THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA'S

# SunMUN IV

## Silent Casualties:
## Preserving Environment and Heritage amidst Conflict

### Director Naveen Siddiqui

# Contents

# Conference Policies

## Equity Statement

The SunMUN IV team is dedicated to creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive, and equitable environment for all delegates, staff members, and advisors. Through collaboration, open-mindedness, and diplomacy, the SunMUN IV Secretariat is committed to providing each and every participant with an equitable and positive experience.

For any questions, comments, or concerns regarding equity, please contact our Chief of Staff.

## General Conduct Policies

The SunMUN IV team is dedicated to enforcing proper conduct throughout the conference weekend. This includes but is not limited to:
- Abiding by ALL hotel policies, including maintaining proper volume levels, respecting non-SunMUN IV hotel guests, use of illegal substances, underage drinking, etc.
- Being present at ALL committee sessions. If a delegate must miss a committee session, they must contact their head delegate and their committee director *immediately*.
- Delegates are expected to maintain respectful and equitable conduct towards all committee attendees and staff.

## Pre-Writing Policy

The SunMUN IV team is dedicated to encouraging a committee environment that is equitable, fair, and honest. Pre-writing of any kind including editing resolution documents outside of committee, writing crisis notes and/or JPD's during timed crises or outside of committee, or completing any work submitted for scoring when not explicitly stated by staffers that delegates are allowed to do so. Any evidence that a delegate has completed submitted work outside of committee time will be taken very seriously by SunMUN IV staffers and may result in discussions with head delegates/advisors and delegates/delegations receiving disciplinary action.

## Sexual Misconduct Policy

The SunMUN IV team is dedicated to providing a safe environment for all delegates, staff members, and advisors free from discrimination on any grounds and from harassment during the conference including sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated. Sexual harassment can involve one or more incidents and actions constituting harassment may be physical, verbal and non-verbal.

SunMUN IV will enforce a zero tolerance policy for any form of sexual harassment, and will treat all incidents seriously and promptly investigate all allegations of sexual harassment. Any and all acts of sexual harassment will not be tolerated and may result in delegate excusal from the

conference, with no payment refund in addition to mandatory reporting of all occurrences. An anonymous sexual harassment reporting form will be provided at the conference.

## Technology Policy

SunMUN IV embraces the use of technology, however, we ask that you only use technology in committee if and when *explicitly granted permission* by your director and/or chair(s). Furthermore, the use of generative AI, including but not limited to Chat-GPT, Claude, Gemini, and Grok is expressly and explicitly forbidden in all committees. Directors reserve the right to utilize AI-detection technologies to uphold the integrity of SunMUN IV. Violators of this policy may be disqualified for a first offense.

## Photo Policy

SunMUN IV staffers will be present at committee rooms, socials, and other SunMUN IV events in order to take photos and videos of the conference weekend. These photos will be used in SunMUN IV's closing ceremony, SunMUN IV's social media, and possibly promotional material for SunMUN IV and future iterations. For those wishing to "opt-out" of the use of their photos in promotional material only, please contact your head delegate.

## Dress Code Policy

All delegates attending SunMUN IV are expected to attend committee sessions in Western Business Attire (WBA). WBA is required due to its role in creating a professional work environment conducive to debate and diplomacy. Examples of WBA are collared, button-down shirts, blouses, blazers, slacks or formal pants, pencil skirts, closed-toe professional shoes, and a tie or bowtie.

## For all other inquiries

Please reach out to the SunMUN IV Secretariat:

Kayla Bello, *Secretary-General*               bello.kayla@ufl.edu
Nico Mendez-Arango, *Director-General*        mendezar.nicolas@ufl.edu

# Letter from the Secretary General

**Dear Delegates, Faculty Advisors, and Friends,**

On behalf of our Secretariat, it is my absolute pleasure to invite you to the fourth iteration of the University of Florida's collegiate Model United Nations conference: SunMUN IV. We are thrilled to welcome you back to Orlando — where diplomacy, creativity, and connection come to life.

My name is Kayla Bello, and I am honored to serve as this year's Secretary-General. After welcoming you last year as the USG of General Assembly, I am beyond excited to lead this next chapter of SunMUN. The joy I've found traveling the country, building lifelong friendships, and pushing myself in every committee room is what brought me to this role. I've grown not just as a delegate, but as a teammate, a friend, and a person—and I hope this conference helps every delegate do the same. This year is about building on all we've done before, while laying the groundwork for what SunMUN can become in the years ahead.

SunMUN IV will feature eight creative and challenging committees designed to meet a wide range of interests and delegate styles. Our General Assembly will explore the global implications of conflict on culture and the environment. Our Specialized Body, the Global Parliament of Mayors, gives delegates the chance to imagine how local power can drive global change. Our Crisis offerings span from an alternative timeline of political reform, to a festival-era Woodstock simulation, to a Pokémon-themed simulation unlike any other. We're also featuring a committee on the rise of K-pop, a historical dive into an alternate Congress of Vienna, and a creative, high-pressure Ad Hoc for those ready to take on the unknown.

We are proud to return to a beautiful hotel venue just steps from Disney Springs, solidifying our place as one of the most exciting and welcoming conferences in the Southeast. Whether you spend your night exploring downtown Orlando, joining in on in-hotel festivities, or walking through Disney Springs™ with new friends, we promise something for everyone.

But SunMUN is more than a location or committee list—it's a chance to grow. As someone who's competed in General Assembly for years, I know the pressure that comes with giving your all in a committee room. But I also know the joys that come with it: the chance to surprise yourself, to grow in ways you didn't expect, and to connect with others who willingly spend their weekends debating fictional scenarios, rewriting history, and building a better world — one resolution at a time. Whether this is your first conference or your twentieth, we hope SunMUN reminds you why you fell in love with Model UN in the first place.

