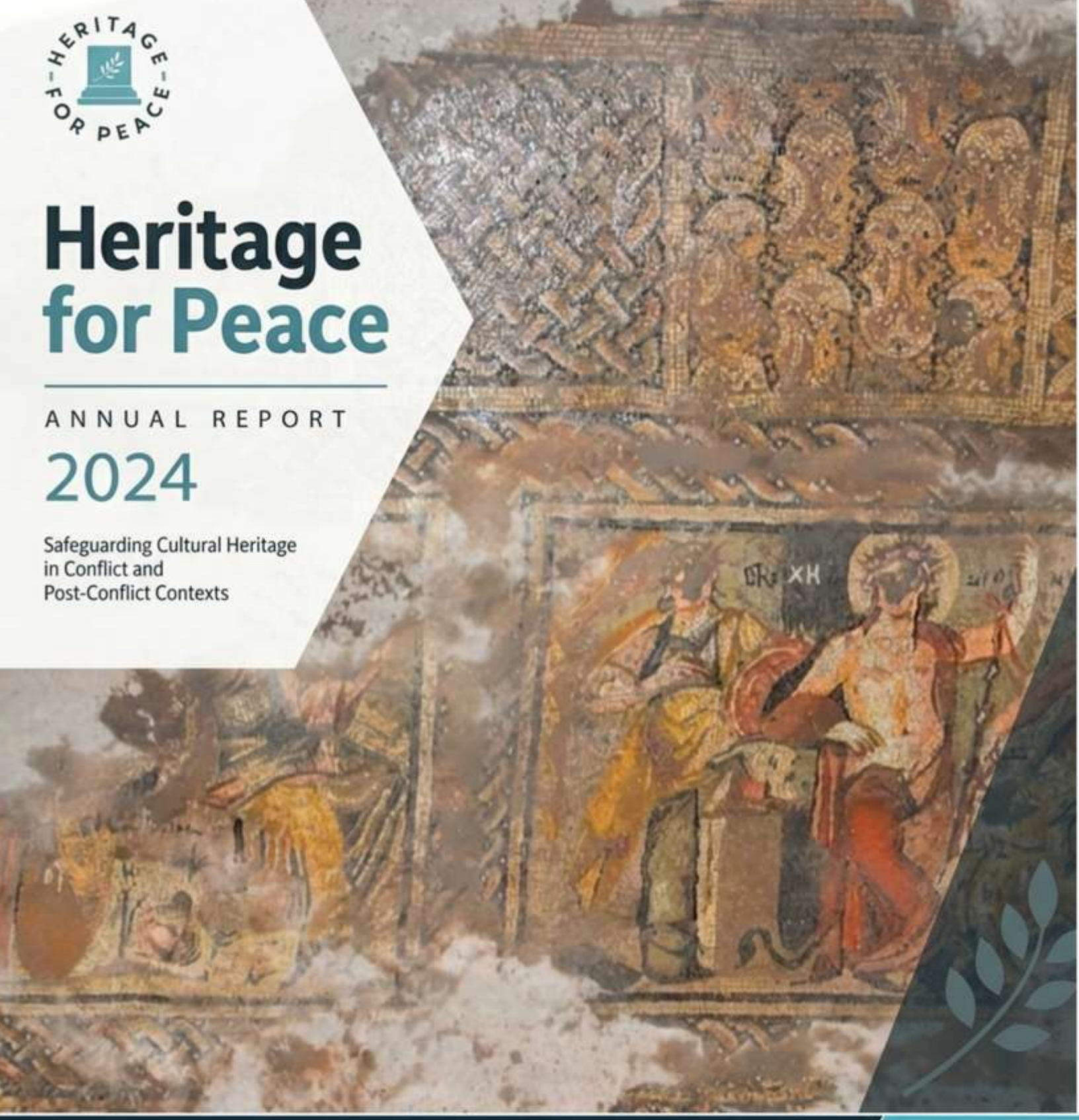
Heritage for Peace

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts



PROTECTING HERITAGE
Preserving our shared history and identity

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES
Building local capacities and creating opportunities

PROMOTING PEACE
Fostering dialogue, resilience and hope

WORKING TOGETHER
Strengthening partnerships for a sustainable future

Heritage.
People.
Peace.
Future.

