

01.08.2023 Tbilisi

02-03/23

To:

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia
The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia
State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia

The Administration of South Ossetia
The chairperson of the Government of The Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia
The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia
The ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

The President of the Blue Shield
Secretariat of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed
Conflict

The director of the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural
Property (ICCROM,

The president of the International Council of Museums (ICOM)

The president of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)

The chair of the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape

The Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia

The head of the Council of Europe Office in Tbilisi

The head of mission of the European Union Monitoring Mission to Georgia (EUMM)

Co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Special representative of the European Union in the South Caucasus and Georgia on crisis issues
Secretariat of the Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (CETS No. 221)

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**Statement by the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield
about the state of cultural heritage sites located in the occupied territories of Georgia**

The Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield responds to the developments of the past years around the cultural heritage sites located in occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region and notes [once again](#) that the trend developed in the previous decades, such as damage and illegal interventions on heritage sites, continue to this day.

Monitoring of the open sources confirms that the damage to immovable cultural heritage monuments, caused by unauthorized repair and restoration works resulting in the alteration of historic fabric of sites, lack of maintenance and neglect, and construction of military facilities near the sites, continues to be evident in both regions. There are also cases of intentional damage.

The more recent information circulating in the print, broadcasting and social media about the archaeological excavations and looting of archaeological objects on the territory of Abkhazia is especially alarming.

The Russian Federation is recognized by many international organisations as an occupying force in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. According to the 1954 Convention the occupying force is responsible for the protection of cultural properties on the occupied territories. The Russian Federation as an occupying force, must be held responsible for the protection of cultural properties on Georgia's occupied territories.

The identified cases once again confirm the neglect of the provisions of the 1954 UNESCO Hague Convention and its two protocols (1954, 1999) by the Russian Federation. Despite the repeated confirmation of the above statements by various international organizations, (one of the latest statements being that of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly from July 2023, a declaration which states that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly “condemns the obliteration and alteration of Georgian features from Georgian cultural heritage monuments in both regions, as a direct consequence of the Russian Federation’s ongoing occupation and ‘Russification’ policy”), both the Georgian side and international organizations are deprived of the opportunity to verify the state of cultural heritage on the ground, carry out monitoring and produce relevant documentation.

The Georgian National Committee of Blue Shield thus calls on the relevant state agencies of Georgia, insofar as possible, to carry out detailed monitoring of the condition of cultural heritage monuments and museums in the occupied territories and to inform relevant international organizations about the identified cases of damage and possible looting. Furthermore, urges to take the necessary steps to better implement the international law, particularly the 1954 Hague Convention, its regulations for implementation and its both protocols. In addition, calls to take the necessary measures to prevent further trafficking of cultural artifacts from the occupied territories (Regarding these issues, see recommendations in [Chapter 8 of the](#)



[Blue Shield Georgia Report on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law with regards to the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Occupied Tskhinvali Region, Georgia"\).](#)

The Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield also appeals to the International Blue Shield and two of its founding organizations - ICOM and ICOMOS, as well as to UNESCO and its secretariat of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict, the Council of Europe and the relevant representations of the European Commission, to take note of the information contained in the annexed documents and to act within their capacities in order to implement the existing relevant international laws and ensure better protection of cultural properties.

The statement refers to the "[Report on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law with regards to the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Occupied Tskhinvali Region, Georgia](#)" published by the Georgian National Committee of Blue Shield in November 2022 and [the preliminary observations of the state of cultural heritage in the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia](#), which is still a work in progress.

The Tskhinvali Region report is the result of many years of local and international cooperation and is accompanied by an online database and a map-based visualization platform containing registered cultural heritage sites across the entire Tskhinvali Region. Its comprehensive Annex is detailing the damage to each site and the sources of information. The team of authors analyzed over 700 sites and examined national and international actions to protect the region's heritage. Using multi-source analysis that includes eyewitness reports, interviews, media, social media, published NGO and IO reports, and satellite imagery assessment via Google Earth and published reports by UNOSAT-UNITAR, it demonstrates that damage incurred not only during the hostilities in 2008, but has continued since and still continues today.