Warmly,

Kayla Bello
Secretary-General, SunMUN IV

# Letter from the Director

Dear delegates,

My name is Naveen Siddiqui, and I am so excited to be your UNESCO GA Chair for SunMUN IV. I am a senior triple majoring in Mathematics, Statistics, and Economics, with a minor in Mandarin Chinese at the University of Florida. This will be my fourth year as part of the UF Model United Nations team, and my first time chairing my very own committee. I previously served on SunMUN II and SunMUN III Secretariat and am currently serving as the Undersecretary of Advisor Relations for GatorMUN XXIII. I am a two-time awardee of the U.S. Department of State National Security Language Initiative for Youth scholarship in Mandarin (*Xi'an, China* and *New Taipei City, Taiwan*), as well as the U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship in Portuguese (*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*). I spent my sophomore academic year studying abroad at the University of Manchester in England and gained valuable global insight in economic frameworks and theory that inform how I perform as a delegate.
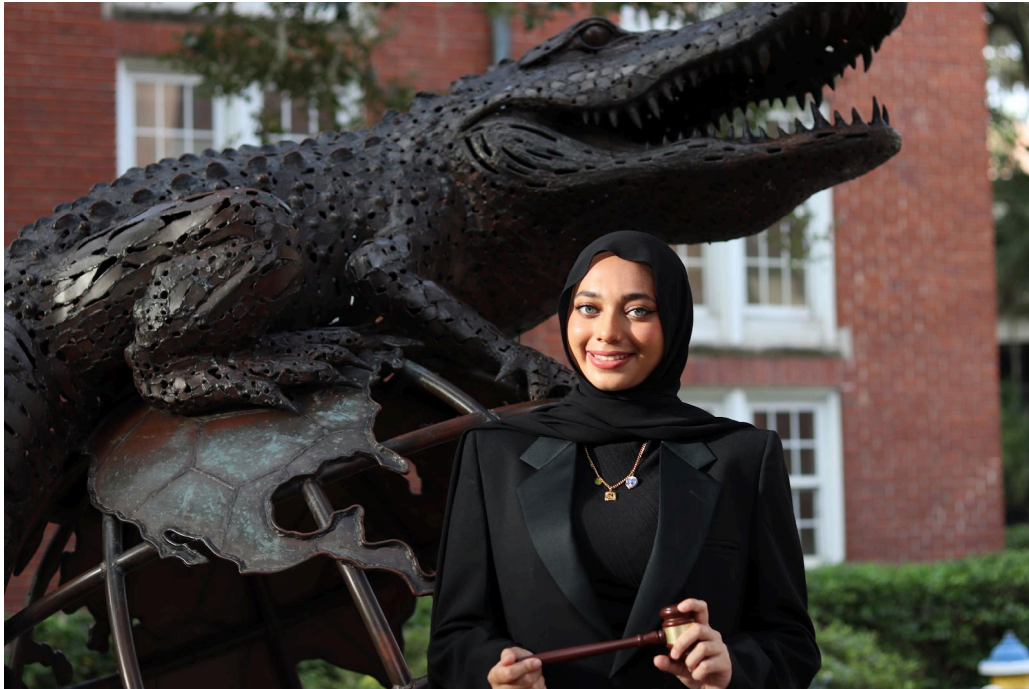


Sincerely,

NAVEEN SIDDIQUI
Director, Silent Casualties: Preserving Environment and Heritage amidst Conflict

# Committee Introduction

Welcome to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)! Today's committee looks to both the past and the future.

Topic 1 will discuss **Environmental Protection in Human-Borne Conflict Areas** and Topic 2 will discuss **Cultural Protection in Human-Borne Conflict Areas,** working on the legal frameworks established in the late 20th century and expanded by instruments such as Additional Protocol I and the **International Law Commission's Draft Principles (PERAC)**. Delegates will explore ways to strengthen post-conflict recovery mechanisms, broaden accountability for environmental and cultural damage, and develop practical frameworks that enable nations to rebuild ecosystems and protect cultural and natural heritage with hope for the future. Delegates will address environmental and cultural exploitation as a conflict-financing mechanism, while also considering how new technologies—such as satellite monitoring and environmental forensics—can guide accountability and remediation in conflict zones. Either through safeguarding vital ecosystems and cultural sites from the immediate effects of armed conflict or embracing innovative approaches to post-war remediation and international cooperation, delegates of UNESCO must chart a path that not only protects the environment in war but also promotes sustainable peace and cultural resilience.

# Committee Overview

UNESCO was established on November 16, 1945, to promote peace through education, science, culture, and the protection of both cultural and natural heritage. Its Constitution emphasizes that lasting peace depends on the intellectual, moral, and environmental solidarity of humanity.

UNESCO has led global efforts to safeguard heritage in all its forms. The 1972 World Heritage Convention protects sites of outstanding cultural and natural value, and the World Heritage Centre's Natural Heritage Strategy guides the conservation of ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural landscapes within these sites, promoting sustainable management and cooperation with global environmental frameworks. The 1970 Convention combats illicit trafficking of cultural objects, and the 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention preserves local knowledge and traditions. Together, these initiatives reflect UNESCO's commitment to ensuring that human progress respects and conserves both cultural achievements and natural environments.

In the 21st century, delegates must navigate the challenges of rapid development and environmental change, balancing education, scientific advancement, and the preservation of the world's irreplaceable cultural and natural sites

# World Heritage Sites

The most notable and well-known portion of the UNESCO mission is the World Heritage List, which currently inscribes 1248 properties under the UNESCO definition of a World Heritage Site, a property "part of the cultural and natural heritage which the World Heritage Committee considers as having outstanding universal value (OUV)." This includes both <u>cultural sites</u>, such as historic cities like Rome or monuments like Angkor Wat, and <u>natural sites</u>, such as the Galápagos Islands or the Serengeti National Park. Sites are nominated by member states and evaluated against criteria to ensure they meet the OUV standard, reflecting their significance to humanity.

Established under the 1972 World Heritage Convention, UNESCO coordinates the identification, conservation, and reporting of World Heritage Sites, guided by the Strategic Objectives of Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building, Communication, and Communities. Inscription on the World Heritage List can increase tourism and foreign investment, providing economic benefits while incentivizing preservation.

While World Heritage Sites are central to its mission, this committee addresses all areas of cultural and environmental importance to communities, including natural landscapes, local traditions, and living heritage, particularly in regions affected by conflict.

