



08 March 2017:

**NEW REPORT: CULTURAL HERITAGE GROUPS RESPOND TO THE SYRIAN CRISIS -
*Towards a Protection of the Syrian Cultural Heritage: A summary of the National and
International Responses Vol IV***

Heritage for Peace team Leonardo Leckie, Emma Cunliffe, and Bastien Varoutsikos have compiled a [fourth report](#)¹ of actions taken by cultural heritage organisations to preserve and protect of Syria's cultural heritage, covering the period of October 2015 to December 2016. The [preceding reports](#) cover activities undertaken from the start of the crisis in March 2011.

Activities can be broadly classified into seven key areas: Projects (such as restoration, looting prevention) and Documentation initiatives; Awareness Raising (conferences, exhibitions); Laws, Legislation and Resolutions; Workshops, Training and Courses; Military Operations; Publications (policies, reports, articles & maps); and a final general category. Activities have occurred at all scales, ranging from the local individual to large international collaborations.

The number of projects that will assist in the protection of Syria's heritage continue to increase, as does the number that are collaborative. As noted last year, the focus remains on what can be achieved from outside Syria, such as documentation for reconstruction and rebuilding, rather than mitigation and support for those working in the country. There is a growing increase in the use of technology to help protect cultural heritage. Web-based applications are being used as tools for mapping, monitoring and documenting. Restoration is becoming an increasingly prominent, and increasingly fraught, topic: the destruction at Palmyra has led to a number of ethical debates about what should be reconstructed, and how. Despite the dispersal of many Syrians who have been forced to flee their homes, they remain (as they should) at the forefront of these discussions. The last two years have also seen a large number of expert recommendations published by some of the leaders in the field: now that the agenda has been established, it is our hope that 2017 will see further implementation of these actions. In particular, 2016 saw the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner Special Rapporteur place cultural heritage destruction and cultural heritage protection firmly on the human rights agenda, with a number of recommendations.

Many people argue that it is not possible to prevent the destruction of sites on the ground: the work carried out by Syrians on the ground, at both the local and the national level, is testament to their desire to protect their heritage if support is made available. By continuing to look for

¹ <http://www.heritageforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Heritage-for-Peace-Int-Actions-report-vol-4-oct-2015-dec-2016.pdf>

ways to improve and increase international cooperation, it will make it easier to give practical help to Syrian individuals and groups – a significant step the international community can take to help protect the world's shared heritage in this region.