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https://www.heritageforpeace.org/?lang=ar

“ Looking back at 2024, I am reminded once again why we created Heritage for Peace and why, after more than a decade, we remain so committed to this work.

Heritage for Peace was born from the experience of conflict and from a simple conviction: ***cultural heritage is not separate from people****. When a monument is destroyed, a museum is looted, or a community is displaced from the places that carry its memories, the loss goes far beyond physical structures. Something belonging to the identity, history and future of that community is also placed at risk.*

In 2024, this reality remained painfully visible in many of the places where we work. Yet what I will remember most is not only the destruction or the challenges, but the determination of the people working to protect their heritage despite extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Throughout the year, our work took us from Syria and Yemen to Sudan, Ethiopia and beyond. We continued protecting archaeological sites and historic buildings, documenting threatened heritage, strengthening local capacities, supporting displaced communities, and advocating internationally for cultural heritage to be recognized as an essential part of recovery and peacebuilding.

But behind every project presented in this report are people: archaeologists, architects, conservators, craftspeople, students, civil society organizations and community members who have chosen to act when their heritage is threatened. Their courage and commitment are what give meaning to our work.

For me, this is also what continues to motivate Heritage for Peace. We cannot prevent every loss, but we can stand beside those who are protecting their heritage. We can provide knowledge, resources and international connections, and we can help ensure that local voices are heard.

Our commitment remains the same as when we began: ***to protect cultural heritage without distinction of nationality, religion or political affiliation, and to use heritage as common ground for dialogue, dignity and peace.***

I am deeply grateful to our team, our local and international partners, our donors, and above all to the communities who continue to place their trust in us.

Their determination gives us every reason to continue. *“*

Dr. Isber Sabrine

President
Heritage for Peace

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HERITAGE FOR PEACE MISSION ST ATMENT

“We are an international group of heritage workers who believe that cultural heritage is a common ground for dialogue and a tool to build peace.”

“Our mission is to support heritage workers, indifferent of citizenship or religion, as they work towards the protection of cultural

heritage for future generation

Heritage For Peace - Who are we ?

Heritage for Peace is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting countries affected by conflict in their efforts to protect and safeguard cultural heritage. As an international network of heritage professionals, we believe that cultural heritage can serve as common ground for dialogue and as a powerful tool for building peace.

Our mission is to support heritage workers—regardless of nationality or religion—in their efforts to preserve cultural heritage for future generations.

Our work extends across multiple conflict-affected regions, including Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Ukraine. In these contexts, ongoing conflicts have caused severe damage to cultural sites, including World Heritage properties, threatened museums and libraries, and contributed to widespread looting and illicit trafficking of artifacts. Despite these challenges, we have observed that many stakeholders recognize the importance of cultural heritage for the identity and future of their countries.

Heritage for Peace remains neutral and impartial. Our programs focus on supporting heritage professionals in addressing the complex challenges of protecting monuments, sites, museums, and libraries during armed conflict. We also work to raise awareness among military actors of their obligations under international law to protect cultural heritage.

Our approach is rooted in capacity-building and knowledge transfer. By combining local expertise with international experience, we aim to strengthen self-sufficiency in heritage management among professionals and local communities. As an independent NGO not affiliated with any government, we are uniquely positioned to work with all parties involved in a conflict and to reach diverse areas with our programs.

What distinguishes Heritage for Peace is its ability to operate beyond the limitations faced by governmental and intergovernmental organizations, which are often restricted to working with officially recognized authorities. Similarly, many international professional organizations can only support their members or institutions affiliated with recognized governments. In contrast, Heritage for Peace can engage more broadly and inclusively with heritage stakeholders in complex conflict settings.

