

Forum: General Assembly Three

Issue: Measures to Protect World Heritage Sites in Areas of Conflict

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Introduction

Throughout the history, there were frequent occasions where conflicts aroused in the areas of World Heritage Sites. However, since the nature of conflicts is random and inevitable, numerous World Heritage Sites have been damaged severely. Moreover, although there has been effort put into protect these sites recently, the issue of protecting World Heritage Sites in Areas of Conflict still remains problematic due to ongoing armed dispute. It is necessary to devise a boundary to balance the atrocity of conflict with the protection of Heritage Sites.

Although protecting the World Heritage Sites seems to be a rather simple issue superficially, it is a extremely complex issue to be alleviated. Armed conflicts involve arbitrary and brutal attacks on each bodies involved in it. Therefore, neither peaceful regulations nor guidelines are followed. Consequentially, all the nearby properties and buildings near the region of conflict were are left desolated. In addition, the environment nearby is fatally devastated as well. However, the severity of the issue is that there is no exception even if the conflict arouses in the World Heritage Sites. Destroyed World Heritage is a tremendous loss to the humanity as a whole and those are necessary to be protected.

On the other hand, the effort to protect the site involves deaths of innocent lives. Numerous peacekeeping troops and national soldiers risk their lives to protect the sites and the citizens nearby the site may lose their lives due to the additional conflict aroused to protect the site. Due to this factor, the issue of protecting heritage sites becomes a complex issue to be handled. Overall, this issue involves two major problems: Protection of world heritage sites and the risk of human lives.

Definition of Key Terms

World Heritage sites

Natural or artificial properties and areas that are acknowledged by the UNESCO with their importance and significance to the humanity. World Heritage Sites often contains the history and values of a culture, which are unable to be recovered after being damaged. Therefore, it is important to conserve these sites for the benefit of the human kind to be informed with the history of certain cultures and sites.

Ascertained Danger

The classification of danger that the World Heritage Site is currently in. Ascertained Danger represents that the site is currently encountering a direct danger that may critically harm it.

Potential Danger

Another classification of danger that reveals the state of World Heritage Site. State of Potential Danger shows that the site may experience danger that could desolate the area in the near future. These classifications show the two types of dangers that needs to be addressed in alleviating this issue.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO)

The UNESCO is a branch of the United Nations that deals acknowledges sites as the World heritage sites by assessing the values and importance that the site holds. In addition, the UNESCO takes part in devising a way to conserve and protect these World Heritage Sites in the conflicted areas. The treaties and solutions passed through the UNESCO will deeply affect the flow of the debate as the issue is discussed.

Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict

This is a convention established at The Hague in 1954 to protect the world heritage sites after acknowledging the impact after World War II. In addition, after the establishment, it has gone through modification in 1991, implementing Second Protocol for the convention.

Background Information

Conflicts and Wars

The initiation of protecting the World Heritage Sites was due to Egyptian's decision to build a dam that damages the monuments and sites of ancient Egypt and Nubia. However, the protection of World Heritage Sites became more crucial in the areas of conflict such as war zones, due to ongoing disputes between nations or groups. Heritage sites and area became desolated due to explosive weapons and firearms, and the environment was dilapidated.

World War II

World War II has been one of the most devastating wars that the humanity has ever faced. It has caused over 60 million casualties which was about 3% of the world population at the contemporary period. During this period, highly explosive weapons and chemical weapons were utilized to maximize the impact to the opposing alliances. However, these weapons not only slaughtered soldiers and civilians, but also corroded and demolished nearby buildings and

households. One of the most famous bombing in the World War II was the Siege of Warsaw. Warsaw is located in Poland and in 1939, 84% of the city was destructed due to the German invasion, and more than 84% of the historic center was destroyed. Ergo, the remnants of World War II were damaged World Heritage Sites along with tremendous amount of casualties.

