

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; the Special Rapporteur on the right to education and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief**

Ref.: AL RUS 18/2022  
(Please use this reference in your reply)

20 December 2022

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; Special Rapporteur on the right to education and Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 46/9, 44/3 and 49/5.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **destruction of and damage to many sites, institutions and objects of cultural, historical and religious importance in Ukraine, the continued denigration of the history and identity of Ukrainian people as a justification for war and hatred, and the attacks against the Ukrainian culture, history and language in an effort to erase them from the physical and symbolic landscapes of Ukrainian territory occupied by the Russian Federation.**

According to the information received:

Numerous sites, institutions and objects of cultural, historical and religious importance in Ukraine, including memorial and monuments, buildings, museums, theaters, monuments, statues, places of worship, cemeteries, libraries, archives, as well as schools and universities, have been partially or fully destroyed by military attacks conducted by the Russian Federation since the escalation of hostilities on 24 February 2022.

*Destruction of and damage to sites, institutions and objects of cultural and historical importance in Ukraine*

As of 12 December 2022, UNESCO has been conducting a preliminary damage assessment for cultural properties by cross-checking the reported incidents with multiple credible sources. UNESCO has verified damage to 227 sites since 24 February 2022: 101 religious sites, 17 museums, 79 buildings of historical and/or artistic interest, 19 monuments, 11 libraries. These cultural properties are in the following Oblasts (regions), parts of which are or were occupied by the Russian Federation: Chernihiv (16 damaged sites), Kyiv (34), Kharkiy (54), Zaporizhzhya (9), Zhytomyr (3), Donetsk (63), Luhansk (26), Sumy (11), Mykolaiv (7), Vinnytsya (2), Odesa (1) and Dnipropetrovs'k (1).<sup>1</sup> The term "cultural property", in such assessment, refers to immovable cultural property as defined under Article 1 of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, irrespective of its origin, ownership or status of registration in the national inventory, and facilities and monuments dedicated to culture, including memorials.

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<sup>1</sup> [Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO | UNESCO](#)

Other assessments have identified more than 500 incidents of potential damage to cultural heritage sites, including archaeological sites, arts centers, monuments, memorials, museums, places of worship, libraries, and archives.

For example, in March 2022, Russian shelling damaged the Dobritsky Yar Holocaust Memorial on the outskirts of Kharkiv, in particular its most prominent feature, a Menorah. The memorial commemorates the site where Nazis killed an estimated 16,000 Jews during World War II.

Numerous other cultural sites, such as the Monument to V.G. Korolenko, as well as the Center for Contemporary Art and Culture named after A. Kuindzhi (both in Mariupol), the National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater and the Memorial Complex of Glory (in Kharkiv) or the Memorial monument to villagers who died in the Second World War (in Kyiv), have been damaged.

The scale of damage to buildings varies. Reportedly, a fire resulting from constant and heavy bombing destroyed the 16<sup>th</sup> Wooden All Saints' Hermitage, one of Ukraine's holiest Orthodox Christian sites, in Sviatohirsk (Donetsk Oblast). For its part, the Odesa Fine Arts Museum suffered minor blast wave damage to architectural elements such as windows and doors; however, fears have been expressed as the historic Center of Odesa features on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List.

Reports indicate that some sites have been deliberately targeted. For example, it is estimated that on 16 March 2022, two bombs of 500 kg (net explosive weight) were dropped on the Donetsk Regional Academic Mariupol Drama Theatre by Russian aircraft, where hundreds of residents were sheltering. The bombs caused the roof and large parts of the walls to collapse. The Russian word for “children” appeared twice in large Cyrillic script in front of and behind the theater, indicating that children were in the building, which would have been clearly visible to Russian pilots and on satellite imagery.

Examples of alleged direct attacks also concern local cultural institutions, such as the Ivankiv Historical and Local History Museum in Kyiv Oblast, shelled on 26 February 2022. No other target in Ivankiv was hit. The museum served as a repository for a collection of paintings by Maria Prymachenko, a Ukrainian painter and former resident of the Ivankiv district. The Izyum Historical and Local History Museum in Kharkiv Oblast was struck in late February - early March 2022. The local Rubizhne City Museum, which houses art and artifacts relevant to local history and culture, was hit by Russian forces during fighting in the occupied area of Luhansk Oblast, in March 2022.

