

Statement
on
Cultural Losses Related to the
Ongoing Conflict in the Middle East

Society of Architectural Historians
Heritage Conservation Committee

The Society of Architectural Historians, along with the rest of the world, has witnessed with great pain the loss of life and suffering inflicted upon Palestinian, Lebanese, and Israeli civilians.

In times of conflict, the preservation of monuments must necessarily be prioritized below the protection of human life. However, we remind all parties involved, and those who have influence on them, that this region contains many of humanity's most precious and sacred sites, many of them fragile and irreplaceable and all of them threatened by this conflict. We note that the intentional targeting or use of cultural and religious sites that are not legitimate military objectives and have no imperative military necessity is specifically prohibited, under any circumstances, by international humanitarian law.

As an organization devoted to "the study, interpretation, and conservation of the built environment worldwide for the benefit of all," we also point out the extensive damage wrought upon educational infrastructure. This includes the death or displacement of students, faculty, and staff. This in turn results in loss of expertise in the form of those who study and care for the internationally significant architecture of this region; this loss will compromise the built environment and our understanding of it for many years to come.

We call on all parties to the conflict to respect the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1972 World Heritage Convention, and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. We urge all involved to take every available precaution to protect civilian lives and avoid permanent damage to cultural heritage in the region.

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