# Environmental Protection in Human-Borne Conflict Areas (Topic 1)

## Importance of Environmental Protection in Conflict

War is typically measured in human casualties, territorial loss, and economic destruction. Yet its environmental toll is just as consequential, though often less visible. Armed conflict frequently devastates the natural systems that underpin human survival—fresh water, arable land, breathable air, and biodiversity. When rivers are polluted with oil, farmland is scorched by incendiary devices, or forests are cleared for military operations, the effects linger long after a ceasefire. These environmental damages not only harm ecosystems but also undermine the very conditions needed for stability, reconstruction, and peace.

Environmental protection in conflict matters because ecological security is inseparable from human security. Studies by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reveal that over 40 percent of internal conflicts in the past sixty years have been linked to natural resources, whether through competition over land, minerals, or water (UNEP, 2009). Failure to safeguard ecosystems before, during, and after conflict risks creating a cycle where degraded environments fuel renewed instability. The environment should not be a silent victim of war, but rather an essential foundation for human life, health, and recovery.

## Historical Overview and the UNESCO Framework

The recognition that warfare has devastating environmental consequences is not new. During the Vietnam War, widespread use of herbicides such as Agent Orange destroyed forests and agricultural land, leaving both ecological and health legacies that endure decades later. These experiences prompted international negotiations leading to the **Environmental Modification (ENMOD) Convention of 1976**, which prohibits the use of environmental modification techniques as methods of warfare, such as triggering earthquakes, manipulating weather, or inducing floods. While ENMOD was pioneering, it addressed only the deliberate manipulation of nature as a weapon, not incidental environmental harm.

The **1977 Additional Protocol I** to the Geneva Conventions marked a significant step by explicitly recognizing environmental protection within humanitarian law. Article 55 called for safeguarding the natural environment against "widespread, long-term, and severe" damage, prohibiting attacks that would prejudice the health or survival of populations. However, its limitations quickly became apparent. The triple requirement of "widespread, long-term, and severe" set a high evidentiary threshold, making it

difficult to prosecute or prevent most environmental damages caused by conventional warfare.

The practical limitations are evident: when Iraq torched Kuwaiti oil wells in 1991, international lawyers debated whether the damage qualified as "widespread, long-term and severe." No prosecutions followed. Similarly, in 1999 NATO bombings of Serbian industrial facilities released thousands of tons of chemicals into the Danube but attempts to invoke the standard also failed. While the threshold is high and has rarely led to accountability, it underscores the recognition that nature itself is a civilian asset deserving protection.

## Current Gaps and Challenges: The Post-Conflict Environmental Recovery Dilemma

Post-conflict settings reveal a paradox: while environmental remediation is essential, it is consistently deprioritized over political and economic reconstruction. This neglect has profound consequences.



In **Lebanon (2006)**, Israeli airstrikes on fuel depots spilled 15,000 tons of oil into the Mediterranean, polluting 150 kilometers of coastline. UNEP's post-conflict assessment found that the environmental cleanup received minimal attention compared to rebuilding housing and transport. A decade later, residual contamination continued to affect marine life and coastal livelihoods (UNEP, 2009).

Similarly, in **Iraq**, the legacy of burning oil wells and drained marshes persisted long after the Gulf Wars. While billions of dollars were poured into political reconstruction and economic stabilization, relatively little was spent on decontaminating soils and restoring ecosystems. The environmental costs were externalized to local communities, many of whom faced long-term health problems and diminished agricultural productivity.

The **Balkans conflict of the 1990s** offers another example. Industrial bombings in Serbia released toxic chemicals into the Danube and other rivers. UNEP's post-war environmental assessment found that while reconstruction funds quickly addressed energy grids and housing, cleanup of toxic hotspots lagged behind. Today, contaminated

sites still pose risks to water and soil, illustrating the long half-life of wartime environmental damage when recovery is neglected.

The **Ukraine conflict** demonstrates these dilemmas in real time. The war has devastated agricultural land, industrial plants, and water systems. International donors have pledged billions for humanitarian and military assistance, yet funding for environmental remediation remains a fraction of what is needed. Landmines alone contaminate millions of hectares, preventing cultivation. Without dedicated recovery funds, these environmental scars will delay Ukraine's economic recovery and deepen health risks.

These cases highlight a central challenge: post-conflict environmental needs compete with immediate social and economic reconstruction priorities. Governments emerging from war typically face urgent pressures—restoring governance, rebuilding infrastructure, reviving economies, and addressing humanitarian crises. Against such pressing needs, environmental concerns are frequently sidelined, yet failure to address it can undermine the very goals of reconstruction.

## The Environmental Cost of Sustaining Militaries

Even outside active combat, militaries are among the largest institutional consumers of fossil fuels and resources. Research by Brown University's Costs of War project found that the United States Department of Defense alone emitted over 59 million metric tons of $CO_2$ equivalent in 2017, making it one of the world's single largest institutional emitters. Comparable data for other militaries are sparse, since military emissions are often exempt or under-reported in international climate frameworks. This lack of transparency leaves a major blind spot in global emissions accounting.

The environmental costs extend beyond emissions. Military bases occupy vast tracts of land, often transforming ecosystems through deforestation, water diversion, and soil compaction. Training exercises can scar landscapes, while storage depots and vehicle maintenance facilities often leach hazardous chemicals into soil and groundwater. For example, studies in the United States have identified widespread contamination of aquifers near military bases due to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), chemicals used in firefighting foam.

Weaponry also leaves a toxic legacy. Explosive remnants of war—landmines, cluster munitions, and unexploded ordnance—can leach heavy metals and explosives into soils.

Clearing these remnants is costly and slow, delaying the safe return of farmland and exposing civilians to injury or death. In Cambodia and Laos, unexploded ordnance from conflicts in the 1970s continues to limit agricultural expansion and impose health risks on rural communities.

The scale of these costs underscores the need to integrate environmental considerations into military planning and reporting. Without transparency and accountability, militaries will continue to represent a hidden but significant driver of global environmental degradation.

## Environmental Effects of Human-Borne Conflict

The environmental consequences of conflict manifest across multiple domains.

