

Saving Haiti's Cultural Treasures

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With the country in ruins following the earthquake, UNESCO has banned the trade of Haitian artifacts.

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Haiti, the rich cultural treasures of the country lie vulnerable to looters looking to take advantage of the widespread disorder in the country. To prevent such theft, UNESCO has taken the positive step of issuing a ban on the export, import, and trade of Haitian artifacts.

UNESCO's rapid response comes after the ugly lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan, just two examples of nations where chaos provided an opportunity to thieves and looters to profit. In the case of Iraq, the Bagdad Museum was robbed in the first days of the U.S.-led invasion. It is now widely known that this was a preventable crime, following repeated, clear warnings that the material in the museum was highly sought after and was certainly at risk of being looted.

Some of the cultural heritage at risk in Haiti is contained in numerous sites that are on the UNESCO World Heritage List, including the former Presidential Palace and the Port-au-Prince Cathedral, as well as many art collections, libraries, museums, and archives.

The U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield, whose mission is "to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict, man made and natural disasters," issued a statement on January 14, expressing its sorrow and solidarity with the population of Haiti for the loss of life and the destruction caused by the earthquake. Their statement continued:

Culture is a basic need and cultural heritage is a symbolic necessity that gives meaning to human lives connecting past, present and future. Cultural Heritage is a reference full of values helping to restore a sense of normality and enabling people to move forward. Cultural Heritage is fundamental in rebuilding the identity, the dignity and the hope of the communities after a catastrophe.

Protecting Haiti's heritage will play an integral part in rebuilding the nation's infrastructure and hopes for normalcy in the future.

Surprisingly, Canada does not have a Committee of the Blue Shield, a situation that needs to be remedied. Canada is a High Contracting Party to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. The country also plays a significant and active role in military action and other similar missions. There is certainly a pressing need for such a committee's presence in this country.

Original:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100215204023/http://themarknews.com/articles/932-saving-haitis-cultural-treasures>