

UNESCO meeting lays groundwork for reviving, protecting Iraq's cultural heritage

24 February 2017 – As details on the destruction of and damage to Iraq's rich and diverse cultural heritage emerge, the United Nations cultural agency has appealed to the international community to help protect and revive the country's archaeological, religious and cultural sites for future generations.

"This is a turning point for the Iraqi people and for the world's understanding of the role of heritage for societies in conflict situations," said the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Irina Bokova.

Speaking at the end of a two-day meeting of the International Coordination Conference on the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in Liberated Areas of Iraq, Ms. Bokova added: "UNESCO is already mobilizing on the ground to support Iraq in protecting heritage and objects most at risk, and to fence off and guard sites."

The meeting also prepared the groundwork for emergency, medium and long term action plans to preserve the country's millennial archaeological sites, museums, religious heritage, and historic cities.

It also agreed to appoint a joint UNESCO-Iraqi Steering Committee to coordinate and advocate the many national and international initiatives to rehabilitate the cultural heritage of Iraq.

However, according to UNESCO the damage already done has been much fear than what was anticipated and the rehabilitation process is likely to require decades of work.

Noting the importance of action to safeguard Iraq's heritage, the country's Minister of Culture Fryad Rawandouzi highlighted: "As we reclaim our country [...] We need help from UNESCO, the UN and others to rehabilitate museums, cities and sites [...] We need a plan with a timeline, as well as technical and financial support."

At the same time, there are fears that antiquities taken away from heritage sites may have been sold on the Internet and the black market and the money used finance activities of the terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh).

"We must stop the trade in Iraqi antiquities, adhere to Security Council Resolution 2199, and dry up [ISIL]'s money flow," underscored Mohammad Iqbal Omar, the Iraqi Minister of Education.

Adopted in 2015, UN Security Council resolution 2199, among other provisions,

banned all trade in looted antiquities from Iraq and Syria. It also encouraged steps to ensure such items are returned to their homelands, and called on UNESCO, Interpol, and other international organizations to assist in such efforts.

“Da’esh tried, but will never erase our culture, identity, diversity, history and the pillars of civilization. I call on the world to help us,” said added the Minister of Education.

[Secretary-General asks Member States to express intention on financing UN plan to tackle cholera in Haiti](#)

24 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has asked Member States to inform him by 6 March if they intend to make voluntary financial contributions to the implementation of the new UN plan to counter cholera in Haiti, his spokesman said today.

“Earlier this week the Secretary-General sent a letter to all Member States” in that regard, Stéphane Dujarric told reporters at the regular daily briefing at UN Headquarters in New York.

“As you are aware, under the new approach, the UN is intensifying support to the Haitian government in building sound water, sanitation and health systems – the best long-term defence against cholera and other water-borne diseases – and also developing a support package to provide material assistance and support to Haitians most directly affected by cholera,” the Spokesman said.

In his letter, the Secretary-General recalled that the UN bears a moral responsibility for ensuring that the new approach – launched in a report to UN Member States on 1 December 2016 – is implemented, Mr. Dujarric added.

RELATED: UN outlines new plan to fight cholera epidemic and help communities

Costing around \$400 million over the next two years, the proposed UN package under the new approach will centre on two different elements, known as ‘Track One’ and ‘Track Two.’

Track 1 – reducing incidence of cholera

The former consists of a greatly intensified and better-resourced effort to respond to and reduce the incidence of cholera, through addressing Haiti’s short- and longer-term issues of water, sanitation and health systems and improved access to care and treatment.

This is expected to involve intensifying efforts to mobilize adequate funding for an increased number of rapid response teams; strengthened epidemiological surveillance; the rapid detection, reporting and treatment of cases; the combined use of cholera vaccinations with targeted water and sanitation interventions; more focused geographical targeting; improved communication and behavioural change strategies; and strengthened support to longer-term water and sanitation services.

Track 2 – a community approach

The second track of the UN response is the development of a package of material assistance and support to those Haitians most directly affected by cholera, centred on the victims and their families and communities. It is expected that it will also involve affected individuals and communities in the development of the package.

Haiti has been dealing with a cholera outbreak since October 2010, some nine months after it suffered a devastating earthquake. The outbreak has affected an estimated 788,000 people and claimed the lives of more than 9,000. Concerted national and international efforts, backed by the United Nations, have resulted in a 90 per cent reduction in the number of suspected cases.

While the number of those affected remains high, and recent outbreaks – partly heightened by the impact of Hurricane Matthew – show the continued vulnerability of the population to the disease, UN officials have said the challenge is not insurmountable.