Symbols of Ukrainian culture and identity also seem to have been specifically targeted. On 6 May 2022, according to information received, a Russian missile strike hit the Hryhoriy Skovoroda National Literary Memorial Museum in the Kharkiv Oblast and caused a fire. Skovoroda was an 18th century Ukrainian poet, composer, philosopher, and teacher, and a symbol of free Ukrainian thinking. He remains a prominent cultural figure, with Ukrainian universities named after him and his image appearing on the second largest banknote in

circulation in Ukraine, the 500 hryvnia note. Manuscripts and other items in the museum's collection had been removed to protect them, but the building sustained significant damage.

Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against densely populated areas have also resulted in considerable damage to civilian infrastructure, including cultural sites and institutions, severely affecting the present and future cultural life of the Ukrainian people, as well as their cultural heritage. The damage caused to civilian infrastructure is of such magnitude that it suggests a deliberate campaign of destruction.

According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, which conducted investigations in the provinces of Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy and has focused on the events in February and March 2022, as specified in Human Rights Council resolution S-34/1, the relentless use of explosive weapons with wide area effects in populated areas has killed and injured scores of civilians and devastated entire neighbourhoods. The Commission documented indiscriminate attacks using cluster munitions, unguided rockets and air strikes in the context of attempts by Russian armed forces to capture towns and smaller settlements. Residential buildings, schools and hospitals, among other parts of the civilian infrastructure, have been damaged or destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

It is also reported that in Chernihiv, the Commission saw dozens of houses and other buildings that had been destroyed or damaged during the attempt by Russian armed forces to take the city. In Kharkiv, explosive weapons devastated entire areas of the city.<sup>3</sup> The Commission also documented attacks with explosive weapons that affected educational institutions. It visited seven such institutions, where it observed the damage first-hand.<sup>4</sup>

Information also indicates that thousands of schools across the country have been damaged or destroyed. An estimated 2.6 million children have been learning online since September 2022.

#### *Destruction of and damage to libraries and archives*

According to information received, 2,475 libraries, out of about 15,000 across Ukraine, are currently closed due to damage, lack of funding, or staff being forced to leave their jobs and homes due to the conflict. Twenty-one libraries have lost their entire collections.

In the city of Chernihiv, which was besieged by Russian forces from 24 February 2022 until their withdrawal from northern Ukraine in early April, the building of the regional children's library was severely damaged. The building formerly housed the Museum of Ukrainian Antiquities, founded in 1902 by Vasyl Tarnovskyi, which served as an important component of the

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<sup>2</sup> [Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/77/533, 18 October 2022](#), summary p.2

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, para. 40

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., para. 42.

nation-building process and aimed at raising public awareness of the Ukrainian history and culture.

The 19th century Korolenko Kharkiv State Scientific Library, the largest library in Ukraine in size, and the second largest in terms of holdings, also suffered significant damage in March. The library housed 7 million copies of documents in different languages and served as a digital education hub in Kharkiv. The Chernihiv Regional Universal Scientific Library, also named after V.G. Korolenko, and the Mariupol Central City Library V.G. Korolenko, have also been damaged.

In the Chernihiv Oblast, the State Security Service archives, which included the former Soviet secret police (NKVD) documents related to Soviet repression against Ukrainians, were destroyed, allegedly by Russian attacks. The loss includes approximately 13,000 files, representing a devastating loss not only to historians but also victims of Soviet repression.

Reports further allege that Russian attacks on Bucha (Kyiv Oblast) destroyed significant parts of the archives of the Ukrainian politician and Soviet dissident and writer, Vyacheslav Chornovil, a defender of Ukrainian cultural rights and free expression, and head of the Ukrainian national-democratic liberation movement in the late 1980s and 1990s. Books from the Chornovil Foundation and 60 copies of the complete works of Chornovil have also been lost.