The ABUAB Project

In the context of growing challenges related to migration and asylum, *Heritage for Peace* launched the "ABUAB" initiative as an innovative platform that leverages cultural heritage as a tool to promote social integration and build bridges between cultures. In 2024, the project experienced significant expansion, adopting a multidisciplinary approach that integrates heritage management, anthropology, art history, education, and archaeology. This was achieved in partnership with a number of museums and cultural institutions, particularly in Barcelona, reflecting the organization's strong belief in the vital role of heritage in fostering social cohesion and enhancing mutual understanding among communities.

The ABUAB project seeks to address a contemporary social and political issue by redefining the role and position of migrants and refugees within Western societies. It does so by promoting intercultural dialogue and highlighting the shared values reflected in cultural heritage, thereby contributing to a positive and sustainable impact on both host communities and newcomers.

Project activities focused on organizing interactive group visits to prominent cultural sites and museums, alongside the implementation of educational and cultural programs that enhance understanding of both local and global heritage.

The initiative also collaborated with cultural institutions to provide platforms for intercultural dialogue, and conducted both quantitative and qualitative research to assess the impact of heritage on migrants and refugees. Particular attention was given to empowering the most vulnerable groups, especially women, by expanding opportunities for interaction and social integration.

In 2024, the project achieved several notable milestones, including the organization of 13 group visits to major cultural landmarks in Barcelona, such as Park Güell, Museu Etnologic de Barcelona, and Fundació Joan Miró. Additionally, the project was launched for the first time outside Spain in the city of Aarhus, Denmark. The continued success of the initiative has also contributed to the development of a scalable and replicable model, supported by strengthening the theoretical and methodological framework for using cultural heritage as a tool for social integration through the integration of scientific research into project activities.

Through this initiative, Heritage for Peace aims to harness cultural heritage as an effective means of promoting social cohesion and intercultural understanding, countering extremism and xenophobia, supporting vulnerable communities, and enhancing their sense of belonging and dignity. The organization also seeks to develop a sustainable and scalable model that can be implemented in other cities and countries across Europe and beyond.

In 2025, the organization plans to expand the project to additional cities in Spain and several European countries, while further strengthening its research dimension to ensure the sustainability of its impact and maximize its long-term outcomes.

Links: Website: abuab.org
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ABUABeurope/
Instagram: @abuab.eu
LinkedIn: Abuab Europe

The Hierapolis Project Protection and Documentation of Heritage in Manbij – Syria

As part of ongoing efforts to safeguard cultural heritage in conflict-affected areas, *Heritage for Peace* is implementing the Hierapolis Project in the city of Manbij, northern Syria. The city holds exceptional historical and cultural significance, with a rich timeline spanning from the Bronze Age through the Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic periods. Historically known as "Hierapolis," Manbij was a major religious and commercial center.

Manbij's cultural heritage has suffered extensive damage during years of conflict, particularly during the ISIS occupation (2014–2016), in addition to ongoing threats such as urban encroachment, looting, and deterioration due to neglect. Continued instability and repeated displacement have further increased pressure on heritage sites, often leading to their misuse for temporary needs.

The project aims to implement emergency interventions to protect, document, and rehabilitate key heritage sites within the city, including Al-Antabi Tomb, the Syriac Church, and the Ottoman bathhouse. It focuses on assessing damage, planning restoration efforts, and strengthening local capacities through professional training, while also fostering stronger connections between local communities and their cultural heritage through awareness and engagement activities.

In this context, 17 local professionals were trained in 2023 to equip them with the necessary skills for heritage protection. Field visits were also conducted to assess damage and prepare for restoration works. In 2024, the project entered its second phase, achieving significant progress in documentation, assessment, and restoration planning. Initial restoration activities were launched, including structural improvements, site cleaning, debris removal, and preliminary rehabilitation works.

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61553121294384

Palmyrene Voices

Between 2024 and 2025, Heritage for Peace continued the implementation of its civil society initiative “Palmyrene Voices”, originally launched in 2020, with the aim of amplifying the voices of the Palmyrene community and supporting their role in shaping the future of their city.

