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Issue 2

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Introduction

Religious Monuments are an essential part of our human history and heritage, as they symbolize our diverse spiritual culture. These monuments are not entirely just architectural achievements, but represent centuries of history, traditions, faith, and community. The protection and preservation of religious monuments is a critical global issue, needed to be addressed promptly. The matter in question has been recognized previously by UNESCO with growing significance.

In the recent past, the world has witnessed the destruction and damage caused to numerous monuments globally. This juncture calls for immediate attention and action to protect these priceless jewels. UNESCO plays a vital role in this effort for protection as a lot of these monuments are designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, recognizing their global excellence. These monumental destinations receive intimidatory threats from natural disasters, intentional acts of destruction, and urban development, highlighting the need for international cooperation and supplementary protective measures.

This report will explore the challenges faced and offer possible solution to ensure the monument's longevity. By researching the past, current and achievable future efforts, this report will aid in your understanding of the complexity of the promotion of protection and the preservation of religious monuments.

Key Terms

Religious Monuments

Religious monuments are buildings dedicated to gods and deities that are/were used for worship and to hold religious gatherings and ceremonies.

Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific, and social significance.

World Heritage Sites

A natural or man-made site, area, or structure recognized as being of outstanding international importance and therefore as deserving special protection.

Restoration

the act or process of returning something to its earlier good condition or position, or to its owner.

Preservation

the act of keeping something in its original state or in good condition.

General Overview

Religious monuments face numerous threats as mentioned before like natural disasters, urban development and acts of destruction, which are often driven by conflicts and distinct beliefs. The damage or loss of these properties can have immense impacts on the communities that respect them, as well as on the broader cultural background. Consequently, the need for urgent actions for the preservation of religious monuments is more than ever.

UNESCO plays a crucial part in this effort through its different programs and initiatives targeted at protecting religious monuments. Moreover, UNESCO conducts capacity-building workshops, publishes many cultural heritage protection handbooks, and organizes international meetings to encourage global cooperation. Due to the research and documentation supported by UNESCO, aids to decide comprehensive inventories of religious monuments, ensuring the maintenance of the records and the identification of the lost and damaged items.

Major Parties Involved

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO is a major organization in protecting religious monuments globally. Through the World Heritage Convention, it identifies sites of outstanding universal value, obligating nations to protect them. UNESCO leads international preservation efforts, gives expert assistance during crisis, and advocates for interfaith understanding.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a major party in religious monument preservation due to the many cultural losses it has suffered, especially the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, which gathered international attention. This history of Afghanistan's monumental devastation makes it a focal point for international preservation efforts, especially in the war zones.

Italy

Italy is another country major country involved in this issue as it is a direct contributor to the preservation of religious monuments. Italy has a high concentration of significant religious sites, which are 60 to be exact, most notably the Vatican City, the heart of the Roman Catholic Church. These sites are a huge responsibility in Italy for the preservation of such priceless sites, making it a major contributor globally.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

UNAOC plays a key role in this issue as well is safeguarding religious monuments, encouraging intercultural dialogue. The UNAOC has created action plans to protect religious sites in response to the increasing threats against the places of worship, highlighting the importance of respect and understanding between different faiths and religions. They work on preventing conflicts arising from religious intolerance and promote initiatives that improve relationships between communities.

Timeline of Key Events

1972: The adoption of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, marking a milestone in the protection of cultural heritage.

1993: The Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, believed to be the birthplace of Jesus Christ, underwent significant restoration efforts.

2001: The Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, highlighting the vulnerability of religious monuments to such destruction through this act of cultural vandalism.

2015: The ancient city of Palmyra, including its religious monuments, was severely damaged by the ISIS.

2019: On April 15, 2019, a devastating fire broke out at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, causing significant damage to the iconic religious monument.

2020: The restoration of Al-Nuri Mosque in Mosul, Iraq, began in 2020 after it was destroyed by ISIS in 2017.

2021: In 2021, UNESCO launched the "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" initiative, focusing on the restoration and preservation of cultural heritage in Mosul, including religious monuments.

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

- Security Council Resolution on Cultural Heritage, 24 March 2017 (S/RES/2347)
- Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 17 October 2003 (ICH Convention)
- United Nations Millennium Declaration, 8 September 2000 (A/RES/55/2)
- Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 25 June 1993, Vienna, Austria

- Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 14 May 1954 (Hague Convention)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The UN has made several efforts to address the protection and preservation of religious monuments.

One of the major attempts was the Security Council Resolution on Cultural Heritage, 24 March 2017 (S/RES/2347). This resolution was focused on highlighting the importance of protecting cultural heritage, which included religious monuments, in war zones. It requested for all the member states to take appropriate measures to prevent the destruction and illegal trafficking of any cultural property. The resolution emphasized the need of international cooperation to protect these valuable monuments and culture.

Another attempt was the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 17 October 2003 (ICH Convention). This convention intended to protect not only the tangible cultural heritage but also the intangible practices, expressions and the knowledge related to religious monuments. It emphasized the significance of preserving rituals, traditions and spiritual practices that are fundamental to the meaning of these sites.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, 8 September 2000 (A/RES/55/2) had a broader extent, maintaining the commitment of the member states to protect cultural diversity and heritage. The declaration focused on underlining the role of cultural heritage in peace, security, and sustainable development, which includes the preservation of religious monuments.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 25 June 1993, Vienna, Austria, highlighted the importance of safeguarding cultural rights as part of human rights. It suggested the preservation of cultural heritage and religious monuments as a part of promoting understanding and respect among different cultures, religions, and communities.

One of the earliest and most inclusive attempts to protect cultural property during armed conflict was the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 14 May 1954 (Hague Convention). This convention also focused on protecting cultural property during

war times by establishing several guidelines. It introduced measures to prevent the theft, damage, and destruction of cultural property and urged special protection zones for important sites.

Possible Solutions

There can be a couple of ways in which we could consider solving this problem:

Enhancement of Legal Frameworks: Strengthening both national and international legal frameworks is paramount for the protection of religious monuments. Member states should appoint strict laws and regulations that prevent destruction, damage, or neglect of such sites. Moreover, international treaties and conventions should be updated according to these policies globally to address emerging threats and provide clear guidelines for preservation efforts.

Urging International Cooperation and Funding: Enhanced international cooperation is crucial for effective efforts to protect and preserve religious monuments. Member States should collaborate effectively with UNESCO, NGOs, and other important stakeholders to share expertise, and resources. Establishing a global fund dedicated to the preservation of religious monuments can provide the necessary financial support for different restoration projects, especially in the areas where the damage was caused by conflict or natural disasters.

Encouraging Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Measures: Promoting tourism in cultural regions can produce more funds for the preservation and restoration projects of religious monuments. However, it is crucial to take necessary protocols to avoid over-tourism as it can maximize the environmental impacts on these sites. To avoid this, it is vital to adopt sustainable practices for a healthy balance of the environment. Developing eco-friendly tourism policies and modifying infrastructure can ensure the long-term preservation of these sites while still benefiting the local population.

Implementing Conflict Resolution and Protection Policies during Armed Conflicts: Implementing measures to protect religious monuments during armed conflict is critical. Including heritage protection in a country's military regulations to ensure that the cultural properties are safeguarded during wars and attacks.

By adopting these possible solutions, we can address the challenges that faced in the protection and preservation of religious monuments and ensure their longevity for the future generations.

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Appendix

- World Heritage Sites: [UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#)
- Security of the Places of Worship in Europe: [Ceeurope.org](#)
- International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS): [ICOMOS](#)
- ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property): [ICCROM](#)
- United Nations Digital Library: [UN Digital Library](#)