#### *Destruction of and damage to religious sites*

It is reported that dozens of churches as well as mosques, synagogues, cemeteries, and other religious buildings have been damaged and destroyed.

For example, it is reported that on 12 March 2022, the bridge nearby the historic Orthodox Sviatohirsk Lavra cave monastery complex came under an air attack by Russian forces. The complex, which was built between the 17th and 19th centuries in the Donetsk Oblast is a major Orthodox Christian site. At the time of the shelling, 520 people were sheltering at the monastery. Between March and June 2022, the complex reportedly came under repeated attacks. The historic wooden All Saints' church was burned completely.

Many other religious sites such as the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Marinka (Donetsk Oblast), the Orthodox church in Kamianka village of Izyum (Kharkiv Oblast), the Building of the early twentieth century that houses a synagogue and the St. Archangel Michael Church, both in Mariupol (Donetsk Oblast), or the Islamic Cultural Centre "Bismillah" in Severodonetsk (Luhansk Oblast), have been damaged.

#### *Continued denigration of the history and identity of Ukrainian people as a justification for war and hatred*

In an effort to justify the armed conflict and the occupation of Ukrainian territory, the Russian Federation, including at the highest level of the State and through senior Russian officials, as well as government think tanks and pro-

government public intellectuals, promote the narrative that no Ukrainian nation existed prior to Soviet Russia's creation of it. This serves as a basis for repeated denials of the existence of Ukraine as a nation, its culture and identity.

In the discourse promoted by public officials of the Russian Federation, the Ukrainian culture is demonized as glorifying and nourishing "nazism". The so-called "denazification" of the Ukrainian population shall consist in re-education, achieved through ideological repression of "Nazi" attitudes and strict censorship, in the political, cultural and educational domains.

*Continued attacks against the Ukrainian culture and history in an effort to erase them from the physical and symbolic landscapes of occupied territory*

Reports allege that, in the occupied parts of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has undertaken to erase Ukrainian culture, history and language and to forcibly replace them with Russian language and Russian and Soviet history and culture. There are reasons to believe that the heavy bombing and shelling in Eastern parts of Ukraine, including of cultural heritage sites, libraries and educational institutions, is part of a deliberate campaign of cultural cleansing, building barriers to new cultural and artistic expressions rooted in Ukrainian identity and culture, and creating obstacles to the return of displaced population and refugees.

This is also evident in the reconstruction plans of the Russian Federation in occupied territory. For example, plans for the reconstruction of the historical centre of Mariupol announced by the Russian Federation dismiss the historical nature of the area, focus on modern residential buildings, and do not seek to take into account the aspirations and wishes of its inhabitants, including those that have been displaced.

According to the International Criminal Court's 2020 report on Preliminary Examination Activities of 11 December 2020, which includes a segment on Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, the information available provides a reasonable basis to believe that crimes under the Rome Statute have been committed in the context of the situations in Crimea and in eastern Ukraine. The following crimes are mentioned: "intentionally directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects and intentionally directing attacks against protected buildings" (in the context of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine); "seizing the enemy's property that is not imperatively demanded by the necessities of war, with regard to private and cultural property" (in the context of the occupation of the territory of Crimea), and "intentionally launching attacks that resulted in harm to civilians and civilian objects that was clearly excessive in relation to the military advantage anticipated (disproportionate attacks)" (if it took place in the context of an international conflict).<sup>5</sup>

According to information compiled in a 2021 UNESCO report, the Russian occupation of Crimea has changed the perception of Ukraine's historical and cultural heritage, both by state and society. The Russian Federation has

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<sup>5</sup> [Report on Preliminary Examination Activities 2020](#), ICC, p. 70 para. 278; 280; 281.

allegedly appropriated Ukrainian cultural property on the peninsula, including 4,095 national and local monuments under state protection. Cultural appropriation is defined as "a long-term strategy to reinforce its historical, cultural and religious domination over the past, present and future of Crimea".<sup>6</sup> Ongoing archaeological excavations have also been reported.<sup>7</sup>

Reportedly, beginning in March 2022, authorities of the occupying power seized or destroyed Ukrainian history books and literature they deemed to be "extremist," from public libraries in cities and towns in the occupied territory of Luhansk, Donetsk, Chernihiv, and Sumy Oblasts. This included books about Ukraine's Revolution in 2013-2014, Ukrainian liberation movements, Ukraine's military operations against separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, and, in some locations, the non-fiction book by Vakhtang Kipiani, *The Case of Vasyl Stus*, about a Ukrainian poet who was imprisoned by the Soviet regime.

