

Forum: Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3)

Issue: Addressing the role of War Monuments in promoting reconciliation and Cultural Sensitivity in post-conflict Societies

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Dear Delegates,

My name is Lefteris Tsampras, and I'm a student at Moraitis School. This year I'm really glad to be serving as Deputy President of the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (GA3) at Logos MUN.

Over the last few years I've taken part in quite a few conferences—DSAMUN, St. Catherine's MUN, San Francisco Harvard Model UN, Logos MUN, Platon MUN, and Leiden MUN. Each of them taught me something different. Some pushed me to speak up more, others helped me think on my feet in debate, and in every one I've met people and made friendships I really value. What started out as something that felt like a big challenge outside my comfort zone has turned into one of the best experiences of my school years.

GA3 has always been one of my favorite committees. The issues you'll be discussing this year aren't just about research, they also require you to bring in empathy, creativity, and an open mind. The study guide will give you a base to work from, but I'd really encourage you to go further and read around, question different perspectives, and represent your country with confidence.

Along with my co-chairs, I'll do my best to make sure you feel supported and that this conference is not only productive but enjoyable. If you need anything at all, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at tsampraslefteris@gmail.com.

I'm looking forward to meeting all of you and hearing the debates and ideas that will come out of GA3.

Best,
Lefteris Tsampras

Introduction

War monuments are physical objects or structures set up to honor people who took part in past wars. War monuments are usually established by local communities or people who were associated with those remembered, such as families of the fallen, war veterans, survivors, and communities with cultural or religious connections to the events.

In Athens, a memorial dedicated to the soldiers of the Greek War of Independence stands as a tall, carefully designed column. Drawing on classical Greek architecture, its shape evokes ideas of resilience, continuity, and a strong link to the country's ancient past. The vertical structure suggests both dignity and permanence, clearly representing national pride and the sacrifices made for independence.

Meanwhile, London's Cenotaph, which honors British troops lost in the First World War, adopts a very different approach. It's a plain, undecorated stone monument that emphasizes absence over heroism. Rather than glorifying conflict, it quietly acknowledges grief and collective mourning. These contrasting designs—the ornate Greek column and the understated British cenotaph—reveal how memorials can express vastly different cultural values: one focused on endurance and identity, the other on loss and remembrance.

The value and meaning of monuments is not fixed. Each monument can either bring national pride and collectiveness or be a reminder of pain, oppression and exclusion. Especially in societies that have experienced war and conflict war monuments can be interpreted in many ways due to cultural sensitivity. For example in post apartheid South Africa monuments such as the Rhodes Memorial who honor and celebrate apartheid leaders and colonialism, cause pain and oppression to black south Africans but others regard them as national heritage. This highlights that people's identities are strongly associated to public memory.

For that reason war monuments need to be handled with extreme care since they are part of reconciliation, especially in post conflict societies. They can deepen hate and division. On the other hand they can promote collectiveness. If handled with cultural sensitivity, war monuments can be a way to heal past trauma and finally bring reconciliation. That showcases that they are not just architectural choices. So we understand that leaders and communities must carefully decide whether to preserve existing monuments, dismantle them, or reinterpret them through plaques, educational programs, or new artistic interventions

In that way war monuments can act as historical touchstones for the younger generation to understand the sacrifices made by past generations.

Definition of Key Terms

War Monuments – A war memorial is “a large structure, usually made of stone, that is built in honour of those people who died in a war.”¹

Reconciliation – “An end to a disagreement or conflict with somebody and the start of a good relationship again.”²

Cultural Sensitivity – “The ability to recognize, understand, and react appropriately to beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors of persons who belong to a cultural or ethnic group.”³

Collective Memory – The shared frameworks that shape and filter individual or personal memories and how groups represent the past.⁴

Memorialisation – A memorial is “a statue, stone, etc. that is built in order to remind people of an important past event or of a famous person who has died.”⁵

Contextualisation – “The process of considering something in relation to the situation in which it happens or exists.”⁶

Footnotes

1. Cambridge English Dictionary, *definition of “war memorial.”*
2. Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, *definition of “reconciliation.”*
3. Oxford Reference, *definition of “cultural sensitivity.”*
4. Oxford Bibliographies, *entry on “collective memory.”*
5. Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, *definition of “memorial.”*
6. Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, *definition of “contextualization.”*

Timeline of Events

DATE	EVENT
15 April 1945	Shortly after the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, survivors and British soldiers collaborated to create one of the earliest memorials dedicated to Holocaust victims.