**Forests and Biodiversity**: Forests are often cleared for tactical purposes, including building roads, fortifications, or creating visibility lines. Biodiversity hotspots are often the first casualties when governance structures collapse.



**Water Resources**: Wars frequently contaminate water systems, either deliberately or incidentally. In Syria, artisanal oil refining during the conflict produced widespread spills that polluted rivers, while damage to water infrastructure left millions reliant on unsafe sources. Similarly, during the Gulf War, oil well fires and spills contaminated aquifers in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, affecting water security for years.

**Air Quality**: Conflict can severely degrade air quality. The Kuwaiti oil fires of 1991 burned for nearly a year, releasing an estimated 500 million barrels of oil and sending black plumes visible from space. Local populations experienced respiratory illnesses, while regional climate impacts were documented in altered weather patterns.

**Land and Agriculture**: Combat scars the land through trenches, craters, and the passage of heavy vehicles. Soils are compacted, reducing fertility, while explosive residues hinder safe cultivation. In Ukraine, the Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that millions of hectares of prime farmland have been rendered unusable by mines and unexploded ordnance. Without clearance, agricultural production—and thus food security—will remain severely constrained.

## Case Study: Colombia

In Colombia, decades of armed conflict involving the FARC insurgency and successor groups have caused severe environmental and cultural damage, particularly in the Amazon and other ecologically sensitive regions. Armed actors cleared forests for tactical purposes and illicit economic activities, including coca cultivation and illegal mining. Following the 2016 peace agreement, deforestation accelerated as armed groups and criminal organizations exploited governance vacuums, with annual forest loss rising to approximately 219,973 hectares in 2017—nearly double the pre-accord rate of 120,000 hectares. This destruction has threatened biodiversity hotspots, disrupted ecosystem services such as water regulation and soil fertility, and undermined the livelihoods and cultural practices of Indigenous and local communities closely tied to the land. Rivers have been contaminated, habitats fragmented, and agricultural lands degraded, highlighting the deep and multifaceted environmental consequences of conflict.
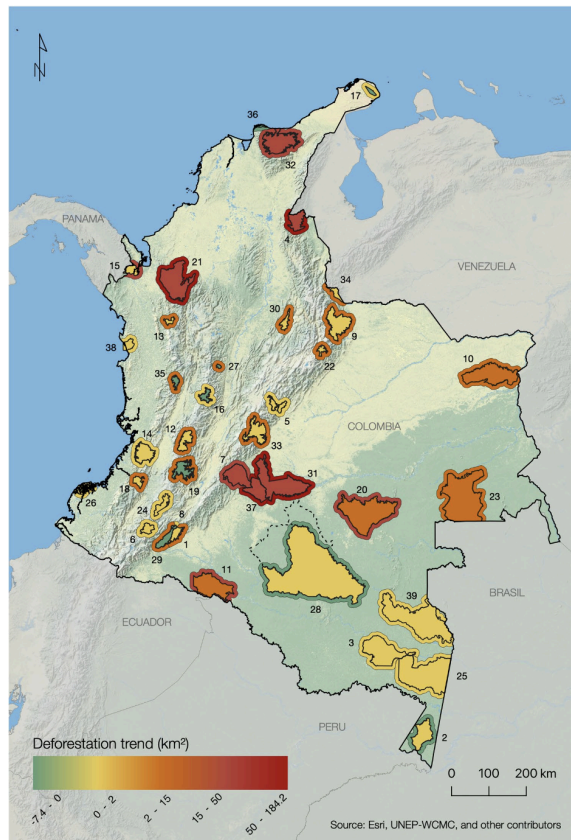
*Change in deforestation extent (km2) before and after the peace agreement with FARC (2013–2015 vs. 2016–2018) in continental Colombian National Natural Parks and National Natural Reserves and buffer areas (10 km).*

Multiple stakeholders are implicated in and affected by this crisis. Armed groups and illegal miners prioritize immediate economic gain, often at the expense of long-term environmental sustainability. Government authorities face challenges in enforcing land-use regulations and protecting Indigenous territories in remote regions, particularly where the post-conflict governance infrastructure is weak. Indigenous and local communities bear the direct brunt of environmental degradation, as the destruction of forests and waterways threatens both subsistence practices and cultural traditions that have been passed down for generations. Environmental NGOs and scientific organizations attempt to monitor biodiversity loss and advocate for conservation, but their efforts are limited by access constraints, security concerns, and insufficient coordination with national authorities.

Despite the scale of the crisis, UNESCO's contributions to Colombia's deforestation situation have been limited. While the organization has provided technical guidance and highlighted World Heritage Sites such as Los Katíos National Park, these efforts have not substantially slowed deforestation across the wider Amazon or addressed the systemic challenges faced by communities and ecosystems beyond formal heritage sites. This gap illustrates a broader challenge: protecting natural and cultural heritage in conflict-affected regions requires more than the designation of World Heritage Sites.

Within this committee, delegates are tasked with exploring innovative approaches to environmental and cultural protection under UNESCO's mandate, including strategies for post-conflict land management, community engagement in conservation, and mechanisms to monitor



| Armed Groups | Mines (# workers) |
| --- | --- |
| NDC-R | 38 (15,864) |
| Maï-Maï Yakutumba | 34 (8,337) |
| Maï-Maï FPP/AP | 30 (13,594) |
| Maï-Maï Ebuela Mutetezi | 24 (1,772) |
| Maï-Maï Juvénal | 14 (1,661) |
| Maï-Maï Apa Na Pale | 13 (2,421) |
| Raïa Mutomboki | 11 (856) |
| FABB | 10 (520) |
| Groupe d'autodéfense Zaïre | 10 (3,647) |
| Maï-Maï APCLS | 10 (803) |
| Maï-Maï Malaïka | 8 (1,840) |
| Ngomino | 6 (431) |
| Maï-Maï Lwesula | 5 (705) |
| CODECO | 4 (878) |
| Maï-Maï Bitonto | 4 (354) |
| Maï-Maï Simba | 4 (218) |
| Groupe autodéfense Kems | 3 (980) |
| Maï-Maï Luc | 3 (614) |
| FRPI | 2 (178) |
| Nyatura | 2 (60) |

and safeguard vulnerable ecosystems and traditional practices. By addressing these gaps and coordinating with multiple stakeholders—from local communities to governmental authorities—delegates can propose holistic solutions that extend UNESCO's scope beyond individual sites to the broader landscapes and populations affected by human-borne conflict, such as creating a war time specific protection that mirrors the 1954 Hague Convention for anti-environmental destruction policy.


