



(World) Heritage sites as ambassadors for peace

Professor Peter Stone, OBE

Newcastle University, UK

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all are welcome

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Further details contact: Professor Peter Wilson, 0428245731, peter.w.wilson@utas.edu.au

“The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] was founded immediately following the horrors of the Second World War in 1945. The Preamble to UNESCO’s Constitution declares that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed” Over the years this fundamental *raison d’être* appears to have been somewhat lost as UNESCO, understandably, has been staffed by some of the world’s leading experts in their primary fields of science, education, and culture [but not peace].

It could be argued that everything UNESCO does should be based around this concept and recently the UNESCO web-site has introduced the strap-line of: “building peace in the minds of men and women”. However, there is a significant difference between a web-site strap-line and action on the ground. It is probably true to say that none of UNESCO’s cultural conventions prioritise, or actually even mention, this *raison d’être*.

It frequently said that UNESCO’s most successful Convention is the 1972 ‘Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage’. The Convention was 192 States Parties (more than any other cultural convention) and there are now 1,052 World Heritage sites spread across the world. However, very few of these acknowledge the link to UNESCO (most only show the World Heritage emblem with no explanation of its meaning) and fewer (any?) emphasise the importance of peace to UNESCO’s activities. Simply put, the interpretation at a World Heritage site dating from the Roman period is all about the Romans; and for Han Dynasty site is all about the Han Dynasty etc.

In the late 1990’s the World Heritage in Young Hands project incorporated peace as one of its main strands. Little has been done about since. There is a massive opportunity to mobilise these 1,052 sites as ‘ambassadors for peace’. Why is no-one talking about this...?



Peter Stone is the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection and Peace at Newcastle University in the UK; Chair of the UK Committee of the Blue Shield; and Vice President of Blue Shield International. He was previously Head of the School of Arts and Cultures and Professor of Heritage Studies in the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University, UK. Before joining Newcastle he had worked for English Heritage, as a field archaeologist, and history teacher.

*In 2003 he was advisor to the UK’s Ministry of Defence regarding the identification and protection of the archaeological cultural heritage in Iraq. He has remained active in working with the military to refine attitudes and develop processes for the better protection of cultural property in times of conflict. He has written extensively on this topic including co-editing, with Joanne Farchakh Bajjal, *The Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq* (2008) and editing *Cultural Heritage, Ethics and the Military* (2011). Peter was awarded an OBE in the 2011 Queen’s Birthday Honours List for services to heritage education.*