

Statement delivered on behalf of 44 countries during the 15th meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict on December 11, 2023

As we gather today for the 15th meeting of the High Contracting parties of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the Russian Federation continues to pursue its war of aggression against Ukraine. The ongoing aggression has resulted in lives lost and lives threatened, and further affected the cultural property in Ukraine through wide scale damage and destruction. Since February 24, 2022, UNESCO has verified damage to 331 sites (*data from November 29*). This includes destructive attacks, which the Russian Federation launched in July and August this year against sites in the L'viv World Heritage buffer zone and the Historic Centre of Odesa, another World Heritage Site.

We hereby recall the resolution of the 42nd General Conference of UNESCO entitled “UNESCO’s action in Ukraine” that “condemns in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation, with the involvement of Belarus, against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations“ and “invites the governing bodies of all relevant UNESCO conventions and intergovernmental programmes to assess and develop measures taking into account the evolving situation in Ukraine“. We use this opportunity to call on the High Contracting parties of the 1954 Convention to condemn systematic attacks against cultural heritage of Ukraine committed by the Russian Federation.

We highly appreciate the ongoing activities of UNESCO in support of Ukraine and its people, including the work of the Heritage Emergency Fund and the UNESCO Liaison Office in Ukraine. We welcome the decision of the 3rd extraordinary meeting of the Committee of the Second Protocol in September this year to grant provisional enhanced protection to 20 cultural properties.

In spite of these efforts, the threat to Ukraine’s cultural heritage will remain acute as long as the Russian Federation continues to show clear contempt of its obligations under international law and we emphasize the need to comply with the 1954 Hague Convention and its First Protocol. The destruction of cultural heritage goes much deeper than the dismantling of the stones that form them. Heritage is key to creating and maintaining peaceful and just societies and to promoting full enjoyment of human rights.

We reiterate our demand that the Russian Federation immediately withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders and immediately, completely and unconditionally stop its military aggression against Ukraine.

The statement was given on behalf of the following countries: Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden,

Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.