Palmyra, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, stands as one of the most remarkable archaeological landscapes in the Middle East, reflecting the outstanding universal value of a historic caravan oasis from the Roman period. However, years of conflict and displacement have deeply affected both the site and its people, creating an urgent need to preserve not only its physical remains but also its living cultural identity.

Palmyrene Voices seeks to address this need by providing a platform through which Palmyrene communities—particularly those in the diaspora—can share their experiences, preserve their collective memory, and remain actively connected to their heritage. The initiative works to support displaced Palmyrene people in maintaining ties to their city, advocating for their right to return, and contributing to reconstruction processes in ways that ensure dignity, inclusion, and cultural continuity.

This project responds to the critical gaps that emerged following the displacement of communities from Palmyra in 2015, which led to the disruption and potential loss of traditional crafts and professions. Through systematic and academically grounded documentation, the initiative aims to safeguard both the tangible and intangible heritage linked to wool and leather production, ensuring that this knowledge is not lost to future generations.

Interview with Origins and Spread of Awassi Sheep herder, April 1, 2024, Gaziantep @ https://palmyrenevoices.org/exploring-the-origins-and-spread-of-awassi-sheep/

As part of its ongoing efforts, Heritage for Peace is currently preparing a detailed publication on the intangible cultural heritage of Palmyra. This work is intended to serve as a resource for craftspeople, researchers, and cultural practitioners, while also contributing to broader discussions on heritage preservation, community resilience, and post-conflict recovery.

By centring the voices and knowledge of the Palmyrene people, “Palmyrene Voices” demonstrates the vital role of community-led initiatives in safeguarding cultural heritage. It highlights how documentation, when combined with inclusive engagement and long-term vision, can contribute not only to preservation but also to empowering communities to actively participate in shaping the future of their cultural landscape.

Assessing and documenting the Al-Qahira Castle in Taiz, Yemen

Between 2022 and 2024, a comprehensive effort was undertaken to safeguard and revive Al-Qahira Citadel, one of Yemen's most iconic and historically significant landmarks. Severely damaged during the Yemeni conflict, the citadel faced an urgent risk of further deterioration and structural collapse. This project focused on protecting the site, stabilising its most vulnerable areas, and restoring its role as a cultural and social landmark. Supported by the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), the initiative reflects the critical importance of international commitment to preserving heritage in conflict-affected regions.

Perched on the northern slope of Mount Sabr, overlooking the city of Taiz, Al-Qahira Citadel stands as a powerful symbol of Yemen's rich cultural heritage, with origins that date back to pre-Islamic times. Beyond its architectural and historical value, the citadel holds deep cultural and social significance, representing resilience and identity for local communities. However, the site suffered extensive damage during the Yemeni conflict, particularly following its destruction in 2015, leaving large parts of the structure at risk of collapse and further deterioration.

Supported by ALIPH and implemented in collaboration with the University of the West of England, the project aimed to safeguard the citadel while laying the groundwork for its long-term recovery and reintegration into community life.

The intervention began with a comprehensive damage assessment to identify priority areas and define urgent stabilisation needs. Based on these findings, conservation efforts focused on the reconstruction of collapsed sections and the reinforcement of structurally vulnerable parts of the citadel,

particularly those overlooking nearby residential areas, where risks to surrounding communities were significant.

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In parallel, the project placed strong emphasis on capacity building and knowledge transfer. The site became an active training ground for 30 young professionals, who were engaged in hands-on learning in architectural documentation, conservation techniques, and structural stabilisation. This approach contributed to strengthening local expertise and ensuring the sustainability of heritage preservation efforts in the region.

By 2024, the project had achieved significant progress in stabilising key parts of the citadel and restoring its functionality. Importantly, Al-Qahira Citadel has been reopened for cultural activities and public events, re-establishing its role as a vital community space and contributing to social cohesion and local well-being.

This project demonstrates how integrated approaches—combining emergency stabilisation, capacity building, and community engagement—can contribute to both the protection of cultural heritage and the recovery of affected communities. It highlights the importance of sustained international support, such as that provided by ALIPH, alongside local expertise to ensure the long-term preservation of heritage sites in conflict-affected contexts.

