



The Blue Shield acts to protect heritage during armed conflicts and disasters. It was founded in 1996 by the four key international organisations in their domains, the International Federation of Library and Information Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Council on Archives (ICA), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).

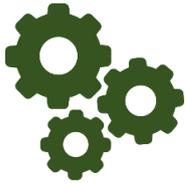
Its roots are in the years following the Second World War. Following the widespread destruction, UNESCO adopted the [1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its First Protocol \(1954\) and Second Protocol \(1999\)](#) which created rules to protect cultural property during armed conflicts. This was the first widely adopted international treaty and highlighted the concept of common heritage.

The blue shield is the emblem used to identify cultural sites protected by this Convention.



Yet, we have continued to see our cultural heritage suffer damage and destruction. Natural or man-made disasters, wars, and ethnic or religious conflicts represent a significant threat to the ability of future generations to enjoy our heritage.

It is a necessity proactively to inform, train and support cultural heritage experts, armed forces, governments, and other stakeholders to safeguard and protect our memory in order to pass it on. The Blue Shield, both at the international and national levels, provide a means for achieving this.



How Does it Work?

The Blue Shield takes a cross-sectoral approach to its work, bring together the heritage sector (including libraries, museums, monuments and sites, and archives) and armed forces. It works for the protection of the world's cultural heritage by coordinating preparations to meet and respond to emergency situations, providing training in realising international law, and in dealing with crises, and providing post-crisis support. It promotes high standards of preparation through risk management training and awareness-raising campaigns for professionals and the general public.

The Blue Shield exists both at the international and the national level. *Blue Shield International* is constituted by representatives from the International Federation of Library and Information Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Council on Archives (ICA) and International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). In addition, four national committee members are elected to the committee. The Chair is Karl von Habsburg (Austria), and the vice chair is Professor Peter Stone. They are supported by a Secretariat.

The International Board looks at [global issues](#). It acts in an advisory capacity for the protection of endangered cultural heritage, and consults and co-operates with other bodies including coalition forces like NATO, UNESCO, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). It also supports the development of globally relevant tools and policy research, and coordinates the work of national committees.

The National Blue Shield Committees [work nationally](#). They promote the ratification and practical implementation by national governments of the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols. National committees exist in numerous countries and bring together a diverse group of professionals, local and national government representatives, emergency services and the armed forces. They promote disaster preparedness, organise training, and can help with coordinating national responses.

In addition, the expertise contained in the international and national committees allow the organisation to collect and share information on threats to cultural property worldwide, thus helping international players to take appropriate measures in case of armed conflict or disaster.

For example, Blue Shield national committees and experts were present after the earthquake in Abruzzo, Italy, and just a few days after the emergency disaster in Haiti. The efforts of Blue Shield made sure that the initial momentum was translated into a long-term dedication to protection and restoration of heritage.

In Australia, the Blue Shield Australia Symposium saw participants share expertise, experiences and case studies of the protection of cultural heritage in times of natural disaster. Blue Shield International regularly [attends NATO Training exercises](#) alongside other humanitarian NGOs to support armed forces in understanding and practicing their heritage protection obligations under international law. This are just a few examples of how the Blue Shield encourages the safeguarding of, and respect for, cultural heritage.

IFLA works through the Blue Shield to respond to conflicts and disasters where cultural heritage is at risk, is being destroyed or has been destroyed.



Why Should You Get Involved?

In addition to the International Board, there are Blue Shield national committees [in multiple countries](#), and progress towards establishing them in several more. Besides bringing together stakeholders, these groups also provide a forum to improve emergency preparedness by sharing experiences and exchanging information. They offer a focal point for efforts to raise national awareness of threats to cultural heritage.

As well as helping IFLA with its goal of preserving and restoring cultural heritage, your engagement can also advance your own objectives, and connect you with others in the field. Blue Shield is focussed on building collaborative working between heritage professionals and armed forces to protect heritage in conflict, and building strong expert groups to call on in case of an emergency or disaster. People from all over the world volunteer their expertise to safeguard cultural heritage. Blue Shield also offers a wide range of training, and information on how to become an active player in the field.

Being a part of Blue Shield, you are a part of the protection of our cultural heritage. It is valuable to promote the work of Blue Shield and support safeguarding of our cultural heritage, at both international and national levels!

What Can You Do?

Engage in safeguarding and protecting cultural heritage and become a part of the Blue Shield network.

The below offer some suggestions of how to get involved:

- [Contact the Blue Shield Secretariat](#) to learn about [your Blue Shield National Committee](#) and what they do. The National Committees have the strength of their accurate knowledge of the local context, and are perfect focal points for concrete action aiming at the protection of cultural heritage.
- Learn more by **reading the reference material** on the [Blue Shield website](#) and how **IFLA has [been involved in emergency situations](#)**.
- Follow Blue Shield on [Facebook](#) and Twitter ([@BlueShield_Int](#))
- [Form a new Blue Shield National Committee](#) **if there is not one in your country**. A support letter from the national four founding organisations is needed. [Ask IFLA to help you out!](#)
- Apply to join the [IFLA Preservation and Conservation mailing list](#) where a world-wide group of experts on cultural heritage and libraries share news, where you will be receiving updates on our work and find many allies ready to help you in your own advocacy work!
- **Let IFLA know what you've done!** Share your stories [with us](#).