Also in March 2022, separatist authorities in Donetsk announced the seizure in 70 libraries of books related to history, politics, Ukrainian national movements and state symbols, as well as religion. In May, the occupying forces reportedly removed the remaining books from the city's damaged main library and loaded them on a bus. In July, occupying forces in Mariupol set fire to the book collection of the Russian Orthodox Church of Petro Mohyla, which contained several unique copies of Ukrainian-language publications.

According to the information received, in March 2022, the authorities of the occupying power detained civil servants, educators and local school directors for their refusal to implement the Russia curriculum in occupied territory. Families have also resisted, and authorities have threatened to remove children from their parents if they refused to send them to school. It is reported that the Russian government has also recruited hundreds of teachers from the Russian Federation to work in occupied eastern Ukraine by offering lucrative pay and free accommodation.

In August 2022, decrees titled "On the Removal of Literature," signed by authorities of the occupying power in two villages in the Kharkiv Oblast were issued. The decrees order the removal and storage of hundreds of elementary and secondary school textbooks and books of Ukrainian literature, as well as posters, signs, and school documentation.

Reports from July 2022 indicate that in the small town of Borivsk, in the northern Luhansk Oblast, Ukrainian State symbols and Ukrainian textbooks are being destroyed in schools. Occupying forces have replaced seized books with textbooks imported from the Russian Federation, some of which teach students that Russia is their homeland and that there is no Ukrainian cultural identity.

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<sup>6</sup> [Follow-up to decisions and resolutions adopted by the Executive Board and the General Conference at their previous sessions](#), UNESCO, 10 September 2021, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

### *Further disruption of cultural life*

The massive population displacement of Ukrainian people caused by the conflict further disrupt Ukrainian cultural life. In addition, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), from 24 February to 2 October 2022, 6,114 civilians were killed and 9,132 were injured. Writers, artists and cultural workers are among those killed and seriously injured.

It is also reported that in occupied Crimea, the Russian Federation has harassed, threatened, arrested, disappeared and prosecuted those who have voiced opposition to the occupation and policies to eliminate the identity, language and culture of the Crimean Tatar community. The Russian Federation also reportedly detains a high number of Ukrainian journalists, activists, writers and others on politically motivated charges in Crimea or has deported them to the territory of the Russian Federation. A majority are Crimean Tatar.

Ukraine's publishing industry has experienced damage to buildings, loss of staff, and closures of printing houses, bookstores and other retail sales outlets, and supply chain disruptions. There are over 250 publishers in Ukraine, located across the country, with a large part of the industry concentrated in Kharkiv, home to the three largest book printers.

According to the information received, 20 offices and warehouses of Ukrainian publishers were damaged, primarily in Kharkiv. In March 2022, one of the largest printing houses in Ukraine reported that their building in Kharkiv was partially damaged by shelling. Another large publisher reported having to find printers near Kyiv and in western Ukraine, after the building housing their printer in Kharkiv was damaged by shelling.

