goods in the Western Balkans* at the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle in Skopje, funded by the European Commission and organised by UNESCO through the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe (Venice) and its office in Sarajevo.

Education and training take place at all levels: **Blue Shield Belgium** supports the University of Paris-Nanterre Masters' programme *Provenance research: Circulations, spoliations, illicit trafficking and restitutions*, lecturing on the fight against the illegal trade in Syrian cultural goods. Recognising their expertise, **Blue Shield United Kingdom** supported the OSCE Heritage Crime Task Force Training in Bulgaria, examining illicit trafficking in conflict with trainees. They are also organising talks and webinars that will take place in 2025.

Awareness-raising is also critical: **Blue Shield USA** together with the Kernochan Center for Law, Media and the Arts at Columbia Law School, and the Responsible Art Market Initiative co-sponsored a conference titled, *Protecting Cultural Property: The 1954 Hague Convention at 70*, which emphasised the methods needed to counter illicit trafficking. The conference was open to the public and well-attended, both in-person and online. **Blue Shield Belgium** also contributed to a museum exhibition: the panels, which were on the 1970 UNESCO Convention against Illicit Traffic in Works of Art were on display in three museums in 2024.





Blue Shield North Macedonia participated in a UNESCO illicit trafficking workshop *Fighting illicit trafficking in cultural goods in the Western Balkans* © Blue Shield North Macedonia

Law, Policy and Implementation, and Advocacy

The Blue Shield is actively committed to promoting compliance with international humanitarian law, of which the 1954 Hague Convention is key. Particular mention must go here to **Blue Shield Poland**, for their work promoting Professor Jan Zachwatowicz, the creator of the distinctive blue shield emblem of the Hague Convention from which the association takes its name. Zachwatowicz was a Polish conservator of monuments who participated in the International Conference in The Hague in 1954, during which the Hague Convention was adopted. As part of the anniversary of the Convention, Professor Zachwatowicz was featured in a museum exhibition co-organised by the Polish Blue Shield Committee, and a jointly organised expert discussion *War and culture - experiences and challenges*, with the participation of Professor Krystyna Zachwatowicz-Wajda, daughter of Professor J. Zachwatowicz.



The exhibition *Warsaw Stronger than War* was presented during the conference *War and the protection of cultural heritage*, and featured Professor Zachwatowicz and his work. Royal Castle in Warsaw, 19 April 2024 © Blue Shield Poland

However, a wide spectrum of laws contribute to heritage protection, covering conflicts, disasters, illicit trafficking, and different types of heritage like intangible and underwater heritage. The Blue Shield exists to ensure comprehensive protection in nations around the world.

Blue Shield Australia are continuing to lobby their government for the ratification of the First and Second Protocols to the Hague Convention, raising support amongst the heritage community. However, disasters like flooding and wildfires are a devastating threat across Australia. Resilience is key, so the Committee are also pushing for heritage integration in Australia's implementation of the Sendai Framework. **Blue Shield Germany** contributed to the legislative process of the Law to Implement the EU Critical Entity Resilience Directive and to Strengthen the Resilience of Critical Facilities (KRITIS-DachG), with consultation comments

and attendance at the hearing: advocating for the inclusion of cultural heritage in the national strategy. Thanks to their hard work, the third and most recent draft includes the culture sector. Likewise, **Blue Shield Slovakia** are liaising with parliament representatives to propose amendments to existing laws and regulations to better address the evolving challenges faced by cultural heritage sites. Other committees are seeking to extend existing protection into new areas: **Blue Shield United Kingdom** Underwater Heritage Working Group has been working on a position paper regarding Ratification of the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001), liaising with many different external advisors as well as other national committee working groups given the strong connection between underwater heritage and other areas. Lobbying is key: **Blue Shield Australia** made submissions to State and Federal inquiries on cultural property, including disasters, risk, and policy, and a National Volunteer Incentive Scheme, urging training and oversight for volunteers handling heritage. Similarly, **Blue Shield France** took part in National Assembly hearings on civil protection adaptation and the General States of Religious Heritage hearing.

