

Intervention of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) at the Expert meeting for the protection of cultural heritage of Yemen (15-16 July 2015)

Dear Mr Chairman / Madam Chair,

I speak for IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, representing libraries and their users worldwide. One of IFLA's core missions is the protection and preservation of documentary cultural heritage.

The current situation in Yemen gives more than ample reasons to worry for the humanitarian and cultural heritage situation. IFLA strongly condemns the destruction of cultural and documentary heritage in the current conflict.

At IFLA we monitor and communicate whenever possible with the regions affected by natural or manmade disasters. The situation in Yemen poses to be even more difficult in terms of information flow, than other recent conflicts. We managed to gather information on the situation of some of the libraries but much other damage has probably gone unrecorded.

We had reports of:

- the public library in Al Haddida being seriously damaged by a car bomb at the end of May,
- the National Library in Adan being seriously damaged by combat,
- the Zobeid public library being closed since the start of the conflict and having severe damages,
- the Bardouny public library being damaged in recent attacks but still able to operate,
- and the Al Saeed Institution for Science and Culture in Taaz being now closed after it was seriously damaged in attacks.

Many libraries in Yemen have remained closed since the start of the conflict and the state of the documentary heritage collections is unclear.

IFLA is a founding member of the Blue Shield, together with ICOM, ICOMOS and ICA. Through the Blue Shield IFLA engages actively with the issues at hand. The mission of the Blue Shield is closely related to IFLA's aim to safeguard documentary heritage collections and together with the other main Blue Shield organisations IFLA raises awareness in countries affected by conflict such as Yemen.

IFLA has a strong library network which we utilise to help gather relevant information to safeguard, preserve, and rescue documentary heritage. We are in the final stage of building a Risk Register for documentary heritage which will allow holders of documentary heritage to register their collections with us. This data can then be used by the Blue Shield and UNESCO if needed. We widely encourage uptake of the Risk Register to ensure that as much

information as possible is available for the relevant acting agents in manmade and natural disaster.

Furthermore, the *IFLA Principles of Engagement in library-related activities in times of conflict, crisis or disaster* outline IFLA's position and what actions can be taken when confronted with a disaster. The IFLA Cultural Heritage Programme links its results, such as the Risk Register for Documentary Heritage, directly into the work of UNESCO and the Blue Shield.

For this we work closely not only with the UNESCO Culture Sector but also with the UNESCO Memory of the World programme, a programme which in light of the current situation has even more significance.

The recent conflict in Yemen has led to libraries being destroyed and documentary heritage collections being either destroyed, looted, trafficked or displaced. Information is very difficult to obtain. Human lives and the safeguarding of librarians and information professionals in the area is always the first priority for IFLA.

IFLA strongly supports UNESCO's actions and will engage and further UNESCO's mission on safeguarding cultural heritage in Yemen as much as possible.