We are expressing grave concerns at the extent of the damage to and destruction of historic, religious and cultural heritage sites in Ukraine caused by Russian forces attacks, in violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We are deeply concerned that these destructions prevent people in Ukraine, in the present and in the future, from exercising their human right to enjoy and access cultural heritage, including places of worship, as well as their right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and express their cultural identity, and undermine the enjoyment of many other human rights, including the right to freedom of belief and religion and the right to education. These destructions, combined with the continued denigration of and attacks against the history, identity and culture of Ukrainian people, effort to erase them from the physical and symbolic landscapes of occupied territory, and attacks against those who voice opposition, seem to be part of a wider scheme of annihilation of a people's culture, in all its diversity. This will have long-lasting effects, undermine future peaceful coexistence, and have a devastating impact on the recovery.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we wish to appeal to your Excellency's Government to seek clarification on the information drawn to our attention.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights and humanitarian law** attached to this letter which cites international instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please explain the circumstances surrounding the destruction of and damage to sites of religious, historical and cultural significance cited above, and whether and how attacks resulting in such outcomes were compatible with international human rights law and international humanitarian law mentioned in the Annex.
3. What measures have been taken to avoid and minimize incidental damage to historical, religious and cultural heritage sites?
4. Please indicate steps that will be taken to investigate all allegations of the destruction, damage or removal of cultural heritage, to create a complete record of these destructions and removals, and to hold perpetrators accountable in accordance with international law.
5. Please provide details on plans for reconstruction in occupied territory, such as the one for Mariupol, and explain how these are fully in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law, including with the cultural rights of inhabitants in such processes, including those who have been displaced.
6. Please explain how Your Excellency's Government intends to ensure that cultural rights are fully respected and protected in occupied territory, including through school curricula, textbook accreditation, respect for the Ukrainian cultural identity, in all its diversity, and non-appropriation of Ukrainian cultural property.
7. Please explain how Your Excellency's Government intends to ensure the respect of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion in occupied territory, including by preventing the destruction or damage of religious sites and places of worship.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken as a matter of urgent priority to halt conduct that has led to the alleged violations of

international humanitarian law and human rights law, to protect places of historic, cultural and religious significance that may be threatened, to prevent re-occurrence of these violations, and in the event that the investigations yield evidence that the allegations are correct, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible of the alleged violations.

In light of the serious implications of these cases, and the risk of ongoing and irreversible damage to Ukraine's rich cultural heritage and cultural life, a matter warranting immediate attention, we are considering expressing these concerns publicly in the near future. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. If a press release is issued, it will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government to clarify the issues in question.

Please, kindly note that a copy of this letter will be sent to the Government of Ukraine for information.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Alexandra Xanthaki  
Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights

Farida Shaheed  
Special Rapporteur on the right to education

Nazila Ghanea  
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

## Annex

### Reference to international human rights and humanitarian law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to stress that, as stated by the Human Rights Council in resolution 9/9, both international human rights law and international humanitarian law apply to situations of armed conflict and provide complementary and mutually reinforcing protection. All human rights require protection equally and the protection provided by human rights law continues in armed conflicts. Effective measures to guarantee and monitor the realization of human rights should be taken with respect to civilian populations in situations of armed conflict and effective protection against violations of their human rights should be provided, in accordance with international human rights law and applicable international humanitarian law. We would also like to recall that international human rights are subject only to derogations taken in accordance with international human rights law.

We wish to refer your Excellency's Government to article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by your country on 16 October 1973, which protect the right of everyone to take part in cultural life.

In its General Comment n° 21, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recalled that States have the obligation to respect and protect cultural heritage in all its forms, in times of war and peace. Cultural heritage must be preserved, developed, enriched and transmitted to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, in order to encourage creativity in all its diversity and to inspire a genuine dialogue between cultures. Such obligations include the care, preservation and restoration of historical sites, monuments, works of art and literary works, among others (E/C.12/GC/21, para. 50).

We would also like to recall the report of the first Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights relating to the right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage. As cultural heritage represents values linked with the cultural identity of individuals and groups, access and enjoyment of cultural heritage also imply that States acknowledge, respect and protect the diversity of cultural heritages. States have a duty not to destroy, damage or alter cultural heritage, and to take measures to preserve/safeguard cultural heritage from destruction or damage by third parties (A/HRC/17/38, in particular paras. 78 and 80 a and b).

To effectively prevent and stop intentional destruction of cultural heritage as a violation of human rights law, the second Special Rapporteur recommended that States respect and protect tangible and intangible cultural heritage, both nationally and transnationally. She also recommended that parties to armed conflicts as well as international and national criminal courts interpret narrowly any military necessity exception to the ban on targeting cultural property, taking into consideration the impact on cultural rights; and should subject to close scrutiny all military decisions resulting in the destruction of or damage to cultural heritage, while acknowledging that public accountability for those decisions is essential (A/71/317, para. 78 a) and j)).