Of course, ratification of a law is only the first step. After that, new policies are necessary, and then those policies must be implemented. This work builds on previous success and, in some cases, years of hard work. In 2023, cultural heritage became part of the National Crisis Plan in Curaçao (partly due to extensive lobbying by the **Blue Shield Curaçao**), but under the specific condition that the Curaçao heritage sector must create a monitoring and alarm tool. In 2024, a workgroup was formed on Curaçao (with different heritage stakeholders) to start mapping all vulnerable heritage sites on Curaçao. Following receipt of a grant from the International Council on Archives (ICA), the Caribbean Risk Map will be integrated in the CARBICA website, meeting the conditions to include heritage in the legal framework on Curaçao.

Many national committees have listed the importance of encouraging and supporting better implementation of the Hague Convention and its Protocols. For example, **Blue Shield Iceland** are part of ongoing dialogue with representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs on how to proceed in the implementation of Iceland's commitment regarding the recent ratification of the Hague Convention (1954). Whilst for many, there is renewed focus amongst committees and governments as a result of the anniversary, for others, the anniversary is an opportunity to showcase ongoing work. The results of the **Blue Shield Germany** survey on the implementation of the Hague Convention and its current status in the regions were presented at an anniversary event for the Hague Convention in Berlin.

Committees are working equally hard to support and develop the implementation of conflict preparedness and disaster policies, working closely with partners. The **USA National Committee** Advocacy Committee continues to work with a *pro bono* law firm to achieve different policy goals, such as codification of the Cultural Heritage Coordinating Committee and identification of a cultural property protection coordinator within the Department of Defense. Blue Shield expertise is widely recognised in membership of new and well-established Working Groups. For example, Working Group **CPP 1954** was established in 2024 by ICOM Austria, the Federal Ministry of Culture, the Austrian UNESCO Commission, the Federal Monuments Office, the Austrian Armed Forces/National Defence Academy, and **Blue Shield Austria** to mark the 70th anniversary of the Hague Convention. **Blue Shield France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland**, and **Austria** are members of government bodies and Working Groups such as the National Joint Flood Commission; Working Group on Civil Defence; National Emergency Management Agency; Heritage in crisis in international conflict; Interministerial Commission on Humanitarian Law; Veilig Erfgoed (Safe Heritage) Taskforce; Atrocities Crime Advisory Group; and the Advisory Body of the Council for the Protection of Cultural Property. Others, like **Blue Shield Norway, Denmark**, and **Iceland**, meet directly with Ministry representatives and serve as advisory bodies, particularly in matters concerning the 1954 Hague Convention, whilst Blue Shield



Curaçao is a passionate advocate for risk preparedness to government bodies and institutions. UK Government heritage protection staff attend the **United Kingdom National Committee** Cultural Property Protection & Military Activity Working Group, ensuring collaboration and expertise sharing. **Blue Shield Niger** has helped to draw up the Terms of Reference for the organisation FAC SAHEL, the Forum des Acteurs de la Construction en Terre au Sahel (Forum of Earthen Construction Stakeholders in the Sahel), the theme of which is Bioclimatic materials and construction in the face of environmental change in the Sahel. The event brought together architects, town planners, heritage managers, craftsmen and contractors, all committed to safeguarding and promoting earthen architecture.

For countries in conflict, the challenges of heritage protection are significant. Korea has been in an active conflict for over 70 years: peace is maintained via an armistice and a demilitarised zone (DMZ) between the two Koreas. In addition to the original heritage contained within the DMZ, significant new heritage has been created around it as a response to the conflict. To pursue the goal of establishing a North-South cooperation system for the protection of cultural heritage within the DMZ, **Blue Shield Rep. of Korea** attended the DMZ Cultural Heritage Preservation Forum with the Heritage Institute, Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation, establishing a foundation for the DMA World Heritage Registration, with Blue Shield International, Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation, Newcastle University (England), and the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea. Attendees discussed strategies for the protection of the DMZ in conflict and looked for comparative examples from other countries of heritage landscape management.



Together with BSI, the Chair of the **Republic of Korea National Committee** of the Blue Shield spoke at the *DMZ Cultural Heritage Preservation Forum* alongside the GyeongGi Cultural Heritage Foundation © BSI.