## Human Health and Quality of Life

Environmental degradation in conflict zones rapidly translates into health crises worldwide. Outbreaks of waterborne diseases, such as cholera, often follow the collapse of sanitation and water infrastructure, with over 400,000 cases and nearly 5,000 deaths reported globally in recent years. Air pollution from conflict-related fires, explosions, and industrial destruction contributes to respiratory illnesses and premature deaths, which affect millions annually. Environmental contamination, including oil spills and toxic chemical releases, devastates fisheries, soil fertility, and local food security, while post-conflict cleanup operations, such as demining, continue to pose serious risks, causing hundreds of injuries and fatalities worldwide. These environmental health
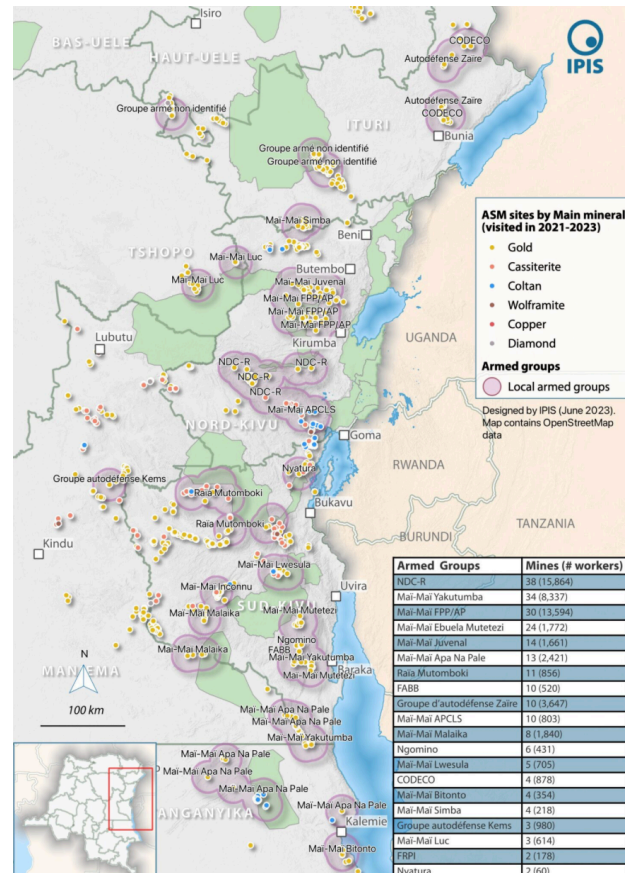
burdens have long-term, intergenerational consequences, embedding the legacy of conflict deeply into civilian life. These health burdens create intergenerational consequences, embedding war's legacy deep into civilian life.

## Eco-terrorism as a Political Tool

Eco-terrorism refers to deliberate attacks on environmental assets used as political instruments, blurring the line between ecological protection, resource warfare, and political violence. In conflict zones, armed groups may sabotage oil pipelines, electricity grids, or water systems both to harm adversaries and draw international attention. The consequences for local communities are severe: contamination of soils and waterways, destruction of fisheries and farmland, respiratory illnesses, skin disease, and economic displacement.



For example, in the Niger Delta, militant attacks on pipelines have spilled millions of barrels of oil since the 1970s, more than the Exxon Valdez disaster annually, devastating communities dependent on fishing and farming. Similarly, in Colombia, pipeline attacks by armed groups sought to weaken the state, but contamination inflicted long lasting harm on civilians.

Historically, eco-terrorism has taken multiple forms. Radical environmental groups in the 1980s and 1990s sabotaged logging equipment, pipelines, and energy infrastructure to prevent ecological destruction. While often attempting to minimize human harm, these actions were labeled terrorism due to economic disruption and political intimidation. Today, eco-terrorism also intersects with resource control. Groups may

weaponize natural resources such as timber, diamonds, wildlife, or oil for strategic and ideological purposes, as seen in Colombia, where attacks on pipelines reinforced both state weakness and illicit economic control.

Eco-terrorism poses unique challenges for the international community. Unlike incidental damage from warfare, it involves deliberate manipulation of environmental assets for political leverage. International counter terrorism law rarely addresses environmental sabotage explicitly, creating gaps in global governance. The environmental and human toll of eco-terrorism, ranging from ecological destruction to chronic health crises, underscores the need to integrate environmental protection into security frameworks and to consider both ecological and civilian impacts when crafting policy responses. Within UNESCO's mandate, this committee can explore approaches that safeguard cultural and natural heritage while addressing the environmental consequences of deliberate attacks in conflict affected regions.

## Conflict Economies and Environmental Exploitation

Beyond the immediate destruction of ecosystems and human livelihoods, environmental resources are often leveraged as tools to finance armed groups during conflict. Natural assets such as minerals, timber, wildlife, and charcoal can generate substantial revenue for militias and insurgent organizations, sustaining operations, prolonging violence, and undermining post conflict recovery. This section examines how environmental exploitation fuels conflict economies, the ecological and societal consequences of such practices, and examples of governance strategies that have successfully redirected resources toward peace and sustainability.



Armed groups frequently sustain themselves and prolong conflicts through the extraction and exploitation of natural resources, creating what are commonly referred to as conflict economies. Minerals, timber, wildlife, and other environmental assets become both a source of revenue and a means of strategic control. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, militias have long

controlled coltan, cobalt, and gold mines, minerals critical to global electronics and energy supply chains. Mining operations are often informal or illegal, producing severe environmental consequences such as mercury contamination of rivers, destruction of wetlands, and large-scale deforestation. These practices not only degrade ecosystems but also displace local communities, disrupt traditional livelihoods, and exacerbate social inequalities.

