

## Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield



09.05.2013

To:

Mr. Thorbjorn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Mr. Julien Anfruns, President of the International Committee of the Blue Shield

Mr. Francesco Bandarin, Assistant Director-General for Culture at UNESCO

Dear Sirs,

According to recent news published by the News Agency „RES“ <http://cominf.org/node/1166497765> of the self-proclaimed republic of South Ossetia, government officials of the self-proclaimed republic of South Ossetia visited Ikorta Monastery in village Arcevi and announced about their plans to restore the historical monument. Representative of the so called “Monuments Protection Division of the Ministry of Culture of South Ossetia” talked about the restoration needs of the church and expressed that its restoration project has been included in the investment programme aiming at the socio-economical development of the republic.

This is not the first and by far not the only case, as similar news concerning the restoration of cultural heritage monuments in the occupied Tskhinvali region had been reported also during the years 2009-2012 (<http://cominf.org/node/1166497765> <http://www.yuga.ru/news/278099/> [http://ugo-osetia.ru/12\\_46/12\\_46-2.html](http://ugo-osetia.ru/12_46/12_46-2.html) <http://www.kp.ru/daily/24279.4/474054/>) relating to a number of other monuments. Earlier news reports also actively addressed the restoration of wall paintings in Tiri Monastery situated 8 Km outside Tskhinvali. Earlier reports on the devastation of the Church of “Gverda” in the Znauri region and Tigva Church had also raised alarm and were addressed by the Georgian NGOs and officials during meetings with the Council of Europe representatives in early 2012.

Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield (founded in March 2013 by national committees of ICOM and ICOMOS and Georgian Library Association) expresses its deepest concern about the state of conservation of Georgian cultural heritage on the occupied territories in Tskhinvali region and particularly that of Ikorta (1172) and Tiri Monasteries (17<sup>th</sup> c) where recent activity from the side of the so called “Ministry of Culture of South Ossetia” had been reported. Among others, it is the task of the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield to support the implementation of the UNESCO Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and thus we seek for international support in our endeavour to protect cultural heritage on Georgia’s occupied territories.

It is our professional belief, that the planned projects should include known heritage professionals from Georgia and abroad who have significant experience with working on the above monuments and have access to the specialized archives. Without the necessary information about the history of the monuments and the previous stages of their conservation, it will be impossible to achieve quality results.

Taking into account the earlier negative experience of Ilori Monastery “restoration” by local clergy in the occupied Abkhazia, we ask the international organisations involved in the protection of cultural heritage, to stay alert of the developments, monitor the process and help mediate to start negotiating joint restoration project of monuments of cultural heritage in Georgia's occupied Tskhinvali region.

We are aware that the alleviation of the Russia-Georgia war consequences remains a priority for the Council of Europe and its decision-making body as well as the international community at large. As we are persuaded that the issue of preservation of the cultural heritage on the Russian occupied territories of Georgia is having intrinsic bearing for the eventual settlement of the conflict between the two member states of the Council of Europe and since we are confident that these matters fall within the mandate of the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the International Committee of the Blue Shield, we have decided to bring these issues to your attention.

We also believe that both Russia and Georgia being member states of the UNESCO Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, it should be made possible to enforce its provisions for the sake of safeguarding cultural heritage on the occupied territories.

We do count on your necessary attention to this important matter and believe that involvement from the side of international community is the only way to prevent damage to the monuments of common European heritage. We ask for your help in organizing deployment of an international monitoring mission to study the current state of conservation of the numerous monuments on the Russian occupied territories of Georgia.

Yours sincerely,

on behalf of the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield,

Ms. Manana Tevzadze

Chairperson

Copy:

Mr. Benjamin Goes

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