One of the biggest policy events of the year was *Milestones & Way to go*. **Blue Shield Austria** and **Blue Shield Germany**, together with the German Society for Cultural Property Protection e.V., the Swiss Society for Cultural Property Protection, and the Fraunhofer Society, hosted a 70th anniversary event of the 1954

Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict at the Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union (EU) in Brussels, which the BSI Secretariat, **Blue Shield France**, and **Blue Shield Belgium** were delighted to attend. Bringing together key stakeholders from across Europe, the symposium provided a platform to reflect on the achievements of the Hague Convention and to discuss future challenges in the protection of cultural heritage. The event looked at the Convention's *'Milestones & Way to go'*, offering insights from various experts of respective institutions and fields including the EU, the Defence sector as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Through collaborative dialogue, the event explored interdisciplinary strategies and initiatives for further enhancing the protection of cultural property in armed conflicts and catastrophes. Following guided expert discussions, and panel contributions, the event made a series of draft recommendations for better protecting cultural property and implementing the 1954 Hague Convention. Once finalised these will be presented to the EU to highlight key actions that should be taken to protect heritage in the event of a conflict.



Milestones & Ways to go Hague Convention anniversary event: programme and development of expert recommendations © Blue Shield International / Blue Shield Austria & Blue Shield Germany

Without constant advocacy and awareness-raising, change is exceptionally hard. In 2024, Blue Shield National Committees ran or co-organised 27 advocacy events, and spoke at another 33 events, all discussing heritage protection in conflict and crisis, and informing attendees about the work of the Blue Shield around the world. This year, most focussed on heritage in conflict and the 1954 Hague Convention. Showcasing the value of partnership working, the Chair of **Blue Shield Armenia** moderated a panel on *New and Emerging Technologies in the Service of Cultural Heritage Mapping and Protection*, at the international conference *Restoration of the Protection of Cultural Heritage Using New and Developing Technologies* in Yerevan, organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, the National UNESCO Commission of Armenia, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia, in collaboration

with UNESCO, which the Blue Shield's President also spoke at. Event highlights included the **Republic of Korea National Committee** annual conference in the National Museum of *Korea on Korea's Experience and Future Strategies in Preserving Cultural Heritage During War* with approximately 50 experts from the fields of Cultural Heritage Foundation Abroad, Gyeonggi History and Cultural Heritage Institute, Research Institute for Buddhist Cultural Properties, and Korea Heritage Service and Museums/Art Galleries; the **Blue Shield North Macedonia** Forum *70 Years of the 1954 Hague Convention*; **Blue Shield Austria's** event *Cultural Property Protection in the 21st Century: Meeting Requirements across the Forces*; and the **Blue Shield Denmark** annual Heritage Friday seminar day *Cultural heritage and conflict – where are we today (70th jubilee for Hague Convention)*.



Panel on *New and Emerging Technologies in the Service of Cultural Heritage Mapping and Protection*, moderated by the Chair of **Blue Shield Armenia** at the international conference *Restoration of the Protection of Cultural Heritage Using New and Developing Technologies* in Yerevan, organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, the National UNESCO Commission of Armenia, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia, in collaboration with UNESCO. © Blue Shield Armenia

There are many ways to raise awareness: Mali has amended the law on the protection of its cultural heritage in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee of the 1954 Convention, particularly in respect to the Second Protocol. The **Malian National Committee** plans to carry out awareness-raising activities in communities to improve the protection of cultural heritage. Their annual organisation, in collaboration with the Cultural Mission of Gao, of the International Day of African World Heritage in Gao on the site of the Tomb of Askia, on 5 May 2024, also continues to strengthen. The event is attracting increasing local participation and media coverage. Mention also goes to the exhibition co-organised by **Blue Shield Poland**. The exhibition *Warsaw Stronger than War* was presented during the conference entitled *War and the protection of cultural heritage*, Royal Castle in Warsaw, 19 April 2024, and shown in several venues.

Blue Shield France have hosted awareness raising stalls at events around France, in six different provinces! **Blue Shield Norway, Belgium,** and **Austria** have done multiple press interviews. **Blue Shield Cameroon** hosts an annual press lunch to communicate with national and international journalists. A key focus is raising awareness about the 1954 Hague Convention and its implementation in Cameroon amidst ongoing security crises. Social media is key: **Blue Shield Armenia, Georgia,** and **Denmark** all created excellent social media campaigns to raise awareness of the 1954 Hague Convention and its implications for heritage professionals and armed forces, whilst **Blue Shield France, Belgium,** and **Slovakia** have extremely active social media accounts informing viewers about national and international heritage protection issues and new tools. These efforts all expand both public visibility and professional engagement.

