

Nara Message
“Saving Syrian Cultural Heritage for the Next Generation – Palmyra”
Nara, Japan
13 July 2017

More than six years of crisis in Syria have devastated the lives and livelihoods of many Syrians, and the destruction of cultural heritage in Syria, including Palmyra, is a grave concern to all humanity. As experts in Syrian cultural heritage from Japan, Germany, France, Poland, Italy, Norway, Austria, and from Syria, participating in the **International Conference on Saving Syrian Cultural Heritage for the Next Generation – Palmyra** held in **Nara, Japan**, we condemn in the strongest terms the destruction of Syrian cultural heritage and call on all concerned parties to do their utmost to safeguard this endangered heritage.

We recall the wide array of United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) legal instruments that are of vital importance in the protection of cultural heritage. These include the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property on the Event of Armed Conflict (1954) and its two Protocols, as well as the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). We also express our support for United Nations Security Council resolution 2199 (2015) condemning the destruction of cultural heritage and adopting legally-binding measures to counter illicit trafficking of antiquities and cultural objects from Iraq and Syria and resolution 2347 (2017), which is the first ever resolution adopted by the Security Council to focus on cultural heritage and its protection for peace and security.

Nara is home to several of the world’s most important cultural heritage sites. Nara’s cultural heritage has also faced danger of destruction time and again throughout its history. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the anti-Buddhist movement destroyed and damaged Buddhist temples across the country, including in Nara. However, the people of Nara overcame these challenges with their determination to preserve their heritage and their attachment to their cultural heritage.

Across the world, cultural heritage is devastated by intentional damage and destruction, denying the passing-on of cultural heritage to future generations and undermining social cohesion. This makes it all the more important, especially at times of crisis, to strengthen the awareness and capacities of local communities to appreciate and preserve cultural heritage.

As we gather in Nara, we acknowledge the great personal sacrifice that our Syrian colleagues have made to preserve Syrian cultural heritage during the crisis. We affirm our commitment to support the Syrian people in the tasks of restoration and conservation of their heritage with training, tools and new technologies; to support them during the documentation of the conflict-related damages and the conservation of the fragments of the demolished buildings, and to help them in their restoration effort.

We hereby express our support for all the international efforts including those of UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Archaeological Institute of Kashihara, with the support of other technical and academic institutions, for the capacity development of Syrian cultural heritage experts.

Standing side by side with the Syrian people, we reaffirm our solidarity and commitment to preserve Syrian cultural heritage. We strongly urge the international community to join our efforts to assist the Syrian people and pave the way for peace and recovery in the future.