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**SANTANDER CONFERENCE:
SAFEGUARDING SYRIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE**

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Girona, Spain – An international conference, *'Heritage and Conflict. Learning from previous experiences to safeguard cultural heritage during the Syrian crisis'*, was held on 23-24 April, 2014 at the University of Cantabria, Spain. The conference was organised by Heritage for Peace, in partnership with the Spanish National Research Council and the Institute of Prehistory at the University of Cantabria. The conference brought together national and international experts to discuss possible measures to help reduce the risk of damage to Syria's material culture and to fight illegal trafficking of antiquities.

Keynote speakers from Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon came together to discuss their *'hands-on'* experiences in safeguarding cultural heritage during conflict situations. Some of the main outcomes of the conference include establishing a climate for co-operation and several concrete steps towards exchanging information and data.

In addition to paving the way for mobilising international collaboration, technical assistance for stopping or mitigating the damage to Syria's cultural heritage was made available to both representatives of the state heritage institution as well as to heritage representatives from the areas outside the control of the state. Case-studies representing various countries from the Middle East affected by recent violent conflicts were used by speakers to highlight strategies and initiatives which have been successful in limiting the destruction to the country's cultural legacy. Those same strategies and initiatives eventually created a better starting point for post-conflict conservation. Last but not least, the effectiveness of international conventions and protocols was discussed.

Most significantly, it was unanimously agreed by all attendees that Syria's heritage is of universal value transcending its national importance and that the destruction thereof is a crime. It was further acknowledged, there is a real need to respect international law concerning the protection of cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict. Governments, multilateral and international organisations, civil society organisations and especially the national and international heritage communities are therefore invited to affirm the role that culture heritage can play in enhancing the peace process and to actively support and assist parties to realise their efforts to safeguard and protect the cultural heritage of Syria. For the Santander Declaration and outcomes, please go to <http://www.heritageforpeace.org/?p=3629>.

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