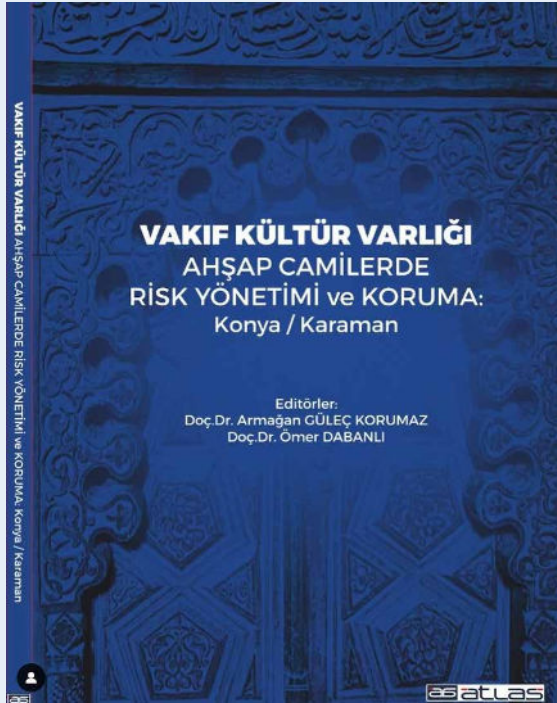
This expertise also results in new publications:

- » **Blue Shield Türkiye** published the Project Book: *Evaluation and Reduction of Fire Risks of Historical Wooden Mosques in Konya - Karaman Region of Türkiye* (with Konya Chamber of Architects and Konya Regional Directorate of Foundations, Ministry of Culture and Tourism). The project made an important contribution to the application process of Hypostyle Wooden Mosques of Anatolia in the world heritage list of UNESCO. At the end Beysehir Esrefoglu Mosque, which is one of the focused monuments in the project, was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List as part of the *Wooden Hypostyle Mosques of Medieval Anatolia*.
- » **Blue Shield Niger** published an article in the journal *City and Heritage*.
- » **Blue Shield Croatia** published
 - » the proceedings from the 2023 Conference on Archives, Libraries, and Museums, focused on cultural heritage protection during crises, with contributions from Blue Shield national committees and Blue Shield International.
 - » a blog post emphasising the importance of cybersecurity in protecting cultural heritage.
- » **Blue Shield USA** published an article entitled, „Cultural Property Protection: Benefits for Military Personnel,” for the conference proceedings, *Cultural Property Protection in the 21st Century: Meeting Requirements Across the Forces*.
- » **Blue Shield Netherlands** - President Andrea Kiesamp’s book *Kunstabunkers en cultuurkaravanen* [Art bunkers and Cultural transports] on the safeguarding of heritage in the Netherlands during World War II was published.²²
- » **Blue Shield France** published
 - » an activity report
 - » a report of their study day
 - » and co-authored an article with the French Army Heritage Delegacy.
- » **Blue Shield Belgium** published
 - » L. Verhaege and V. Boschloos, La problématique des vols du patrimoine religieux : Réflexions sur le cas de la statue de La Roche, in *Bulletin Du Musée en Piconrue - Musée de La Grande Ardenne* 149-152 (2024/1-4), p. 25–31.
 - » C. Ceulemans, A.-S. Hanse, V. Boschloos, The Role of Blue Shield Belgium in Flood Response, in the *Bulletin de l’Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique*, 2025 (forthcoming) (peer reviewed).
 - » C. Ceulemans, A.-S. Hanse, RETEX sur la gestion des inondations de 2021 et les activités du Blue Shield Belgium, in G. Xhayet (ed.), *Le patrimoine historique, artistique et archéologique au défi des inondations. Actes de la journée d’étude à Verviers*, 19 avril 2024 (Belisama 2), s.l., Association des Cercles francophones d’histoire et d’archéologie de Belgique (forthcoming).

²² Available at: <https://www.walburgpers.nl/nl/book/9789464562408/kunstabunkers-en-cultuurkaravanen>

