

International Expert Meeting on safeguarding Syria's cultural heritage in the Federal Foreign Office

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From 2 to 4 June 2016, an International Expert Meeting on protecting and preserving Syria's cultural heritage is to be held in the Federal Foreign Office at the invitation of Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), and Minister of State Maria Böhmer, Special Representative of the Federal Foreign Office for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Cultural Conventions and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Education and Science Programmes. The three-day conference will begin on Thursday, 2 June, at 5 p.m. in the Weltsaal of the Federal Foreign Office.

The aim of the meeting is to move forward with current national and international activities to document and assess damage caused to Syrian cultural sites such as Palmyra and to build networks between the key experts in this field. The agenda also includes basic and further training for museum experts and experts for the reconstruction of Syria's cultural heritage, as well as illegal trading in Syrian cultural objects.

Commenting on this, Minister of State Maria Böhmer made the following statement in Berlin today (1 June):

“Together with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), we have managed to invite a group of experts, institutions and non-governmental organisations to Berlin who are global leaders in the field of the protection of cultural property. War continues in parts of Syria. Our aim is nevertheless to lay the basis for the reconstruction of the cultural sites and thus help preserve and strengthen Syria's cultural identity. Despite serious damage, there is hope for successful conservation and restoration. Palmyra is symbolic of many Syrian cultural sites which need to be preserved for the people in Syria and the entire world.”

Background information:

More than 170 experts from all over the world have been invited to the three-day conference in the Federal Foreign Office including renowned archaeologists, experts in ancient history and monument preservation, architects and urban planners. The participants include the head of the Syrian antiquities authority, as well as several other scientists from or working in Syria.

The meeting has been prepared by the German Archaeological Institute (DAI (German Academic Exchange Service)), the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation (SPK), the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Centre and the German Commission for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Representatives of these institutions such as Prof. Hermann Parzinger, President of the SPK, Prof. Friederike Fless, President of the DAI (German Academic Exchange Service.) and Dr Mechtild Rössler, Director of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Centre will also attend the conference.

In conjunction with the conference, a forum of young experts called United for Syrian Heritage is taking place with the support of the Gerda Henkel Foundation and hopes to network junior scientists from the fields of archaeology, monument preservation and urban planning and give the next generation a voice. The outcome of the youth forum will be presented at the opening of the conference on 2 June.

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