

Speech: Karen Bradley's speech at the G7 Culture Ministers in Florence

Let me begin by thanking our Florentine and Italian hosts.

My compliments to you for organising the first meeting of G7 culture ministers – and for your wonderful hospitality.

On behalf of everyone from my country, my profound thanks to everyone here for the solidarity you have shown us following the terrorist murders that took place last week – right at the heart of where British politicians and our staff work.

The death of a very brave police officer serves as a tragic reminder of the debt we owe to those who keep us safe, including at events like this. Much of their work may go unnoticed, but we are extremely grateful for it.

What a pleasure it is to be here in Florence. It really is a joy to behold. Everywhere you turn you see something charming and beautiful.

This is a very, very special city – the birthplace of the Renaissance.

But great buildings, sculpture, and paintings cannot endure through magic alone. They have to be cherished. Here in Firenze, we can see that this is possible and why it matters.

So it is heartening that there is such unity among governments. Today we declare our shared responsibility to protect the world's treasures.

There is an urgent need for action. We are witnessing looting and vandalism on a heart-breaking scale. Not only do these assaults help finance terrorism, they are a calculated attempt to destroy people's history, culture, and identity.

It cannot be allowed.

The United Kingdom is with you all as we confront this evil.

Last June, we opened our [£30 million Cultural Protection Fund](#). This will support projects that safeguard and promote cultural heritage overseas.

The three goals that the Fund will assist are Cultural Heritage Protection; Capacity Building and Training; and Advocacy and Education.

The British Council is managing the Cultural Protection Fund in partnership with my government department – the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

£3 million has gone to the British Museum Emergency Heritage Management Training Scheme in Iraq. It means that the skills we have developed in this country can support the Iraqis in their efforts to protect their cultural

heritage.

Iraqi site inspectors, excavators, and experts in documentation have been shown round historic sites in England and learned English. The first group finished their field training in Iraq in November and are now applying advanced techniques they learned through the British Museum.

This project has shown what the Cultural Protection Fund can help accomplish.

The United Kingdom is also about to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and accede to its two Protocols.

UK Armed Forces already operate within the terms of the Convention, but now it will be enshrined in law.

Our Armed Forces are creating a Cultural Property Protection Unit to make sure that respect for cultural property is part of training and operations. The Unit – nicknamed the Monuments Men for reasons that will be familiar to fans of Matt Damon – will also investigate and report issues and offences.

We are keen to learn and share best practice with our allies, very much including the Italian Armed Forces.

The Cultural Property Act of Parliament that we passed this year contains a number of vital measures.

It creates a variety of criminal offences; regulates the use of the Blue Shield as a protective emblem; and introduces a legal regime that makes it illegal to deal in cultural property that has been unlawfully exported from an occupied territory.

Please do not think that the UK leaving the European Union means that we are turning our back on the rest of Europe or the rest of the world.

The very opposite is true: the government that I represent has a vision of a genuinely global Britain. And we will do all we can to help protect the world's treasures and places.

For let us not doubt, for one moment, that this affects us all.

Imagine, if you can bear to, what it would be like if terrorists stormed the Galleria dell'Accademia and destroyed Michelangelo's David.

Do you suppose it would only hurt Florentines and Italians? No, the entire world would share in the agony and outrage.

David represents religion, civil liberties, the ability of the weak to triumph over the strong, the inherent value of beauty, and one of the most magnificent periods of human history.

In that sense, then, David belongs to us all, and we all have an obligation to protect him.

Art raises human beings above barbarism. That is why barbaric people hate it so much and want to obliterate it.

We will not let them.