



Russia Must be Excluded from the World Heritage Committee

After Odessa, Strongly-worded Statements are not Enough

With the targeted destruction of historic buildings, museums and the spiritual center, the main church of the Ukrainian cultural metropolis Odessa, the barbaric, genocidal Russian regime has crossed a final line and irrevocably left the circle of the civilized world.

Russia has thus forfeited any right to play a role in international bodies that advise or decide on the protection of cultural property.

Russia has not only clearly violated the 1972 International Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Art. 6.3 "Each State Party to this Convention undertakes not to take any deliberate measures which might damage directly or indirectly the cultural and natural heritage ... situated on the territory of other States Parties to this Convention."), but also against the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954 - the first convention of UNESCO, which was adopted by the international community as a direct consequence of the terrible destruction and looting of cultural property during World War II.

How can it be that such a country is still a member of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee?

There can be no more blatant reason for exclusion from this body than the destruction, committed with the intent of genocide, of cultural heritage that is by definition the common heritage of humanity (world heritage). It is now time for humanity as a whole to take a stand against this barbarism. Words, no matter how strongly formulated and no matter how highly placed, will seem embarrassing and shallow if they are not followed by determined action.

It is inconceivable that at the annual meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in September, Russia should be allowed to deliberate and decide on all decisions concerning the world heritage - including, for example, the historic center of Lviv, St. Sophia's Cathedral and the Cave Monastery of Kyiv, and the historic center of Odessa, which it has just destroyed itself.

The states parties of the World Heritage Committee¹ are called upon now to leave behind geopolitical interests and alliances that are historically based but have become obsolete, and to recall the common obligation they have assumed towards the world community: to protect the cultural and natural heritage of humanity. Nothing else can save the moral and legal legitimacy of this body.

¹ Argentina, Belgium, Bulgaria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Rwanda, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Thailand, Zambia

We demand:

1. The Presidency of the World Heritage Committee (Saudi Arabia) must immediately convene an extraordinary meeting of the body with the sole agenda item of the exclusion of the Russian Federation from the World Heritage Committee (according to §34.1 of the Rules of Procedure: "The Committee shall adopt such decisions and recommendations as it may deem appropriate.")
2. The other States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, led by Ukraine, must use all diplomatic channels and political means at their disposal to persuade the members of the Committee to vote in favor of the exclusion of the Russian Federation.
3. The World Heritage Committee must immediately task a working group with developing a long overdue sanctions regime against violations of the World Heritage Convention. These sanctions must be based on objective, verifiable criteria (such as continued failure to comply with the Committee's decisions or the Convention's Operational Guidelines) and must come into force without further ado once meeting these criteria has been established.

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