Involvement of the United Nations

The United Nations has been deeply involved in protecting the World Heritage Sites in areas of conflict. The General Assemblies often discuss of the issue of protecting the World Heritage Sites and seek for successful resolutions in alleviating this issue. In addition, UNESCO has the primary responsibility on the issue of protecting World Heritage Sites and

UNESCO



Caption #1: UNESCO Logo

The UNESCO works toward selecting and protecting the World Heritage Sites through grasping the primary danger in the World Heritage Site and establishing potential danger that might occur. In 1954, the UNESCO has received a request from Sudan and Egypt to assist them to protect monuments of ancient Egypt and Nubia. Therefore, UNESCO has started a campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia through gaining agreements of the member states. This was the inception of protecting the World Heritage Sites done by UNESCO.

World Heritage Committee



Caption #2: The UNESCO World Heritage Committee Logo

The World Heritage Committee was established in the general conference of UNESCO in 1972. It started receiving periodic information from the designated countries and have a glance on the current situation of the Heritage Site. In addition, the World Heritage Committee analyzes the Heritage Sites that are listed in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites and implements the World Heritage Conventions. Lastly, it is also responsible for financial supports in protecting these sites upon requests. There are 21 representative states parties involved, elected by their General Assembly. Moreover, the committee has contributed significantly in protecting World Heritage Site through establishing *Rules of Procedures of World Heritage Site*.

Key Issues

Desolation of Artificial Monuments and Structures

Numerous world heritage sites over the world has experienced desolation due to their existence in conflicted region. In addition, since recovering such damaged monuments is a delicate and complicated procedure, even the damages of world heritage sites from world war has not been fully recovered yet. However, the desolation of artificial monuments and structures are continuing up to the present time due to unstoppable wars and physical conflicts between parties.

Syrian Civil War

Syrian Civil War is a contemporary, serious example of a conflict that is causing the desolation of world heritage sites and monuments. It is an armed conflict that escalated rapidly from a protest due to violent management of it by the president of Syria in 2011. This conflict involves several parties of armed groups which makes it harder to alleviate the issue. However, the highly affected of these conflicts in Syria are the world heritage sites in Syria. The world heritage sites destroyed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is also involved in the Syrian Civil

War, because ISIL is one of the key factions fighting in the war. World Heritage Sites in Syria, including Palmyra, Bosra, and the medieval buildings in the Ancient City of Aleppo, has been damaged during the war.

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also recognized as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is a militant group that is notorious for their inhumane punishments and ongoing conflicts for their religious beliefs. Therefore, throughout the decades, ISIL has executed numerous attacks in the areas that has conflict with their religion, both in wide and narrow scope. However, the ISIS also acted as an active party to in damaging World Heritage sites. They have engaged in harming the World Heritage Site through purposely demolishing the site or attacking with explosives in the area of World Heritage Sites. The ISIL has demolished, churches, mosques and shrines, ancient and medieval sites, etc. All of the 6 Syria's UNESCO Heritage Sites were damaged by the ISIL.

Palmyra

In 2015, ISIL has captured Palmyra which is one of the world heritage site of Syria. There have been a long, intense ceasefire between ISIL and combative forces, and the ISIL has reported that they have no intentions of purposefully demolishing the world heritage site. However, contrary to their pledge, ISIL has destroyed the ancient Lion of Al-lat statue in Palmyra. Also, several other statues were damaged by the ISIL and even after that, their barbarity did not cease from progressing, which led several more monuments demolished through attacks and explosives.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations (UN)

The United Nations has dealt with the issue of protecting World Heritage Sites in Conflict Areas through the discussions in general assemblies involving the member states. Their stance on the issue is absolutely focused on protecting the World Heritage Sites while alleviating the conflicts. They have been approaching this issue through the establishment of UNESCO which solely contributes toward conserving the conditions of world heritage sites.