Wildlife trafficking is another dimension of environmental exploitation that finances armed violence. Across Central Africa, militias and groups like the Lord's Resistance Army have poached elephants and other species, selling ivory to fund operations. At peak levels, as many as 20,000 elephants were killed annually, driving some populations to the brink of collapse and undermining biodiversity. Similarly, in Somalia, Al-Shabaab generated as much as $384 million annually through charcoal exports, a trade that fueled both ecological degradation and armed conflict before UN sanctions intervened.

These cases illustrate how environmental assets can become instruments of war, entangling ecosystems, economies, and civilian populations in cycles of violence. Yet they also demonstrate the potential for governance and regulation to redirect environmental resources toward peacebuilding. Post-war reforms in Sierra Leone under the Kimberley Process significantly curtailed the role of conflict diamonds in financing violence, showing that transparency, international cooperation, and legal frameworks can transform environmental assets from conflict drivers into foundations for sustainable development.

Within UNESCO's mandate, this committee can examine how the exploitation of natural resources intersects with cultural and environmental heritage, exploring strategies to monitor and regulate resource use, empower local communities, and prevent the degradation of ecosystems that support both livelihoods and heritage sites. By addressing these linkages, delegates can propose comprehensive solutions that disrupt conflict economies while preserving the ecological and cultural foundations of affected regions.

# Questions to Consider

1. How can the international community ensure that environmental remediation is prioritized alongside economic reconstruction after wars?
2. What changes to international law could compel the better protection of the environment in armed conflict?
3. What funding mechanisms could guarantee resources for post-conflict cleanup and restoration?
4. How should eco-terrorism and environmental exploitation by armed groups be defined and addressed within international law?
5. In what ways might safeguarding ecosystems during war contribute to peacebuilding and long-term stability?
6. How can UNESCO partner with international legal entities to create protective frameworks against eco-terrorism?

# Cultural Protection in Human-Borne Conflict Area (Topic 2)

## Importance of Cultural Protection in Conflict

Cultural heritage encompasses the tangible and intangible elements that define a community's identity, history, and continuity. In conflict zones, the deliberate or collateral destruction of cultural sites, artifacts, and traditions can have profound and lasting effects on societies. Such losses extend beyond the physical realm, impacting social cohesion, collective memory, and the resilience of communities in post-conflict recovery.

## Historical Overview and the UNESCO Framework

The international community has recognized the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage during armed conflicts through various treaties and conventions. The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was the first international treaty dedicated exclusively to the protection of cultural property during armed conflict. It established guidelines for the safeguarding and respect of cultural heritage, including the use of distinctive emblems and the establishment of special protection for cultural property under threat.

Subsequent instruments have built upon this foundation. The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property aims to combat the illegal trafficking of cultural objects by encouraging states to adopt measures to prevent such activities. The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention complements this by providing a framework for the restitution of stolen or illegally exported cultural objects, emphasizing the importance of cooperation among states to address the illicit trade.

Recognizing that cultural heritage extends beyond physical objects, the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage focuses on preserving traditions, rituals, languages, and other non-material aspects of culture. These conventions collectively underscore the global commitment to protecting cultural heritage in times of peace and conflict.

## Current Gaps and Challenges: The Post-Conflict Cultural Recovery Dilemma

Despite the existence of international legal frameworks, significant challenges persist in the protection and recovery of cultural heritage in conflict-affected areas. One major issue is the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. While conventions like the 1954

Hague Convention set forth protective measures, their implementation often depends on the willingness and capacity of states to enforce them, leading to inconsistent application across different regions.

Additionally, the rapid pace of modern conflicts and the proliferation of non-state actors complicate the identification and protection of cultural sites. In many instances, cultural heritage is not prioritized during military operations, leading to inadvertent or deliberate damage. The absence of comprehensive inventories and the lack of coordination among international and local actors further hinder recovery efforts.

In **Sudan**, the prolonged civil war has devastated the National Museum in Khartoum, with thousands of artifacts looted or destroyed. Notably, the Buhen Temple, dating back to 1500 B.C., suffered extensive damage. Restoration efforts are hindered by limited resources, and approximately 4,000 antiquities remain unaccounted for across the country.



Similarly, in **Ukraine**, the ongoing conflict has led to the destruction of cultural sites. Human Rights Watch reported that explosive weapons have caused significant damage to museums, archives, and places of worship, particularly in urban centers. For instance, airstrikes have destroyed the ancient port of Anthedon Harbour, a site on UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites.



The Great Mosque of Aleppo in **Syria**, constructed between the 13th and 18th centuries, was severely damaged during the Syrian Civil War. The mosque's minaret, a significant architectural feature, was destroyed in 2013 amid the conflict.

These examples underscore the multifaceted impact of armed conflicts on cultural heritage,

highlighting the need for robust international frameworks and local initiatives to safeguard cultural assets during times of war. The illicit trade in cultural property remains a persistent problem. The 1970 UNESCO Convention and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention provide frameworks for combating this trade, yet enforcement remains a significant challenge. The global demand for cultural artifacts, combined with weak regulatory environments in certain regions, facilitates the illegal trafficking of cultural objects, depriving communities of their heritage and undermining the efforts to restore cultural identity.

## The Cultural Cost of Sustaining Conflict

The prolonged nature of many contemporary conflicts exacerbates the impact on cultural heritage. Extended periods of instability increase the vulnerability of cultural sites to looting, destruction, and neglect, and cultural heritage can become entangled in the conflict economy, with artifacts and sites exploited for financial gain. Beyond the tangible losses, the destruction of cultural heritage carries profound psychological and social consequences. Research indicates that the loss of landmarks, religious structures, and historical sites disrupts collective memory and identity, contributing to a sense of dislocation and grief within affected communities. Cultural heritage embodies shared values and social cohesion; when it is damaged or destroyed, community members can experience increased trauma, anxiety, and diminished well-being.

The psychological effects are compounded in post-conflict settings. Studies suggest that the erosion of cultural symbols can hinder reconciliation and trust-building processes, as communities struggle to reconnect with a shared sense of history and belonging. Loss of cultural landmarks may also amplify intergenerational trauma, as younger generations grow up without access to physical embodiments of their heritage, weakening social continuity and collective identity. In this sense, protecting cultural heritage is not only a matter of preserving history but also of sustaining the social and psychological foundations necessary for post-conflict recovery.

