COVID-19: ALIPH SUPPORTS OVER 100 CULTURAL HERITAGE OPERATORS IN CONFLICT OR POST-CONFLICT AREAS

Wednesday, 29 July 2020 – The International alliance for the protection of cultural heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH) has committed over 2 million USD to support more than 100 operators in conflict or post-conflict areas in weathering the COVID-19 pandemic. ALIPH doubled its initial budget to respond to the overwhelming number of requests and the needs expressed from the field.

The ongoing health crisis has brought significant insecurity to the cultural heritage protection sector, forcing the closure of museums and sites, and in some cases, necessitating rehabilitation work to stop. The workers at these sites are essential to the protection and rehabilitation of the patrimony of countries in conflict or in crisis recovery. Thus, ALIPH is supporting local organizations to meet operating costs, develop sanitary measures, acquire digital tools and skills, launch emergency protection projects, or generate new forms of income. With these grants, the Foundation has directly supported some forty local heritage operators or artisans in around thirty countries, such as the National Museum of Mali, Uganda Museum, Corporación Cultural Museo del Vidrio of Bogotà, and the Directorate of Heritage and Archaeology of Mosul, which has since strengthened the security of some archaeological sites in the Nineveh Plain.

Moreover, nearly 60 additional organisations will be supported through a new re-granting program, implemented in partnership with major cultural heritage actors, which will channel ALIPH funds to local operators in their respective networks: UNESCO, International Council of Museums (ICOM), Prince Claus Fund, World Monuments Fund, REMPART, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Petra National Trust, as well as the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), the French laboratory Cultures et Environnements: Préhistoire, Antiquité, Moyen Age, part of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CEPAM-CNRS), and the Centre Français d’Archéologie et de Sciences sociales (CEFAS), which will, for instance, cooperate with the GOAM (General Organisations of Antiquities and Museums in Yemen) to develop protection measures for the collections of 5 Yemeni museums and offer digital tools and training for their staff.

“If we do not take decisive and significant action during times such as these, when the livelihoods of those who work every day to preserve and safeguard cultural heritage are being threatened, then we simply are not fulfilling our mission,” said Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan, ALIPH chairman. “The COVID-19 Action Plan targets the most urgent needs of local actors today, right now, so that they can continue to work tomorrow.”

A tangible example of such rapid and impactful intervention is Sunbula, a not-for-profit fair-trade organization based in Palestine that works to promote and preserve traditional crafts and know-how in coordination with 25 artisan groups, representing some 2,000 people. Since its store was closed on March 10, the artisans and the shop have lost critical revenue. “The emergency fund has really helped Palestinian artisans in this challenging time,” said Shirabe Yamada, Sunbula’s executive director. “Thanks to ALIPH’s swift response, [they] received the payment they were waiting for, and the craft cooperatives were able to restart production. There is very little emergency funding available for the heritage industry, so [we] are very grateful for the support.”
In addition to emergency financial support measures, ALIPH has established a repository of e-learning resources on the protection of cultural heritage – in the form of several dozen multilingual courses produced by trusted online learning providers from around the world – to strengthen the skills of heritage professionals during this pandemic. Two major distance-learning projects are also being supported, representing nearly 750,000 USD combined. The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) will develop training modules on conflict-sensitive cultural first aid and cooperation with the humanitarian sector. The Prince Claus Fund Cultural Emergency Response Programme will oversee 10 small-scale first aid cultural heritage projects and 3 rehabilitation projects in Africa and Asia.

Lastly, despite the crisis, and in compliance with health regulations, several ALIPH-financed projects have continued or resumed work. In the old city of Mosul, the rehabilitation of Tutunji House restarted after the rainy season. The University of Pennsylvania, in cooperation with the University of Mosul and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq, have been clearing this Ottoman-era building of rubble, storing reusable architectural elements, and stabilizing the structure for future restoration. And in Shewaki, Afghanistan, the conservation of a Buddhist-era stupa restarted after work was paused in March.

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About ALIPH

The International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH) is currently supporting nearly sixty projects in sixteen countries for a total amount of almost 20 million USD.

The Foundation provides concrete support for the protection and reconstruction of cultural heritage in conflict zones and post-conflict situations. It financially assists associations, foundations, academic, cultural and heritage institutions, and international organizations to preserve cultural heritage facing imminent conflict or to intervene for its rehabilitation. Its three areas of intervention security of heritage, and post-conflict actions to enable local populations to once again enjoy their cultural heritage.

ALIPH was founded in March 2017 in response to the massive destruction of exceptional, often ancient, cultural heritage in recent years. Operating under Swiss law, this Geneva-based foundation, also has the status of an international organization.

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