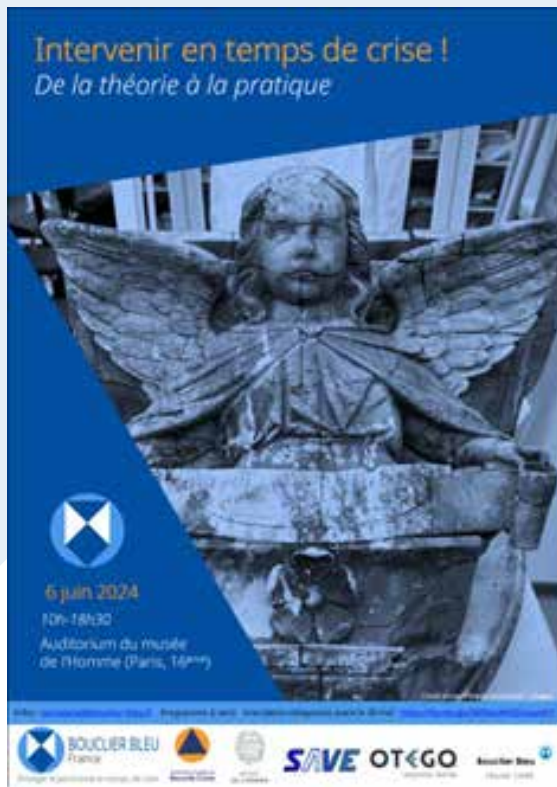


Finally, a special congratulations to **Blue Shield Slovakia**, which was recognised for its contributions. The Archeofilm International Movie Festival, which explored the intersection of archaeology, art, and the environment was collaboratively organised with the participation of Blue Shield Slovakia and was awarded the annual prize from the magazine Monuments and Museums for the year 2023 in the event category on 2 October 2024.



Blue Shield Türkiye Project Book: *Evaluation and Reduction of Fire Risks of Historical Wooden Mosques in Konya - Karaman Region of Türkiye* (with Konya Chamber of Architects and Konya Regional Directorate of Foundations, Ministry of Culture and Tourism © Blue Shield Türkiye

Blue Shield France Activity Report 2023, and Report of the study day *Intervenir en temps de crise!*



23 Available at: <https://www.bouclier-bleu.fr/files/default/uploads/Documentation/Bouclier%20bleu%20France/Rapports%20d%27activite%27rapport-morale-d-activite-2023-bouclier-bleu-france.pdf>

and: <https://www.bouclier-bleu.fr/evenement/journee-d-etude-intervenir-en-temps-de-crise-de-la-theorie-a-la-pratique>



”

The protection of cultural heritage is an imperative for our societies. On a national level, Blue Shield Austria is a crucial partner in strengthening our mutual efforts to raise awareness for the necessities of cultural property protection and better safeguard our cultural heritage

Florian Meixner, Austrian Commission for UNESCO

”

ICOM Austria very much appreciates the great cooperation and exchange with Blue Shield Austria. Together we are initiating and supporting projects on the protection of heritage, fighting illicit trafficking of cultural objects or preparing for emergencies in museums and cultural institutions. We are very grateful for the great experience and expertise Blue Shield brings to the table!

Elke Kellner, Managing Director, ICOM Austria



Coordination

Those whose heritage is under threat guide the work of the Blue Shield. When crisis affects a community, the Blue Shield works with national and global partners to help them protect their heritage. Such partnerships are critical to effective working: our partners include not only heritage professionals, but governments, academia, armed forces and humanitarian workers.

That's why the Blue Shield was founded by ICOM, ICOMOS, IFLA and the ICA – to bring together professionals across all sectors, and ensure collaborative working.

” I remember the opening reception of the Radenci meeting [1998] on the Slovenia-Austria border. During this I introduced two very senior book and archive conservators to each other. One worked in the archives and the other worked in the libraries. Both had big teams and expertise in dealing with damaged paper and conservation problems related to paper and similar materials. They both worked in the same country, they both worked in the same ministry, they worked at opposite ends of the same government building, in the national capital and they had been working there respectively for about 25 and 21 years. And yet they had never met one other! From a conservation standpoint we were able to hammer away the point that if you have a threat or an actual disaster you need to look to the whole of the conservation and cultural heritage family for support.

Patrick Boylan, ICOM representative, panel discussion when receiving an Advocacy Award from the International Institute of Conservation, 2012.²⁴

External

That need for the whole heritage community is just as vitally important today, but today we also recognise the need to work with armed forces, emergency responders, and all those in uniform with a role to play in heritage protection. Many organisations choose to join Blue Shield as active members: most national committees have members from ICOM, ICOMOS, IFLA and ICA (or their designated representatives) – the Blue Shield still seeks to ensure inclusion of all types of heritage, and collaboration between those responsible for it. National Commissions of UNESCO, governments and heritage agencies, armed forces, lawyers, and humanitarian organisations like Red Cross Societies have all joined national committees around the world. Too often, a lack of diversity is recognised as a problem, so committees like **Blue Shield Australia** are actively working to recruit new members and increase the diversity of their representation.

