

# Open letter to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee

*Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office*

To the Members of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee:

Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Russian, Federation, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, Zambia.

Distinguished members of the World Heritage Committee,

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched an armed offensive against Ukraine. One month later, intense fighting continues with hundreds of lives lost, and buildings and sometimes entire cities devastated. According to the figures recently released by the UNESCO Secretariat, 53 cultural buildings (historical monuments, places of worship, libraries, etc.) had been damaged or destroyed by 31 March. It is likely that the figures have since risen.

The heritage of Kharkiv, a UNESCO Creative City, paid a particularly heavy price, as did the centre of Chernihiv, which is on Ukraine's tentative World Heritage List. The terrible images of the bombing of the Mariupol theatre, attested by UNESCO through satellite imagery, weigh particularly heavily in our minds. And the damage continues.

Article 6.3 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention states that "Each State Party to this Convention undertakes not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage referred to in Articles 1 and 2 situated on the territory of other States Parties to this Convention."

It is impossible for the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee to be held either in Kazan or under Russian presidency while the latter is destroying "outstanding universal value" in Ukraine. The credibility of UNESCO and the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage is at stake.

Given these circumstances, the signatories of this letter, all States Parties to the 1972 Convention, will not travel to Kazan or to a 45th session of the World Heritage Committee hosted in any other country if chaired by Russia.

However, we believe firmly that the important work of listing and protecting World Heritage should continue, despite the Russian offensive in Ukraine, and we do not therefore want to see the 45th session postponed. This is a particularly important meeting of the Committee, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Convention, and which should launch a whole new focus on heritage in Africa in particular. These are important discussions that should take place in conditions that allow all States Parties to give them due focus and attention.

We look to you as our elected representatives on the World Heritage Committee to consider these arguments as you take forward your responsibilities on behalf of the Convention.

Yours ever,

Laura Davies

On behalf of the following 46 countries, States Party to the 1972 World Heritage Convention:

1. Afghanistan
2. Albania
3. Andorra
4. Australia
5. Austria
6. Canada
7. Colombia
8. Croatia
9. Cyprus
10. Czech Republic
11. Denmark
12. Ecuador
13. Estonia
14. Finland
15. France
16. Georgia
17. Germany
18. Hungary
19. Iceland
20. Ireland
21. Latvia
22. Lithuania
23. Luxembourg
24. Malta
25. Moldova
26. Monaco
27. Montenegro
28. Netherlands
29. New Zealand
30. Nigeria
31. North Macedonia
32. Norway
33. Peru
34. Poland
35. Portugal
36. Republic of Korea
37. Romania
38. Saint Kitts & Nevis
39. San Marino
40. Slovakia
41. Slovenia
42. Spain
43. Sweden
44. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
45. Ukraine
46. United States of America

Cc:

Madame Audrey Azoulay, Director General of UNESCO

Mr Ernesto Ottone, Assistant Director General of UNESCO for Culture

Lazare Eloundou Assomo, Director, World Heritage Centre, UNESCO

Teresa Patricio, President of the Board, International Council on Monuments and Sites, ICOMOS

John Robbins, Chair, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, ICCROM

Ryazan Al Mubarak, President of the Council, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, IUCN

Alberto Garlandini, President International Council of Museums, ICOM