Statement on potential specific targeting of cultural sites in Iran

Blue Shield International\(^1\) notes with grave concern the recent statements by the President of the United States of America that he is seriously contemplating targeting cultural sites in Iran if Iran reacts to the killing of General Qasem Soleimani.


The current situation is additionally problematic and unfortunate as the USA was the first country to enshrine the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict in the 1863 Lieber Code\(^2\) during the American Civil War. More recently, individuals were found guilty and imprisoned for deliberate crimes against cultural property under the remit of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia; and, in 2016, Mr Al Mahdi, a member of the extremist group Ansar Dine, was sentenced to nine years imprisonment and given a €2.7 million fine by the International Criminal Court under the Rome Statute, for the destruction of nine mausolea and a mosque in Timbuktu, Mali.

It would be a major undermining of international humanitarian law, and a significant set-back for the international community, if the USA, especially given its historic leadership, had to be added to those responsible for the deliberate, calculated, illegal destruction of cultural heritage.

We ask the President to remove any cultural sites from his target list so as to avoid the USA committing war crimes and to stop threatening cultural sites in Iran in any way.

For further information please contact:

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\(^1\) The Blue Shield is an International NGO established under Dutch Law. It advises UNESCO on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict and has as its mission to protect the world’s cultural property, and is concerned with the protection of cultural and natural heritage, tangible and intangible, in the event of armed conflict, natural- or human-made disaster. See https://theblueshield.org/