UNESCO & World Heritage Committee

The UNESCO has endeavored to protect the World Heritage Sites in Conflict Area in ways of promoting officially protected sites. They are entirely posed toward alleviating the issue and seeking for direct or indirect solutions that would solve this issue. UNESCO's main aim for preserving world heritage sites and protecting them from any potential danger is to preserve the culture lying within these sites. Since most of the sites are historically significant, their presence itself allows the people of their culture to review the values of their culture and have direct

interaction with it. Therefore, in the name of intercultural dialogue, the UNESCO has worked toward solving this issue since its establishment.

ISIL and Armed Parties

The armed parties around the world are currently exposed to being lead to violent, physical conflicts. However, such conflicts, including explosive weapons and immoral actions, leads to the detonation of surrounding environment of the conflict region. However, once these armed parties are engaged in such conflicts, they do not focus on protecting the World Heritage Sites nor even aware of these sites nearby their conflict region. Since preserving these sites during conflict may disrupt the most effective military technique that can be implemented, protecting world heritage sites become a secondary issue. ISIL is the best example of contemporary armed groups which does not care about protecting these sites, and instead enjoy demolishing such places through their religious terms.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
September 1 st , 1939 – September 2 nd , 1945	The World War II. World War II has made the world aware of the recognition
November 16 th , 1945	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has been established to collaboratively secure the World Heritage Sites.
November 16 th , 1972	The World Heritage Committee has been adopted in the 7 th General Conference held by UNESCO.
March 15 th , 2011 - 2012	The Syrian Civil War has initiated in 2011 which is continuing until present. Syrian Army fighters were reported to be present at the Crac des Chevaliers Fortress, one of the world heritage sites.
2015	UN peacekeepers were sent to Syria in order to protect World Heritage Sites from ISIS Attacks.
May 13 th – 26 th , 2015	ISIL has attacked and seized Palmyra, one of the six World Heritage Sites in Syria. The attack has led to destruction of several monuments and statues stored in the area.

Possible Solutions

The significance of resolving the issue of protecting World Heritage Sites is not merely to protect the monument. However, it is important to acknowledge that specific monuments embody and contain the culture and traditions of the people. Therefore, resolving this issue will need to be approached carefully through preventing possible conflicts that might occur in the world heritage sites and alleviating the conflicts that are currently taking place in order to protect those sites.

One of the best protection that can be done in these sites is actually preventing the conflict from happening. Due to the barbarous nature of war, the damages that might take place are inevitable. Therefore, prevention is the best way from leaving the world heritage sites at risk. This may include active communications between parties in order to reach consensus without leading to physical conflict. Therefore, by eradicating the potential of armed conflict, World heritage sites that are labeled as potential danger would be saved.

Another way to protect the world heritage sites is to terminate the armed conflicts that are currently happening. The continuity of war merely increases injuries of people and destroyed environment nearby. As a result, ending a prolong armed conflicts between parties would reduce the potential damage that the sites might receive. However, stopping a war or minor conflicts is extremely hard to be called to action. Keeping in mind that most conflicts starts off as minor friction between parties, and lead to physical dispute due to incapability to reach consensus.

In addition, protecting the World Heritage Sites during war or conflicts is nearly impossible. The military forces and armed parties would try to use any types of weapons which would effectively work on their opponent. Therefore, corrosion due to chemical weapons and damage due to explosive arms are inevitable once the conflicts begin. There have been previous attempts to resolve this issue by employing UN peace keeping troops in such sites to protect them from getting damaged. However, peacekeeping troops would not be able to evacuate from dangers of explosive weapons and it may alter into a conflict where the peacekeeping troops are directly attacked. Therefore, although it may be a plausible solution, it definitely needs consideration of many aspects in employing peacekeeping troops.

Protecting World Heritage Sites is rather complicated to be done due to the atrocity of conflicts. It is most important to find answer to these two key questions. How could the conflict be prevented as preliminary stage and what actions will be taken once the conflict arouses?

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