19 April 1948	The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Monument was unveiled, serving as a tribute to both Holocaust remembrance and Jewish resistance during the war.
9 November 1989	The fall of the Berlin Wall led to a wave of change across Eastern Europe, including the dismantling of many communist-era statues and memorials.
9 November 1993	During the Bosnian conflict, the destruction of the historic Stari Most Bridge in Mostar came to symbolize a devastating loss of cultural heritage.
9 March 2015	The Rhodes Must Fall movement began in South Africa, calling for the removal of monuments tied to colonialism and apartheid
25 May 2020	The killing of George Floyd sparked widespread Black Lives Matter protests. Across many countries, public monuments associated with racism and slavery became flashpoints for debate and removal.

Background Information

Monuments are not just history. They are statements. Built to show who matters and, just as clearly, who doesn't. That's why they are political, even if they look neutral on the surface. What one age celebrates, the next might question or even destroy.

Disputes appear because statues often tell only one side of the story. They can praise winners and ignore victims. Instead of healing, they can hurt. Europe shows both extremes: Holocaust memorials stand as sites of respect, but fascist statues remain in some places, still stirring anger. In Africa, after independence in the 1950s and 1960s, people demanded colonial symbols be removed, they felt like daily reminders of domination. The U.S. keeps clashing over Confederate statues. And across Asia, some monuments linked to imperial expansion are still hotly debated.

The effects are bigger than stone and bronze. Inclusive monuments can help people feel noticed. Exclusive ones leave whole groups silenced. In the end, monuments shape not only memory but also how reconciliation is imagined.

Case Studies

1) Berlin Holocaust Memorial (Germany)

In the centre of Berlin, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was inaugurated in 2005. It features over 2,700 concrete blocks of varying heights arranged in a grid across a sloping field. The design, stark and deliberately abstract, avoids any celebratory imagery. Instead, it invites quiet reflection and disorientation, encouraging visitors to engage emotionally with the memory of those who perished. Beneath the site, an information centre offers personal stories, historical records, and documentation, linking the physical space to broader education about the Holocaust.

Why it matters for reconciliation & cultural sensitivity:

Germany's approach with this memorial is notably introspective. Rather than focus on national victory or military strength, the monument confronts a painful chapter of its history with humility. By placing emphasis on the victims and their experiences, and pairing public space with education, it sets a model for memorials that acknowledge wrongdoing while fostering collective responsibility.

2) Stari Most Bridge, Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Built in the 16th century under Ottoman rule, the Stari Most bridge stood for centuries as a symbol of unity in the ethnically diverse city of Mostar. During the Bosnian War in 1993, it was deliberately destroyed, becoming an emblem of cultural loss and ethnic division. Between 2001 and 2004, the bridge was meticulously rebuilt using traditional materials and techniques, including stone from the original quarry. Its reopening was not just a physical reconstruction but a deeply symbolic act, reaffirming the city's shared heritage.

Why it matters for reconciliation & cultural sensitivity:

The restoration of Stari Most represents more than architectural recovery. It offered a neutral, shared space for communities divided by war and ethnic tension. By choosing to restore a common symbol rather than introduce a new, potentially partisan one, the project supported dialogue and coexistence—demonstrating how heritage can be a powerful tool for healing when handled inclusively.

3) "Rhodes Must Fall" Movement (South Africa)

In 2015, students at the University of Cape Town launched a protest campaign to remove a statue of Cecil Rhodes—a figure associated with colonial exploitation. They argued that his

continued presence on campus contradicted the values of a post-apartheid South Africa. The statue was removed in April that year, but the movement's impact extended far beyond. It sparked global conversations about colonial symbols, institutional racism, and the role of public monuments in shaping historical memory.

Why it matters for reconciliation & cultural sensitivity:

The Rhodes Must Fall campaign highlighted how statues can represent more than historical figures—they can act as daily reminders of systemic harm. The protests opened up broader questions about who is commemorated in public spaces and why. The movement underscored the need for more inclusive public memory and showed that addressing historical injustice often requires listening to the communities most affected.

4) Edward Colston Statue (Bristol, UK)

For over a century, a statue of Edward Colston—an 18th-century slave trader and local benefactor—stood in Bristol's city centre. While some viewed him as a philanthropist, others pointed to his direct involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. Long-standing calls for the statue's removal went unheeded until June 2020, when protesters pulled it down during a Black Lives Matter demonstration. It was later recovered and placed in a local museum, still bearing the marks of protest, alongside materials that contextualise the event and its historical significance.