Links: Page: https://www.heritageforpeace.org/second-project-2/?lang=fr

Tell Baya Project

House Rehabilitation Mission

Between 2023 and 2024, Heritage for Peace contributed to the implementation and continuation of the “Tell Baya’a” project, a civil society initiative dedicated to the protection and documentation of cultural heritage in Raqqa, Syria, in a context deeply affected by conflict and displacement.

Developed in partnership with a network of local and international organisations—including the Milá y Fontanals Institute, the Directorate of Culture of Raqqa, RehabiMed, Roya, and Rafekatuna—and supported by the Cultural Protection Fund of the British Council, the project reflects a collaborative approach grounded in local engagement and international expertise.

The initiative focused on safeguarding two key heritage components at the Tell Baya’a site: the ancient city of Tuttul and the German mission house. Tuttul, an important archaeological site dating back to the Middle Bronze Age, has been significantly impacted by conflict, looting, and unregulated use. The German mission house, a distinctive example of traditional mud-brick architecture with domed roofing, has similarly suffered from neglect and structural degradation.

Project interventions are centred on both preservation and community-oriented rehabilitation. Following detailed damage assessments, conservation works were carried out using traditional materials and techniques, with a particular focus on stabilising and rehabilitating the German mission house. The building was subsequently adapted into a multifunctional space designed to serve the needs of displaced communities, including a health centre, educational and training facilities, and a heritage interpretation space.

A key component of the project was capacity building. A total of 30 young refugees were trained in traditional construction techniques, equipping them with practical skills for the local labour market while actively involving them in preserving their cultural heritage.

In parallel, the project placed strong emphasis on community engagement and awareness-raising. Through a series of campaigns and public activities, more than 1,000 local participants were involved in learning about the importance of cultural heritage and its protection. These efforts contributed to fostering a sense of ownership, pride, and active participation in safeguarding the Tell Baya'a site and its surroundings.

Despite facing challenges related to regional security conditions and logistical constraints, including limitations on international team mobility, the project demonstrated adaptability and resilience. Key lessons highlighted the importance of strong local partnerships, flexible implementation strategies, and sustained investment in training and community involvement.

By 2024, the project had achieved significant milestones, including the completion of the rehabilitation of the German mission house, the documentation and assessment of 19 artefacts and 60 pottery fragments uncovered during site activities, and the development of extensive photographic records. In addition, the project expanded its outreach through digital platforms, reaching over 1,100 followers on social media.

Overall, the Tell Baya'a project demonstrates how integrated, community-based approaches to heritage protection can contribute not only to the preservation of historically significant sites, but also to improving living conditions, supporting livelihoods, and strengthening social

cohesion in post-conflict contexts.

Restoration Project at Al-Qahira Citadel in Taiz, Yemen

Al-Qahira Citadel is one of Yemen's most important historic landmarks and a symbol of the cultural identity of the city of Taiz. Due to years of conflict and neglect, the site has suffered significant damage, highlighting the urgent need for its protection and preservation.

In response, Heritage for Peace, in collaboration with the General Authority for Antiquities and Museums and with the support of the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP), launched a restoration and conservation project to safeguard the citadel.

The project officially began in October 2024 with initial activities focused on site cleaning, organisation, coordination, and the procurement of construction materials. Designed as a two-year initiative, the project aims to stabilise and preserve the citadel using appropriate conservation approaches while preparing the ground for further interventions.

Website: https://www.heritageforpeace.org/second-project-2/

Syrian Heritage Law Training (SHELTr) Project

In 2024, Heritage for Peace concluded the SHeLTr project, an initiative launched in 2016 to strengthen cultural heritage protection in Syria through legal awareness and capacity building.

The project addressed gaps in the understanding and application of heritage protection laws by delivering specialised training on the intersection of International Humanitarian Law, Syrian legislation, and Islamic Law. It targeted heritage professionals, legal experts, and local stakeholders in conflict-affected areas.