The scale of the work evidenced throughout this report is a testimony to the respect earned by Blue Shield National Committees, who are viewed as valuable colleagues, and sources of expertise. Where national agencies are not active members, they are almost always crucial partners. Relationships with them have enabled the national committees of the Blue Shield to extend their reach around their respective countries. These collaborations not only amplify awareness of the Blue Shield as a national representative within the expansive network of the Blue Shield worldwide, but ensure that heritage is protected throughout a country. Most national committees report close engagement with their governments, including Ministries of Culture, Defence, and Foreign Affairs, as well as national heritage agencies, armed forces (land, air, sea,

²⁴ The Advocate Award 2012: <https://www.iiconservation.org/advocate-award>

Text of the panel discussion: <https://www.iiconservation.org/sites/default/files/awp/download/2023-10/protecting-preparing-responding-en.pdf>

Radenci meeting, 16 November 1998: <https://theblueshield.org/the-1998-radenci-declaration-on-the-protection-of-cultural-heritage-in-emergencies-and-exceptional-situations/>



and veterans' associations) and emergency services to support proactive protection, emergency response, military training, and countering trafficking. However, the importance of local knowledge and local structures must also not be forgotten: **Blue Shield Cameroon**, for example, cites The Traditional Chieftaincies of the Far North, North-West and South-West as a major partner. Volunteer networks are critical. **Blue Shield France's** volunteer network covers most of the country, and has even deployed abroad: their teams are trained to government standards. **Blue Shield Belgium's** volunteer team (which is also appropriately trained) is continuing to increase: in 2024, 25 new volunteers joined Blue Shield Belgium, bringing the total to around 250.

Universities, and the UNITWIN UNESCO Chair Network, along with other scientific institutions, are also recognised as key partners. Just as the threats to heritage are advancing, protection must also be based on robust information and the latest technologies. National Committee members teach on heritage courses, and are involved in university research programmes, not only sharing their existing experience but helping develop new knowledge and tools. Blue Shield proficiency is also recognised in academic projects. **Blue Shield Belgium**, for example, provide their expertise through the external advisory board of the AURORA project (Artwork Unique RecognitiOn and tRacking through chemicAL encoded data, miniaturised devices and blockchain alliance), an EU-funded research network (Horizon-RIA) focusing on heritage protection and non-invasive chemical marking.

Some have formalised these arrangements with official agreements. For example, **Blue Shield France** has signed agreements with: the Ministry of the Interior (DGSCGC) to frame ORU (Emergency Response Organisation) interventions at the request of national crisis authorities; several Fire and Rescue Department Services (SDIS); and local Civil Protection Agreements to ensure cooperation on operations, training, and communication on heritage protection. Following **Blue Shield North Macedonia's** awareness-raising Forum, cooperation was established with General Mitre Arsovki, as well as with the Association of Defense and Security Veterans and Reservists of the Republic of Macedonia, with which a memorandum of cooperation was signed. Conversely, lack of coordination was recognised a key issue in Norway: **Blue Shield Norway** is seeking to address the lack of national coordination between different museum owners (state, counties, private etc.)



Blue Shield France sign formal agreement with the General Directorate of Civil Security and Crisis Management © Blue Shield France

Humanitarians can also be critical partners, when communities are telling us that in a crisis their heritage still matters to them. For example, **Blue Shield France** signed a formal agreement with the French National Society of the Red Cross for joint training, emergency operations, and mutual support nationally and internationally. **Blue Shield Poland**, and **Blue Shield United Kingdom** also report close collaboration with their National Red Cross Societies.

Heritage protection is an issue that crosses borders, and regional and global partners are also vital. In the Caribbean and South America, for example **Blue Shield Curaçao** and **Blue Shield Guatemala** collaborate with and are supported by Cultural Emergency Response. Given the capacity of the Caribbean, cross-island regional working is essential: other partners include the Museum Association of the Caribbean (MAC), and CHEN: Caribbean Heritage Emergency Network, in which **Blue Shield Netherlands** is a member of the Advisory Board. Regional networks also play a vital role: **Blue Shield North Macedonia** cooperated with the Balkan Museum network, for example, whilst **Blue Shield Cameroon** are working with UNESCO's Multisectoral Office for the Central Africa Region.

