

Speech by State Minister for Foreign Affairs

Kentaro Sonoura

at the International Conference for the Protection of
Cultural Heritage in Conflict Areas (Draft)

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Distinguished guests,

I would like to express my appreciation for being invited to this conference.

I assume that all of you present here are well aware of how much cultural heritage enriches our minds and lives. We are responsible for passing it on to future generations.

While it is widely recognized that cultural heritage has common value for humanity, we are witnessing tragic incidents, in which cultural heritage sites are

selected as targets of attack in armed conflicts and terrorism.

Such widespread destruction of cultural heritage sites with histories dating back thousands of years instantly wipes out evidence of human creativity and wisdom. We must be united to prevent such tragedies.

Japan has also been actively engaging in international cooperation since the early postwar period. Since the late 1980s, international cultural exchange has been positioned as a pillar of Japan's diplomatic policy, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the UNESCO/Japanese Funds-in-trust for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage. So far, we have contributed a total of 68 million dollars to this fund.

Through this fund, we supported many projects in conflict areas, such as the project for the cultural heritage of Bamiyan in Afghanistan. Another

example is the project for the conservation of museum collections in Iraq launched in 2014. Through such projects, Japan contributes not only to the restoration of cultural sites but also developing the human resources of the recipient countries.

The private-sector is also very active in this field. Particularly notable is the activity of Mr. Ikuo Hirayama, who served as a UNESCO goodwill ambassador. Mr. Hirayama took care of 102 items of cultural property taken out of Afghanistan, and restored and returned them to Afghanistan. We may say that this is a predecessor of the “safe havens” initiative.

Now I turn to the current situation in conflict areas. What can we do in the face of the destruction of cultural heritage that is actually taking place?

The first preemptive step should be documentation and archiving of the data of cultural heritage.

In case cultural heritage is unfortunately destroyed, cutting-edge technology broadens the possibilities for restoration. You can see on the screen there, an image of Bel temple of Palmyra, created by Professor Saito. I believe such 3D technology or technology to clone cultural properties, which Professor Miyasako presented on here yesterday, are new challenges against the destruction of cultural heritage. In order to make effective use of such technology, cross-border sharing of data is indispensable.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the United Arab Emirates and France for hosting this meaningful conference.

Thank you for your kind attention.