Speech by Minister of State Maria Böhmer at the International Conference for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas held in Abu Dhabi

2016-12-03

Your Highness, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed,

Your Excellency, President of the French Republic, Francois Hollande,

Director-General Irina Bokova,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The destruction of cultural property due to terror and war, illicit excavations and illegal trading, poses a threat to humankind’s cultural heritage. The destruction of our past also endangers our present and our future.

The

UN

Security Council has adopted several resolutions condemning the deliberate destruction of cultural property. Furthermore, the International Criminal Court in The Hague made another ground-breaking contribution in the form of a landmark first conviction for cultural destruction in Mali as a war crime.

Protecting, preserving and rebuilding cultural heritage is thus a pressing issue. On behalf of the German Government, I welcome the joint initiative by the French President and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi to hold this conference. Allow me to pass on to you the best regards of Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel and Federal Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

This conference sends a clear signal: we’re working together to counter the destruction of cultural heritage.

Germany has taken several measures aimed at protecting cultural heritage around the world:

We have established the Archaeological Heritage Network. It pools the cultural preservation expertise in Germany and makes it available around the world. It cooperates worldwide, for instance with

UNESCO

. Last week, an agreement on cooperation with ALECSO was concluded. The network consists of the German Archaeological Institute, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, the German Commission for

UNESCO

, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit and many other institutions, universities and museums. I'm delighted that experts from this network are playing an active role in this conference.

With the project "Stunde Null: A Future after the Crisis", we're supporting the documentation of Syria's cultural heritage and its possible reconstruction. We're training Syrian specialists, students and future decision-makers in the fields of architecture, archaeology, heritage conservation, building research, urban planning and craftsmanship. Quite concrete steps have thus been taken to enable Syrian refugees and experts to shape their country's future. That is the particular relevance of this initiative: giving people prospects for the future after the crisis.

In Berlin in June 2016, I – along with

UNESCO

Director-General Irina Bokova – hosted an expert meeting on preserving Syria's cultural heritage, thus making a contribution towards international coordination.

Germany is supporting cultural preservation in more than 140 countries. In Mali, for example, we've helped to save and preserve centuries-old Islamic manuscripts from Timbuktu. We also provide assistance following natural disasters. In Nepal, for instance, we're fostering the reconstruction of cultural heritage in conjunction with the Gerda Henkel Foundation following the terrible earthquake in 2015.

And recently, the German Bundestag re-enacted its Act on the Protection of Cultural Property. Germany thus now has an effective instrument for purposefully combating the illegal trade in cultural property. It enables Germany to help safeguard against illicit excavations more effectively and combat terrorist financing through the illegal trade in cultural property.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The establishment of an international fund for the protection of cultural heritage and an international network of safe haven activities are of key importance for safeguarding cultural heritage. Germany stands ready as a strategic partner to cooperate, to make its expertise available and to support projects. Bringing together resources, know-how and networks is a shared goal which we can also advance within the

UNESCO

framework.

Let me conclude by saying:

At the

UNESCO

international expert meeting on preserving Syria’s cultural heritage held in Berlin just a few months ago, I was deeply impressed by how young Syrians traumatised by war and terror found the will to plan their country’s future. That gives me hope. Despite all the horrors, we can create opportunities. We can give these people faith in the future. Indeed, we must.

Our commitment to preserving cultural identity is a commitment to peace and security.

It’s a commitment to people.

Thank you very much.

Overview "Newsroom"

Source : https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/161203-stm-b-abudhabi-285906