Internal

Boylan called it a “cultural heritage family”, and seeing the support amongst the Blue Shield network confirms it. National Committee members from **Blue Shield United States, United Kingdom, Lebanon, Greece**, and **France** all give their time to Blue Shield International as members of our expert Working Group on Countering Trafficking. Members of **Blue Shield Netherlands** and **Blue Shield Türkiye** audit the accounts of the Blue Shield; and many members have supported training and events run by Blue Shield International. We thank them all.

It's essential to support and mentor National Committees under construction, which is why Blue Shield International ran a session at the 2024 Conference Shielding the Past: **Blue Shield France, Germany, Belgium, the USA**, and the newest Committee, **Sweden**, all shared their experiences. The **USA National Committee** prepared supplementary materials for members of the **Hungarian Committee of the Blue Shield Under Construction** that detailed how to work with the military and advise on Blue Shield functions.

National Committees don't only share their expertise with those seeking to create committees. **Blue Shield Austria** played a key role in the founding of **Blue Shield Armenia**, which officially became the 33rd National Committee of the Blue Shield network in 2024. This support and collaboration has continued even though the Committee is now well-established. **Blue Shield Armenia** is also liaising with **Blue Shield France** outlining their common goals and the valuable experience that the two committees can bring in support and collaboration; while **Blue Shield USA** and **Blue Shield Curaçao** also work together on challenges like disaster mapping. Other committees, like **Blue Shield Belgium** and **Blue Shield United Kingdom** also cite their strong relationships with other national committees in their annual reports.

Many events are co-organised, such as *Milestones & ways to go*, co-organised by **Blue Shield Austria** and **Blue Shield Germany**, and attended by **Blue Shield France** and **Blue Shield Belgium**. **Blue Shield Austria** was also asked to speak in the lecture series organised by **Blue Shield Germany**. The President of **Blue Shield Netherlands** ran a workshop at the invitation of **Blue Shield Armenia** within the framework of the international conference *Museum Professionalism in Difficult Times* for 50 students.





Workshop run by **Blue Shield Armenia** and **Blue Shield Netherlands** © Blue Shield Armenia

Regional networking and support are key. The **USA National Committee** initiated engagement with the leaders of the Blue Shield National Committees of the Western Hemisphere. The goal of this outreach is to establish an ongoing dialogue and collaboration with the National Committees of the Blue Shield in the Americas, including **Argentina, Curaçao, Guatemala, Perú** and **Canada**. **Blue Shield Senegal** has defined a policy for the deployment of the Blue Shield in Africa: supported by **Blue Shield Mali** they are helping other African countries to set up national Blue Shield committees and coordinate Blue Shield activities in West Africa. **Blue Shield Denmark** are currently working on establishing closer contact with other Nordic Blue Shield national committees.

Supporting Culture in Crisis – Worldwide

By working together, the Blue Shield association engages in heritage protection on a global scale. Time and experience have shown that much of the effort required to protect cultural property in conflict will also protect it in disaster. For crisis-affected peoples, it doesn't matter how heritage is lost, only that it is. It is an essential contributor to secure, stable communities, and a part of their identity.

The Blue Shield, and the world, owe a debt to those who drafted the 1954 Hague Convention and its First Protocol 70 years, ago, and their successors, led by Patrick Boylan, who wrote its Second Protocol 25 years ago. They had a vision, where the protection of cultural property in conflict was enshrined in an international treaty specifically dedicated to heritage protection, where States Parties were obligated to take protective measures in peace, where looting of cultural objects is prohibited, and where return of such objects is expected if they are found. Where armed forces were required to respect all important cultural property, and ensure the immunity of places and objects of very great importance, and where it was recognised that

” ... The preservation of the cultural heritage is of great important for all peoples of the world...
[Preamble, 1954 Hague Convention]

That vision, set out in 1954 and today ratified by two thirds of the world, is still a ringing call to action that guides the Blue Shield in our work.