The obligation to preserve and safeguard cultural heritage was also inscribed in the 2003 UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage, stressing the responsibility of States not to intentionally destroy heritage, “whether or not it is inscribed on a list maintained by UNESCO or another international organization” (Section VI). The UNESCO Declaration also stresses the responsibility of States to take all appropriate measures to protect cultural heritage in conformity with the principles and objectives of, inter alia, the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which the Russian Federation acceded on 12 October 1988, and the 1976 Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas (Section IV).

Furthermore, we would like to draw your attention to the principles enshrined in the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which the Russian Federation acceded on 4 January 1957, and which are considered customary international law. In accordance with article 4 of the Convention, States parties must respect cultural property situated within their own territory as well as within the territory of other States parties by refraining from any use of the property and its immediate surroundings or of the appliances in use for its protection for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict; and by refraining from any act of hostility directed against such property (paragraph 1). States shall also refrain from any act directed by way of reprisals against cultural property (paragraph 4).

We would also like to stress that, in accordance with article 53 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (1977), ratified by the Russian Federation on 29 September 1989, it is prohibited: (a) to commit any acts of hostility directed against historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples; (b) to use such objects in support of the military effort; and (c) to make such objects the object of reprisals.

Furthermore, the Statute of the International Criminal Court stresses that intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes or historic monuments is a war crime in both international and non-international armed conflicts, “provided they are not military objectives” (ICC Statute, article 8(2)(b)(ix) and (e)(iv) (cited in Vol. II, Ch. 12, § 19).

In 2017, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2347, which for the first time made the protection of cultural heritage a security imperative and affirmed that directing unlawful attacks against sites and buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, or historic monuments may constitute, under certain circumstances and pursuant to international law a war crime and that perpetrators of such attacks must be brought to justice (para. 4). The Security Council emphasized that the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, and the looting and smuggling of cultural property in the event of armed conflicts, and the attempt to deny historical roots and cultural diversity in this context can fuel and exacerbate conflict and hamper post-conflict national reconciliation, thereby undermining the security, stability, governance, social, economic and cultural development of affected States (Preamble, para. 5).

We would also like to underline that, under article 13 of the ICESCR, everyone has the right to education. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

As stated by the first Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, the right of children to develop their own historical perspective throughout education is to be considered an integral part of the right to education. Indoctrination on any grounds, including political or religious ideology, should not be tolerated in either public or private schools. History teaching should be based on the understanding of history as an academic discipline. History teaching should aim at fostering critical thought, analytic learning and debate; stressing the complexity of history, it should enable a comparative and multiperspective approach. It should not serve the purpose of strengthening patriotism, fortifying national identity or shaping the young in line with either the official ideology or the guidelines of the dominant religion (A/68/296, paras. 87 and 88 a)).

In its General Comment 21, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recalled that the right of everyone to take part in cultural life is intrinsically linked to the right to education (ICESCR, arts. 13 and 14), through which individuals and communities pass on their values, religion, customs, language and other cultural references, and which helps to foster an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect for cultural values (E/C.12/GC/21, para. 2). This was reaffirmed by the first Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights (A/HRC/14/36, para. 9).

Article 18 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by your country in 1973, stresses that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom [...] either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.” According to the Human Rights Committee the freedom to manifest religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching encompasses a broad range of acts. The concept of worship extends to ritual and ceremonial acts giving direct expression to belief, as well as various practices integral to such acts, including the building of places of worship (see CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 paragraph 4). Similarly, the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (A/RES/36/55) highlights in article 6 that the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief includes the freedom, "to worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes".

Finally, we would like to make reference to General Assembly resolution 55/254 on the protection of religious sites (2001), which in paragraphs 1 and 2 condemns all acts or threats of violence, destruction, damage or endangerment, directed against religious sites and calls upon all States to exert their utmost efforts to ensure that religious sites are fully respected and protected in conformity with international standards.