Why it matters for reconciliation & cultural sensitivity:

The toppling of Colston's statue marked a turning point in public debate over monuments tied to historical injustice. Its relocation to a museum, rather than reinstatement or erasure, reframed it from a symbol of civic pride to an object of critical reflection. This case illustrates how unresolved historical narratives can surface in times of social unrest, and how public institutions can respond by rethinking how—and where—such legacies are presented.

Stakeholders

Post-conflict states (Bosnia & Herzegovina),

Governments in countries that have recently come out of war face a very delicate balance. They need to remember the past while also helping their people move forward. In Bosnia, for example, memorials to the Srebrenica genocide sit uneasily between communities still divided by ethnicity.

Rwanda

Rwanda has built genocide memorials not only as places of mourning but also as tools for national reconciliation. Cambodia, with its sites linked to the Khmer Rouge, faces similar challenges of commemoration and healing.

Germany

Germany is often mentioned as a country that directly confronted its past. Rather than removing reminders of the Nazi era, it created new ways of presenting them. The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, along with thousands of small brass plaques known as Stolpersteine placed outside victims' former homes, shows how Germany turned memory into public education and a commitment to "never again."

Authoritarian governments

(Russia)

By contrast, authoritarian states often use monuments to support their own political agenda. In Russia, statues of Soviet leaders are kept or even reintroduced as symbols of pride and strength.

(China)

In China, public memorials play a strategic role in shaping national identity and legitimizing state power. A central theme across many of these sites is the "Century of Humiliation"—a term that refers to the period between the First Opium War (1839) and the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, during which China experienced military defeats, foreign occupation, and internal turmoil. Monuments and museums that recall this era, such as the Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression in Beijing or the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing, are designed not only to commemorate past suffering but also to reinforce a unifying narrative of struggle and resurgence under Communist Party leadership.

These sites often emphasize victimhood and foreign aggression, while positioning the Party as the agent of national revival. Through carefully curated exhibits, ceremonial events, and educational programs, the state uses these memorials to instill patriotism, foster loyalty, and assert control over historical interpretation. As a result, public memory becomes less about open reflection or reconciliation, and more about reinforcing political cohesion and state authority.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO has long played a central role in protecting cultural heritage around the world, especially in areas affected by conflict or division. It is responsible for drafting and overseeing key international agreements, including the 1954 Hague Convention on protecting cultural property during armed conflict and the 1972 World Heritage Convention. These frameworks help set global standards for how sites of historical and cultural importance are treated.

Through its World Heritage List, UNESCO identifies locations of "outstanding universal value" and works to ensure their preservation—not just for the countries they're in, but for the benefit of all people. In places recovering from war or crisis, the organization has led rapid-response efforts. For instance, it coordinated the rebuilding of heritage sites in Mostar after the Bosnian War, and launched global initiatives to raise awareness and support following the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001.

International NGOs

(International Coalition of Sites of Conscience),

Non-governmental organizations bring in outside expertise and funding. The Sites of Conscience network, for example, helps turn former prisons or concentration camps into places for dialogue and education.

(World Monuments Fund)

The World Monuments Fund provides financial and technical support so that countries can preserve heritage sites that might otherwise be neglected or lost.

Local communities and survivors (Srebrenica Mothers).

At the centre of memorial debates in Bosnia are the Mothers of Srebrenica, a group of women who lost husbands, sons, and other relatives in the 1995 genocide. Their advocacy has been instrumental in keeping the memory of the victims alive and ensuring that public remembrance does not become detached from lived experience. For them, memorials are not abstract or symbolic—they are rooted in grief, justice, and the ongoing struggle to acknowledge the truth. Through court testimonies, public protests, and memorial ceremonies, these women have helped shape how the genocide is remembered both locally and internationally, reminding the world that remembrance must begin with those who carry the deepest scars.

Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties and Events

UNESCO Guidelines on Heritage in Post-Conflict Societies

UNESCO has developed a set of guidelines for the protection of cultural heritage in countries recovering from conflict, based on the idea that preserving monuments and historical sites can help prevent future violence. The logic is that shared heritage can offer a platform for dialogue and healing, while also reducing the risk of historical erasure or revisionism. These principles are grounded in conventions like the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1972 World Heritage Convention.

However, critics point out that these guidelines are not legally binding. They operate more as recommendations than enforceable rules, depending heavily on the willingness of national governments to implement them. In practice, this means that monuments tied to contested histories often remain vulnerable to neglect, politicisation, or even destruction. Without stronger enforcement mechanisms or international oversight, these frameworks may fall short in societies where state actors are themselves involved in shaping divisive or selective narratives.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (1998)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa is one of the most cited examples of post-conflict justice. It included memorialisation as a key part of its process, aiming to ensure that public remembrance contributed to national healing. Testimonies from victims of apartheid were recorded and made public, helping shape a memory culture rooted in lived experience. Monuments, museums, and public spaces were created or redesigned to reflect these voices, helping to challenge previously dominant narratives.