”

Heritage is a part of all of us, it is part of our identity and sense of belonging ... By recognizing that culture is an extension of human beings, their dignity, their identity, and their history, we then understand the protection of culture as a humanitarian concern as much as education, shelter, and protection

Jennifer Price-Jones, Humanitarian Consultant, Blue Shield International



Financial Annex A – The Blue Shield 2024

Income and Expenditure* / **

2024 ANNUAL INCOME	
Grant Income	Total
UNITAD Assessment of Christian Sites (Iraq) to review damage by Daesh	€ 41,112.97
UK DCMS / British Cultural Protection Fund - Syria Earthquake Assessment	€ 9,818.55
Donations	€ 20.00
British Cultural Protection Fund Lebanon Portal Grant	€ 2,730.26
TOTAL INCOME	€ 53,681.78

2024 ANNUAL INCOME	
EXPENDITURE	Total
Consultants and Professional Fees/Services	€ 39,364.46
Travel Costs (Travel, Insurance, Security, Transport, etc.)	€ 1,457.80
Running Operational Costs (software, website, postal, bank charges,)	€ 7,070.13
Project Administrative Fees	€ 9,491.89
TOTAL EXPENSES	€ 57,384.28
NET INCOME LESS EXPENDITURE	-€ 3,702.50

* This report covers income and expenditure for fiscal year 2024. Grants may be multi-year. Grant income includes project administrative fees charged by BSI against all grants.

Operational income and expenditure do not consider the contributions for 2.5 FTE posts, and travel and other operating costs provided by Newcastle University, UK, for 2024.

** In line with the Article 12 of the Articles of Association, the Association (operating as Blue Shield International) exclusively and directly pursues non-profit actions and aspires to attract funding from a variety of sources including donations, income from activities and/or grants, gifts and/or endowments. Funds are only used for statutory objectives and in relation to specific projects approved by the Board and carried out by Blue Shield International.

Financial Annex B – National & Regional Committee Individual Income 2024

1.	Armenia*	24,000€
2.	Argentina	Unspecified
3.	Australia	None
4.	Austria	2,250€
5.	Belgium	61,085€
6.	Cameroon	None
7.	Croatia	None
8.	Curaçao	249.32€
9.	Czechia	1,003.46€
10.	Denmark	2,967€
11.	France	153,482€
12.	Georgia	12,706.09€
13.	Germany	4,370€
14.	Greece	5,000€
15.	Guatemala	Unspecified
16.	Iceland	None
17.	Ireland	None
18.	Lebanon	None
19.	Mali	None
20.	North Macedonia	1,022€
21.	Netherlands	None
22.	Niger	243.92€
23.	Norway	1,000€
24.	Pasifika	Unspecified
25.	Perú	Unspecified
26.	Poland	None
27.	Rep of Korea	1,818.60€
28.	Senegal	61.20€
29.	Slovakia	390€
30.	Türkiye	None
31.	USA	9,700€
32.	UK	None

*Annual Report covers 4 months of operations.

- Blue Shield Sweden was accredited in late 2024 and is not part of the 2024 reporting round.


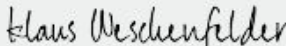
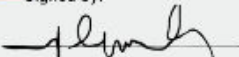
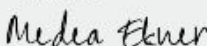

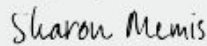
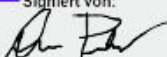

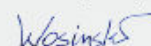
- Although Blue Shield Italy was accredited in 2023, their General Assembly to appoint officers and begin work was not until October 2024.

- As a regional committee, Blue Shield Pasifika is not part of the reporting round.



Signatures of the Board

We, the Blue Shield Board, agree the Annual Report and Budget 2024.

Peter Stone, President	Signed by:  730E1021CAB04F2...
Klaus Weschenfelder, Treasurer	Signiert von:  05B06FCB7A2441C...
Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly resigned February 2024. The accounts and annual report are signed by replacement Board member,	
Ömer Dabanli (joined 2025)	Signed by:  63913A3720374B5...
Medea Ekner	Signed by:  19D3C7C3F6374B7...
Hamady Gaye	Signé par :  83C1210D22FA46F...
Sharon Memis	Signed by:  D74AF21830314B6...
Anna Puhr	Signiert von:  40AEB7F0D35C9F9...
Carlos Eduardo Serrano Vásquez	Signé par :  399A65BA52084B4...
replaced Emilie Gagnet Leumas in Autumn 2024	
Michał Wosiński	DocuSigned by:  517F71D59AD040C...

Dutch Civil Code Article 2:48 Financial statements and annual accounts

- 1. ... the Board of Directors reveals at the General Meeting an annual report on the course of events within the Association (vereniging) and on the policy conducted. It submits the balance sheet and the profit and loss account (income statement), added with notes, for approval to the General Meeting. These documents are signed by the Directors; where the signature of one or more of them is missing, this shall be reported, mentioned as well as the reason for this.





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