The World Archaeological Congress

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Media Release: Statement on Middle East conflict and its Consequences for Human Rights, and Archaeological and Environmental Heritage.
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The World Archaeological Congress (WAC) is an international organization that represents professional archaeologists in tertiary institutions, museums, government agencies and the private sector in more than 90 countries. WAC has a particular concern to promote the protection of sites and objects of the past, and the ownership and conservation of archaeological heritage.

The current humanitarian crisis involving Lebanon and Israel prompts WAC to condemn the impact of armed conflict on civilians through the loss of hundreds of lives and extensive displacement of communities. WAC calls for a halt to the violence against people, their belongings, and the cultural and natural environments that is happening The Mediterranean area contains a legacy for the whole of humanity, as a locus where many cultures, religions and forms of organization have been created since ancient times. Our nature as humans is based both in our existence and in the legacies of our cultures. Both of these are being seriously injured in this war, since it involves civilians as victims (especially women and children) and the destruction of their belongings-including some objects and places that are considered the heritage of all of us.

WAC calls on the governments of both countries in this struggle to follow United Nations mandates to find a reasonable and peaceful solution to this conflict. The heritage we have a responsibility to preserve and make visible to all humanity is not only the ancient remains, buildings and places, but also the descendants of the creators of this patrimony, and the stakeholders who use it in their everyday life.

WAC members are united by their belief in the values of respect and human dignity, and the need to build hope in the future here. The WAC Statutes address the need for members to take into account human rights in archaeological education and research, and other practices particularly in the light of the principles and conventions of the United Nations and UNESCO. The current humanitarian crisis involving Lebanon and Israel gives WAC cause to condemn the impact of armed conflict on civilians through the loss of hundreds of lives and extensive displacement of communities. WAC deplores the violence and devastation brought about by this conflict.

The Congress views with concern the potential for damage to significant cultural property in the north of Israel and in the southern areas of Lebanon. In the past, WAC has urged governments to request compliance with the *UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* and the principles of customary international law. The Hague Convention calls on parties involved in armed conflict to avoid targeting of, and minimizing damage to, cultural sites, monuments and antiquities. A number of sites in each of the two countries have been inscribed on the World Heritage List, or are in an advance stage of declaration as World Heritage Sites, because they contain the cultural remains of diverse time periods recorded from the occupation of early human existence.

WAC endorses the recent call by the Archaeological Institute of America and the American Schools of Oriental Research to safeguard human rights, and preserve cultural heritage in the circumstances that have resulted from the ongoing armed conflict in Israel and Lebanon. WAC urges the parties in the conflict to operate within the terms of the Hague Convention to prevent the loss of more lives, and to minimize the damage of the significant cultural sites that contribute to the heritage of the Middle East that is valuable to all people.

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For further information:
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Background on WAC
The World Archaeological Congress is the major global organisation in archaeology, with elected representation from all parts of the world. It holds an international congress every four years to promote the exchange of the results of archaeological research; professional training and public education for disadvantaged nations, groups and communities; the empowerment and betterment of Indigenous groups and First Nations peoples; and the conservation of archaeological sites.

The last Congress, WAC-5, was held from June 21-June 26 at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. WAC-5 was the first full World Archaeological Congress to be held in North America. It was attended by some 1,200 archaeologists, native peoples and international scholars from some 75 nations.

The Congress Patron for WAC-5 was Harriet Mayor Fulbright. Patrons of previous WAC Congresses include Nelson Mandela and Prince Charles. WAC-5 was held in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, and in collaboration with the Getty Conservation Institute.