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## Statement of Grave Concern over Destruction of Cultural Heritage in the Wider Region of the Middle East

Europa Nostra expresses its grave concern regarding the escalating hostilities in Iran and the wider region of Middle East which continue to cause human suffering, displacement, and numerous fatalities and casualties. Not only are lives and livelihoods at risk, but the rich history and heritage of the Middle East are facing attacks and threats of deliberate or negligent destruction.

Europa Nostra deplors the immense risks posed to cultural heritage sites, museums, cultural institutions and cultural heritage professionals across the region. Recent reports indicate damage to important historic sites in Tehran, including the [World Heritage-listed Golestan Palace](#), following nearby strikes and explosions as well as [significant damage to world heritage sites in Isfahan](#). Furthermore, missiles have hit the architecturally-significant modernist buildings in the area of Tel Aviv in Israel known as “The White City”, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and also [another world heritage site, the Tyre site in Lebanon](#).

According to the [statement made by UNESCO on 8 March](#), in addition to heritage sites in Iran, Israel and Lebanon, several sites in other countries of the wider region and beyond are now under threat, notably in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Cultural heritage is not only a legacy of the past but also a shared source of identity, memory, and dialogue among peoples and cultures. The protection of heritage in times of conflict is therefore a responsibility of the international community and a legal obligation under international law.

**Prof. Dr Hermann Parzinger\***, Executive President of Europa Nostra stated: *“Regrettably, wars and armed conflicts will not disappear from human history. But civilised nations should be aware that places and monuments of unique cultural and historical value must not become targets and victims of military operations or treated as “collateral damage”. This is a matter of our shared cultural, moral and legal responsibility. If cultural heritage is destroyed in one country, we all are losing, humankind is losing!”*

Europa Nostra joins the growing number of international heritage organisations, including [UNESCO](#), the [International Council of Museums \(ICOM\)](#), [International Council on Monuments and Sites \(ICOMOS\)](#) and [the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield](#), that have expressed alarm at the risks facing cultural sites, museums, and professionals in the region.

The European Voice of  
Civil Society committed  
to Cultural Heritage

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Europa Nostra echoes the calls made by our peers in the cultural heritage sector for all parties of the conflict to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and to take immediate and concrete measures to identify, map, and safeguard cultural heritage sites, in close collaboration with relevant international bodies, especially UNESCO and the Blue Shield International.

In particular, Europa Nostra recalls the obligations established by the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, including its enhanced protective mechanism, and also by the 1972 World Heritage Convention. These obligations require states and all parties to armed conflict to protect cultural property and refrain from targeting or using such sites for military purposes. These instruments recognise that damage to cultural heritage constitutes a loss not only for a single nation but for humanity as a whole.

Europa Nostra calls upon all parties involved in the current conflict to refrain from actions that could endanger cultural heritage and to take urgent measures to ensure the protection of historic sites, museums, archives, libraries, and other repositories of cultural memory. Particular attention must be given to the safety of heritage professionals and cultural workers who continue to safeguard these irreplaceable assets under extremely difficult circumstances.

Europa Nostra stands in solidarity with cultural heritage professionals, institutions, and communities across the broader region of Middle East (Iran, the Gulf Region and the wider area of the Eastern Mediterranean) who are working to protect their heritage in the face of conflict. We reaffirm that safeguarding cultural heritage is an essential component of protecting human dignity, fostering mutual understanding, and laying the foundations for dialogue and peace.

Together with colleagues from key international heritage organisations, Europa Nostra will continue to monitor the situation closely and remains ready to support international and European efforts aimed at protecting cultural heritage and promoting respect for cultural diversity and shared heritage worldwide.

*\* Prof. Dr. Hermann Parzinger is Executive President of Europa Nostra. He has served for 17 years as President of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and was also President of the German Archaeological Association. He has been actively engaged in cultural and scientific bodies across Europe and internationally, including in his functions as a member of U.S. organisations such as the American Philosophical Society, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and American Institute of Archeology.*