Yet the TRC has also faced criticism. Many argue that while symbolic acts of remembrance were prioritised, structural reforms—such as addressing economic inequality or racial injustice—were not fully pursued. This left some communities feeling that their trauma was acknowledged but not materially addressed. As a result, while the TRC succeeded in linking memory to reconciliation, its long-term impact on justice and equality remains contested.

International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is a global network of museums, historic sites, and memory initiatives that connect the preservation of memory with human rights advocacy. It encourages memorials to be more than static spaces—to serve instead as platforms for dialogue, activism, and civic engagement. Member sites around the world facilitate community programming, educational work, and public discussions that tie historical events to present-day struggles for justice.

While its approach is innovative, the Coalition faces limitations. It operates largely through local partnerships and civil society organisations, rather than through state institutions. This means that its impact can vary widely depending on political context, local resources, and government support. Without formal legal backing or alignment with national policies, its ability to influence broader reconciliation processes may remain limited in more repressive or divided settings.

UN Report on the Rule of Law and Transitional Justice (2004)

In 2004, the United Nations published a landmark report that expanded the definition of transitional justice to include cultural heritage. It argued that post-conflict recovery should not rely solely on legal trials or political reforms but also engage with memory, identity, and cultural continuity. By recognising heritage as a form of justice, the report placed memorialisation alongside truth-telling, reparations, and institutional reform as essential tools for rebuilding societies.

However, like many UN initiatives, the report was more aspirational than enforceable. Its implementation has been inconsistent, and much depends on whether national governments choose to prioritise cultural heritage in their justice agendas. In politically unstable or authoritarian contexts, these recommendations often remain on paper rather than translated into policy or practice. Nonetheless, the report was a significant step in integrating memory and cultural preservation into international understandings of justice.

Possible Solutions

Include different communities in deciding how monuments are treated:

War monuments are deeply tied to identity and memory, so deciding their future should never be left to officials alone. Survivors, veterans, descendants, minority groups, and local residents each carry different perspectives on what these monuments represent. By bringing people together in public consultations or town hall meetings, communities can reach decisions that feel fair and inclusive. UNESCO has supported such participatory processes in cultural heritage projects worldwide, while local cultural councils can provide the space for dialogue. This approach avoids one-sided outcomes and gives people a sense of shared ownership.

Keep statues but add explanations that place them in context:

Not every controversial statue has to be removed. In many cases, leaving it in place but adding explanations can be more powerful. Clear plaques, QR codes, or digital guides can give context

by showing both the achievements and the darker sides of a historical figure or event. This keeps history visible but forces us to confront it honestly. ICOMOS, which specialises in protecting cultural heritage, has long promoted contextualisation, and historians from local universities can provide the balanced research needed to make the explanations meaningful.

Create shared memorials that honour all victims:

Most monuments focus on one side of a conflict, leaving others invisible. Shared memorials can change that by honouring everyone affected such as civilians, soldiers from all sides, and marginalized groups whose suffering is often overlooked. These spaces, designed with input from communities, artists, and religious leaders, can help build empathy and recognition of universal loss. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience works around the world to create inclusive memorials, while interfaith councils can ensure the design reflects diverse voices and traditions.

Use monuments in schools as teaching resources:

Monuments should not stand silently in public squares; they can also teach. Schools can organize visits, classroom discussions, and creative projects to use these sites as living history lessons. By linking monuments to questions of ethics, memory, and reconciliation, young people can better understand the past and its relevance today. The UNESCO Associated Schools Network has already integrated cultural heritage into education, and teachers' associations can make sure resources and training reach classrooms effectively.

Further reading

UNESCO, *Cutting Edge: Overcoming Barriers to Peace Through Culture* —
<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cutting-edge-overcoming-barriers-peace-through-culture>
[UNESCO](#)

ICCROM, *PATH – Peacebuilding Assessment Tool for Heritage Recovery and Rehabilitation* —
https://www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/path_final_9.3.21.pdf
[ICCROM](#)

ICOMOS-Ename Charter for the Interpretation of Cultural Heritage Sites —
<https://www.georgewright.org/231enamecharter.pdf> [georgewright.org](https://www.georgewright.org)

Australia ICOMOS, *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance* (2013) — <https://australia.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Burra-Charter-2013-Adopted-31.10.2013.pdf>

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"Toppling of Edward Colston Statue." *M Shed Museum, Bristol City Council*. 2020.
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