## Cultural Effects of Human-Borne Conflict

The disruption of cultural practices, displacement of communities, and suppression of languages and traditions contribute to the erosion of intangible cultural heritage, which is often inseparable from the identity, social cohesion, and psychological well-being of affected populations. Cultural heritage embodies collective memory, shared values, and social continuity; its destruction can lead to profound grief, trauma, and a weakened sense of identity within communities.

In regions where cultural heritage is closely tied to the land, the consequences of armed conflict are particularly acute. The displacement of communities frequently severs intergenerational transmission of knowledge and disrupts traditional practices. This not

only hinders the preservation of language, rituals, and ecological knowledge but also impedes reconciliation processes and the rebuilding of social trust in post-conflict societies.

A concrete example can be seen in the Nasa Indigenous community in Colombia. Decades of armed conflict involving both government forces and armed non-state actors forced the displacement of many Nasa families from their ancestral territories. This displacement disrupted traditional agricultural practices, spiritual rituals, and communal governance systems that were tied directly to their land. After reclaiming 350



hectares of territory, the Nasa implemented initiatives to revitalize both the environment and cultural practices, including programs that train younger generations to manage the land sustainably while preserving traditional knowledge. This illustrates how the destruction of physical and social spaces during conflict can erode cultural continuity, while also highlighting the potential for cultural and ecological restoration in post-conflict recovery.

By disrupting access to land, sacred sites, and community spaces, armed conflict undermines both tangible and intangible heritage. Protecting these cultural assets during conflict is essential not only for preserving history but also for sustaining

community identity, psychological resilience, and the social foundations necessary for post-conflict recovery.

## Cultural Terrorism and Looting as Political Tools

Armed conflicts have long been catalysts for the destruction and looting of cultural heritage, serving as tools of war and political strategy. While traditional forms of looting involve the physical removal of artifacts and destruction of sites, the digital era has introduced new avenues for such activities, complicating efforts to protect cultural heritage.

The increasing use of digital platforms and social media has created new challenges, introducing additional methods used by traffickers. These platforms facilitate the online sale and distribution of looted artifacts, making it more difficult to trace and recover stolen items. The anonymity provided by the internet allows traffickers to operate across borders with relative impunity, further complicating enforcement efforts.

In response to these challenges, international organizations and governments are exploring technological solutions to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural property online. Initiatives include developing digital tools to monitor and track the sale of looted artifacts, enhancing cooperation with technology companies to identify and remove illicit listings, and promoting awareness and education to empower communities to protect their cultural heritage in the digital realm.

However, the effectiveness of these measures is often limited by political considerations, lack of resources, and challenges in enforcement. The rapid pace of technological advancement outstrips the development of regulatory frameworks, leaving gaps that traffickers can exploit. Moreover, disparities in access to technology and digital literacy between regions further exacerbate the problem, highlighting the need for a coordinated global response to address the digital dimensions of cultural terrorism and looting.

## Conflict Economies and Cultural Exploitation

Cultural heritage is increasingly integrated into the conflict economy, serving as both a target and a resource for armed groups. Looting of archaeological sites, museums, and sacred spaces provides a direct source of revenue. Stolen artifacts are often sold on global black markets, online auctions, and through private collectors, fueling the operational capacity of militias and prolonging conflicts. Antiquities are trafficked internationally, generating millions of dollars annually that help sustain armed factions and criminal networks. The global demand for ancient objects, combined with weak regulatory oversight, incentivizes continued destruction of cultural property.

The commercialization of cultural heritage can also exacerbate this problem. In conflict-affected regions, armed groups sometimes allow limited tourism or controlled access to looted sites to generate revenue while maintaining leverage over local

populations. This commodification often leads to the degradation of sites, loss of context, and erosion of authenticity, undermining long-term cultural preservation. Indigenous and local communities, which depend on heritage for identity, spiritual practices, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, are disproportionately affected. For instance, the looting of Mariupol Museum during the Russian invasion of Ukraine not only removed physical artifacts but disrupted community access to shared history and collective memory, indirectly affecting social cohesion and resilience.

Addressing the integration of cultural heritage into the conflict economy requires coordinated legal, technological, and community-based solutions. International law, including the **1970 UNESCO Convention on Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property**, provides a framework to criminalize trafficking, enforce restitution, and enhance cooperation among nations. Digital tools, such as provenance databases, blockchain tracking, and AI-driven monitoring of online sales, can help identify and recover stolen artifacts. Supporting local stewardship, community-led monitoring programs, and post-conflict capacity building empowers affected populations to safeguard cultural heritage. Combined, these strategies aim to reduce the financial incentives for armed groups to exploit cultural property while preserving heritage for future generations.

# Questions to Consider

1. How can international legal frameworks be strengthened or adapted to more effectively protect cultural heritage from looting, destruction, and trafficking during armed conflict?
2. What strategies can the global community employ to disrupt the illicit trade in cultural property, ensure accountability for traffickers, and facilitate the restitution of stolen artifacts?
3. In what ways can the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, including traditions, languages, and Indigenous practices, be prioritized and integrated into post-conflict recovery programs?
4. How can emerging technologies such as satellite monitoring, AI-driven artifact tracking, and digital provenance tools be leveraged to prevent destruction and monitor cultural sites in real time?
5. What mechanisms can empower local and Indigenous communities to take an active role in preserving and protecting their cultural heritage amid conflict, displacement, or instability?
6. How can policymakers balance the economic opportunities derived from cultural heritage, including tourism or controlled access, with the long-term need for preservation and authenticity in conflict-affected regions?

# Works Cited

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment*. UNEP, 2009, https://www.unep.org/resources/report/conflict-peacebuilding-role-natural-resources-and-environment.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Lebanon: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment*. UNEP, 2007, https://www.unep.org/resources/report/lebanon-post-conflict-environmental-assessment-2007.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Balkans: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment*. UNEP, 1999, https://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/UNEP_Balkans.pdf.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). *Environmental Assessment of Kuwait: 1991 Oil Fires and Oil Spill*. UNEP, 1993, https://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/kuwait/kuwait_raq1.pdf.

Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques (ENMOD). United Nations, 1976, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVI-1&chapter=26.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 (Protocol I)*. 1977, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977.

Crawford, Neta C., and Catherine Lutz. *The U.S. Military Emits More CO2 than Many Countries*. Costs of War Project, Brown University, 2019, https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/papers/2019/USmilitaryemissions.

U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). *PFAS Chemicals: Status of DOD Actions to Address Contamination*. GAO, 2021, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-421.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). *Damage and Needs Assessment of Ukraine's Agriculture Sector*. FAO, 2023, https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc6667en.

Health Effects Institute (HEI). *State of Global Air 2020: A Special Report on Global Exposure to Air Pollution and Its Health Impacts*. HEI, 2020, https://www.stateofglobalair.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020-10/soga-2020-report-10-26_0.pdf.

Action on Armed Violence (AOAV). *Global Explosive Violence Report 2022*. AOAV, 2023, https://aoav.org.uk/2023/global-explosive-violence-monitor-2022/.

Armenteras, Dolors, et al. "Deforestation in Peace? Rapid Post-Conflict Deforestation in Colombia's Amazon." *Environmental Research Letters*, vol. 14, no. 5, 2019, pp. 1–11, https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/ab10e3.

Global Witness. *Hostile Takeover: The Militarisation and Criminalisation of Forest Governance in Colombia.* Global Witness, 2021, https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/forests/hostile-takeover/.

United Nations Security Council. *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2182 (2014).* United Nations, 2015, https://www.undocs.org/S/2015/801.

Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. The Hague, 14 May 1954. RefWorld, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unesco/1954/en/35015.

Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. UNESCO, 14 Nov. 1970, https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/convention-means-prohibiting-and-preventing-illicit-import-export-and-transfer-ownership-cultural.

UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995). UNIDROIT, 1995, https://www.unidroit.org/instruments/cultural-property/1995-convention/.

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. UNESCO, 17 Oct. 2003, https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention.

The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi. Case Information Sheet. International Criminal Court, 2016, https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/CaseInformationSheets/Al-MahdiEng.pdf.

Human Rights Watch. *Destroying Cultural Heritage: Explosive Weapons' Effects, Armed Conflict, and Cultural Sites.* Human Rights Watch, 18 Apr. 2024, https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/04/18/destroying-cultural-heritage/explosive-weapons-effects-armed-conflict-and.

Reuters. "Sudan Preservationists Struggle to Restore Country's Shattered Cultural Treasures." *Reuters*, 30 Sept. 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudan-preservationists-struggle-restore-countrys-shattered-cultural-treasures-2025-09-30/.

UNESCO. "Damaged Cultural Sites in Ukraine Verified by UNESCO." *UNESCO*, 22 Sept. 2025, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/damaged-cultural-sites-ukraine-verified-unesco.

UNESCO. "Syria: UNESCO Appeals to Stop Violence and to Protect the World Heritage City of Aleppo." *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, 24 Apr. 2013, https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1002.

The Antiquities Coalition. *IS and Cultural Genocide: Antiquities Trafficking in the Terrorist State* (report). Antiquities Coalition, Jan. 2017, https://theantiquitiescoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/IS-and-Cultural-Genocide-Antiquities-Trafficking-in-the-Terrorist-State.pdf.

Sargent, Michael, et al. *Tracking and Disrupting the Illicit Antiquities Trade with Data and Technology*. RAND Corporation, 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2706.html.

Brodie, Neil, Jenny Doole, and Peter Watson. *Stealing History: The Illicit Trade in Cultural Material*. McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2000.

Labadi, Sophia, and William Logan, editors. *Urban Heritage, Development and Sustainability: International Frameworks, National and Local Governance*. Routledge, 2015.

Meskell, Lynn. "Transacting UNESCO World Heritage: Gifts and Exchanges on a Global Stage." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 115, no. 1, Mar. 2013, pp. 95–108.

Antiquities Coalition. "Antiquities Coalition Enlists the Public to Help Ukraine Recover Missing Cultural Treasure." *Antiquities Coalition*, 5 Aug. 2025, theantiquitiescoalition.org/antiquities-coalition-enlists-the-public-to-help-ukraine-recover-missing-cultural-treasure/.

Clooney Foundation for Justice. "Conflict Antiquities: How Looted Artifacts Fund Conflict and Terrorism." *The Docket*, 8 June 2022, https://cfj.org/news/conflict-antiquities-how-looted-artifacts-fund-conflict-and-terrorism/.

Daily Sabah. "Great Mosque of Aleppo Bears the Marks of the Ongoing Destruction." *Daily Sabah*, 15 Dec. 2016, www.dailysabah.com/syrian-crisis/2016/12/16/great-mosque-of-aleppo-bears-the-marks-of-the-ongoing-destruction.

Geranpayeh, Sarvy. "'We Are Crying': Heritage Authorities Express Sorrow after Sudan National Museum Looted and Ransacked." *The Art Newspaper - International Art News and Events*, The Art Newspaper - International art news and events, 1 Apr. 2025, www.theartnewspaper.com/2025/04/01/heritage-authorities-express-sorrow-sudan-national-museum-looted-ransacked.

*World Heritage and Reconciliation*. Chapter in *50 Years World Heritage Convention: Shared Responsibility – Conflict & Reconciliation*, Springer, 2022, pp. 439–444, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05660-4_34.

Grattan, Steven. "After Taking Back Land in Colombia, Indigenous Prepare Their Youth to Safeguard It." *AP News*, AP News, 28 July 2025, apnews.com/article/colombia-indigenous-land-protection-cauca-farc-youth-f4de70775dfdd3986af377d297e26e7c.

Drozdzewski, Danielle, Emma Waterton, and Shanti Sumartojo. "Cultural Memory and Identity in the Context of War: Experiential, Place-Based and Political Concerns."

*International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 101, no. 910, Aug. 2019, pp. 273–94, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383119000110.

Jolaoso, Simi. "Nigeria Oil: Shell Ignored Warnings of Spill Clean-up 'Scam', Whistleblower Tells BBC." *BBC News*, BBC, 12 Feb. 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0rqe85q1jno.