A key milestone was an in-person training held from 18 to 28 April 2024 at the Syrian Center for Cultural Heritage Protection in Idlib. Seventeen participants—including religious leaders, civil society representatives, and local council staff—received practical tools to enforce heritage protection laws and promote awareness within their communities.

Feedback from participants was highly positive, highlighting the need for longer and more interactive training. Since 2019, the project has also gained recognition through academic publications and conferences.

Overall, SHeLTr represents a unique contribution to heritage protection in conflict contexts by translating complex legal frameworks into accessible, practical knowledge. Building on its success, Heritage for Peace is exploring opportunities to expand the programme within Syria and to other countries in the region, with the support of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung.

Website: https://sheltr.heritageforpeace.org/#course

Outreach, Publications, and Advocacy of Heritage for Peace (2024)

In 2024, Heritage for Peace significantly expanded its international outreach through active participation in conferences, publications, and advocacy initiatives, strengthening global recognition of the role of cultural heritage in peacebuilding and conflict contexts.

The organisation contributed to key international events, including a conference at La Sapienza University in Rome addressing the destruction of cultural heritage in Gaza, and the UNESCO–Kingdom of the Netherlands Conference marking the 70th anniversary of The Hague Convention. These platforms enabled engagement with global experts and promoted dialogue on safeguarding heritage in times of conflict.

Heritage for Peace also gained international media visibility, notably through a New York Times feature highlighting the damage to the Great Omari Mosque in Gaza, where the organisation emphasised the importance of preserving cultural memory alongside physical reconstruction. In addition, the organisation contributed to investigative reporting with Bellingcat, supporting documentation of damage to heritage sites in Gaza through satellite imagery and visual analysis.

Research and publications remained a core focus. In 2024, Heritage for Peace contributed to academic works on heritage protection in armed conflicts and co-authored a study on the Tishreen Basin in Syria, examining the combined impacts of conflict and climate change on cultural sites.

The organisation further strengthened its advocacy through initiatives such as Abuab, presented at an international conference in Portugal, highlighting the role of cultural heritage in supporting refugee integration, social cohesion, and mental well-being.

Geographically, Heritage for Peace expanded its work through new partnerships, including in Ethiopia (Tigrai), where it contributed to a preliminary damage assessment report, and continued its Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative (SHPI), raising awareness through conferences, publications, and reporting on the impact of conflict on both tangible and intangible heritage.

Overall, 2024 marked a year of strengthened global engagement, impactful research, and strategic advocacy, reinforcing Heritage for Peace's role as a key actor in promoting the protection of cultural heritage in conflict-affected regions.

Thank you!

Heritage for Peace expresses its sincere gratitude to all partners We would like to extend special thanks to our donors and funding partners whose generous contributions have made our work possible. Their trust and support allow us to continue developing and implementing initiatives that protect cultural heritage and support communities in times of conflict.

Finally, we acknowledge all individuals and institutions who have contributed—directly or indirectly—to our projects and advocacy efforts. Through this collective commitment, we continue to promote the protection of cultural heritage as a fundamental component of peacebuilding worldwide. and collaborators whose continued support has been essential to advancing our mission. As our organisation grows and strengthens its impact, we remain deeply appreciative of the collective efforts that make this work possible.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to heritage professionals, practitioners, and community members working in challenging contexts around the world. Their dedication and resilience play a vital role in safeguarding cultural heritage and ensuring its transmission to future generations. It is a privilege to work alongside them in protecting and promoting heritage as a tool for peace.

We are also grateful to our local partners and coordinators, whose leadership and commitment have been instrumental in implementing projects on the ground. Their work ensures that our interventions are context-sensitive, effective, and sustainable, particularly in areas affected by conflict and crisis.

Partners:

ALIPH International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas

UWE Bristol University of the West of England

GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG

BRITISH COUNCIL

In partnership with Department for Culture, Media & Sport

Cultural Protection Fund

RehabiMed

U.S. AMBASSADORS FUND for CULTURAL PRESERVATION

UNITED STATES MISSION YEMEN