[News story: Two-year university courses come a step closer](#)

The government has today, Friday 24 February, tabled amendments to the Higher Education and Research Bill to encourage more flexible learning and increased choice for students.

These include a key amendment to enable universities to offer more accelerated courses, including 2-year courses, where content is condensed into a shorter period.

This amendment would enable a higher annual fee limit to be set for accelerated courses, subject to Parliamentary approval. This amendment responds to evidence which shows that inflexible fee structures are seen as a major barrier to the availability of accelerated courses, with many universities unable to deliver their traditional 3-year courses in two years because of the existing limit on annual fees.

This delivers on a manifesto commitment to encourage universities to offer

more 2-year courses and extends the opportunity to study at England's world-class universities to even more people.

The government intends to consult on the detail of how to deliver higher annual fee limits for accelerated courses ahead of tabling secondary legislation. The proposals will include clear measures to ensure the limit would only apply to accelerated courses.

Other important amendments to the bill tabled today include:

- an amendment which will help students to store up academic credits and to switch institution more easily
- an amendment which will place a requirement on the new sector regulator – the Office for Students – to have regard to institutional autonomy in everything that it does
- amendments that will guarantee that the standards against which providers are assessed are determined by the higher education sector
- an amendment that enshrines in law for the first time the Haldane Principle, which dictates that decisions on individual proposals should be reviewed and made by experts in their fields; this means with that all governments will, in the future, need to have regard to the Haldane Principle when making a grant or giving directions to UK Research and Innovation – the government's single strategic research and innovation funding body

Speaking at the Universities UK conference in London, Jo Johnson, the Minister for Universities and Science, said:

Change is long overdue and this bill gives us the chance to introduce new ways of learning. Students are crying out for more flexible courses that enable them to get into and back into work more quickly, and courses that equip them with the skills that the modern workplace needs.

I absolutely recognise that for many students the classic 3-year model will remain the preferred option but that cannot be the only option. That is why we have tabled amendments that give real flexibility in learning.

These changes will not mean any compromise in quality, or an increase in overall degree costs for students. The tuition fees for a student taking an accelerated degree will never be more, in total, than those for the same degree over a longer time period. It is also likely that students will end up paying less overall because they will have fewer years of maintenance costs and a real chance of entering the workforce more quickly.

Read the [entire speech](#).

[Donors pledge \\$670 million at UN-backed conference to support aid operations in Lake Chad region](#)

24 February 2017 – Giving voice to people affected by conflict and complex crises in Africa’s Lake Chad region, a United Nations-supported conference in Oslo today generated more than \$670 million in pledges that will sustain critical relief operations over the next two years and beyond.

Officially known as the Humanitarian Conference in Oslo for Nigeria and Lake Chad region, the donors event also agreed on addressing longer-term development needs and to seek durable solutions to crises in Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon – which together make the Lake Chad region.

“Without our increased support, affected communities will face a life of hunger, disease, gender-based violence and continued displacement,” said the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O’Brien.

“But there is another future within grasp: as the international community scales up support, we can stop a further descent into an ever-deepening crisis with unimaginable consequences for millions of people,” he added.

According to estimates, about 17 million people are living in the most affected areas across the four countries. Of them some 10.7 million people are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance, with 8.5 million in north-eastern Nigeria alone, having been made witness to years of violence as a result of Boko Haram militancy.

More to follow...

[UN reports more than 300 migrant deaths on Mediterranean crossing in first two months of 2017](#)

24 February 2017 – An estimated 366 migrants died at sea during their Mediterranean journey to Europe in the first 53 days of 2017, down from 425 of the comparable period of last year, the United Nations migration agency said today.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) has reported that 13,924 migrants entered Europe by sea through 22 February, sharply down from 105,427 a year earlier.

These data include the death toll reported this week from a boat with as many as 133 passengers on board that foundered off Az Zawiyah, near Tripoli on this past Sunday.

According to an IOM source at the scene, the human smugglers stole the craft's engine and left the vessel drifting, telling passengers that authorities were *en route* to rescue them. "This is becoming a common tactic," said IOM Rome spokesman Flavio Di Giacomo. "But when you take an engine from a boat like this, you can no longer treat it as an 'incident.' It is homicide."

This year so far, Italy accounted for 10,701 arrivals, Greece 2,223 and Spain 1,000. In the comparable period last year, Greece recorded 97,325 arrivals and Italy 8,102.

To date in 2017, an estimated 326 migrants died during their deadly journey on the Mediterranean's central route linking Libya to Italy, compared with only two deaths on the Mediterranean's east corridor to Greece.