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Your Excellencies,

As the preparations commence for hosting the G20, we commend the Italian Presidency for adding culture to the agenda.

Heritage is built upon the stories of our past, but also has the power to shape our future. With its long and celebrated history, Italy knows the role that culture plays in global security, national economies, and foreign policy. From the Pyramids to Pompeii, the world’s ancient treasures have become internationally recognized symbols and a shared part of our human journey, which have the power to unite us across borders, faiths, and languages.

In addition to the artistic, historic, and religious value that artifacts and sites hold, they are a financial resource, contributing to the culture sector’s estimated US\$2,250 billion in annual revenue and 29.5 million jobs before the pandemic. Heritage tourism is critical to the livelihoods of many around the world, and in the post-COVID recovery, will be foundational to the rebuilding of both local neighborhoods and the global economy. However, to realize this potential, world leaders must urgently address the intersecting threats to our precious cultural resources.

As Italy has frequently warned, especially through its eminent role within the United Nations, malicious actors recognize heritage's lucrative potential, as seen in the growth of transnational crime involving art and antiquities. Looters and traffickers are destroying our shared history and feeding a skyrocketing demand for cultural treasures on the black market. Many of the same armed groups that are now financing their operations through stolen artifacts in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere are also targeting sites and relics for outright destruction. Such actions are atrocious crimes in and of themselves and a key warning sign of genocide. Far beyond war zones, criminals are exploiting the art market's vulnerabilities to commit a wide range of offenses, from fraud to forgery, tax evasion, money laundering, and sanctions violations.

This threat is also coinciding with vicious attacks on cultural, historic, and religious sites aimed at crushing the spirit of a people and eradicating their spiritual and cultural inheritance as an act of war. Moreover, these horrific acts are colliding with the challenges of protecting cultural heritage from climate change. A significant share of global cultural sites are located in coastal areas vulnerable to sea level rise, exposing them to hazards that will continue to intensify in the future. Safeguarding the world's irreplaceable treasures will have a ripple effect that goes beyond the physical fabric of places. As recognized in the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), cultural heritage is a key component for supporting inclusive, safe, and resilient communities.

Therefore, it is vital from a sustainability, security, economic, and diplomatic perspective that the G20 send an important political signal by including a strong statement in its final communiqué about the need to protect cultural heritage from all these threats. At the same time, we hope that the working group on culture will consider the additional following concrete steps:

- **Improved Data:** Commissioning research at the regional and global levels to provide reliable figures on illicit trade, money laundering, and other transnational crimes via art and antiquities, such as sanctions evasion, as well as the impact of the destruction of cultural heritage by conflicts or changing climate patterns. Possessing this information will help policymakers, law enforcement, and others to prioritize and best target their efforts.
- **An Awareness Campaign:** As the G20 has done with other issues, use its platform to help policymakers, the private sector, civil society organizations and the general public better understand the threats to cultural heritage, as well as how to mitigate them.
- **Legal and Institutional Framework:** Update national and international laws and policies to better address these threats, as well as provide support to associated institutions and civil society concerned.
- **Capacity Building:** Develop and provide additional training to border patrol and customs officials, as well as investigators and prosecutors, including strategies that can be used to target the assets and financial networks of criminals. In addition, create training for heritage site managers and preservation professionals to prevent theft and bolster protections of cultural sites in the event of conflict or natural disasters.
- **Knowledge Transfer:** Establish mechanisms for cross-national partnership and collaboration that enhance the exchange of information and share lessons learned across regions and between governments.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Develop best practices and recommendations for emergency preparedness around cultural sites and collections to proactively prepare for attacks or natural disasters.

- **Financial Mobilization:** Encourage the financial commitment of the international community in favor of the concrete protection and rehabilitation of cultural heritage and the fight against the looting and illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

We stand prepared to support the government leadership—whether through the G20 or working directly with country leaders—by providing our time and resources to help accomplish these goals. Together, we can ensure that our past is preserved for future generations, not lost to willful destruction, theft, smuggling, or natural disasters.

Sincerely,

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