
Empowerment of civil society for the protection of cultural heritage in conflict and post-conflict areas

“Syria, Iraq, Yemen , Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon and Libya”

Date: 28-29/ May/ 2025

Time: 13:00 – 19:00 CET time zone (+01:00 GMT)

Location: Virtual | Zoom Platform

Moderator(s): Heritage for Peace Organization

Registration link

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_pa872k9SQDiTr-Y8um27Tw

Abstract

This conference will present the Arab Network of Civil Society Organizations to Safeguard Cultural Heritage (ANSCH) projects concerning safeguarding cultural heritage resources in the Arab region, as well as negotiating challenges and opportunities facing emerging civil society organizations (CSOs) in wartime. Representatives from Syria, Iraq, Yemen , Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon and Libya, civil society organizations will speak about their experiences in protecting the cultural heritage in conflict and post-conflict zones. On the second day, they will present scenarios of challenges and opportunities they are encountering in protecting Heritage. Furthermore, Heritage for Peace Organization represented by its president will discuss issues related to the implemented projects by ANSCH, ANSCH’s future plan, and assess the needs and potential support to the participants. Funding agencies and experts in the field of heritage preservation will contribute to the conference by giving support and further recommendation.

Note: Sessions in this conference will be held in English and interpretations in Arabic will be available.

Background : Third ANSCH Conference

The so-called “Arab Spring” swept across many Middle Eastern countries, resulting in profound political and social upheaval in Egypt, Syria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, and Tunisia. In countries such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon, and Libya, the consequences included devastating civil wars that not only impacted populations but also inflicted severe damage on cultural heritage. Indiscriminate bombardment, the military use of archaeological sites, illicit trafficking, looting, and vandalism led UNESCO to place several World Heritage sites on its List of World Heritage in Danger.

These alarming developments underscored the urgent need for coordinated efforts to protect cultural heritage. Alongside international organizations, local civil society has played a crucial role in preventing further destruction, monitoring illicit activities, and engaging communities in heritage preservation. Responding to these challenges, Heritage for Peace, in partnership with local and international stakeholders, launched several pioneering initiatives, most notably the Arab Network of Civil Society Organizations to Safeguard Cultural Heritage (ANSCH), funded by the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH). ANSCH connects governmental and non-governmental agencies with local communities to design and implement protection projects in Arab countries, with a current focus on Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen.

In the absence of effective national and international regulations for safeguarding heritage, there is a pressing need to develop emergency measures and empower civil society organizations (CSOs) to protect both tangible and intangible heritage resources.

Within this context, the third conference of ANSCH will showcase the network’s collective work and highlight projects dedicated to protecting cultural heritage across the Arab region. The conference will also address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by emerging CSOs operating in conflict settings.

ANSCH's Work plan

The Arab Network of Civil Society Organizations to Safeguard Cultural Heritage (ANSCH) is a joint initiative launched by Heritage for Peace in coordination with civil society organizations in several Arab countries(<https://ansch.heritageforpeace.org/>). The network aims to enhance cooperation between government entities and nonprofit organizations to manage, plan, and conserve archaeological sites, historic monuments, museums, and other cultural heritage resources.

Day Two: Case Studies and Challenges

- **Theme:** The second day will feature real-world case studies from organizations in Libya, Iraq, Yemen, and Sudan, illustrating the complexities and risks of heritage protection in crisis situations.
- **Discussion:** Addressing the challenges, risks, and strategies involved in protecting heritage under crisis conditions.
- **Presentations:** Heritage for Peace will give an overview of ANSCH's completed projects, outline future strategic plans, and discuss opportunities to strengthen support for member organizations.

Main Conference Themes

- **Survey Results:** Presentation of the comprehensive survey conducted by ANSCH on the needs of civil society organizations involved in heritage protection in conflict-affected Arab countries, covering operational challenges, available resources, crisis response capacity, and the broader role of CSOs in community engagement.
- **Key Topics:** Institutional development, cooperation with public authorities, and identifying priority areas for external support.

Conference Objectives

- Foster dialogue and build partnerships among civil society organizations.
- Strengthen collective capacities to safeguard cultural heritage during crises and recovery.
- Develop future strategic plans and identify support opportunities.