

Protection of Cultural Heritage

Numerous events in recent years have brought home to us the fact that cultural property is increasingly under threat: Armed conflicts or terrorist attacks, for example, have left centuries-old monuments in Syria and Mali in ruins; floods and fires have destroyed buildings and valuable objects of art; documents and exhibits in archives, libraries and museums have been damaged by unfavourable climatic conditions. Challenges posed by key issues such as climate change, cybersecurity or digitalisation will continue to increase with regard to Protection of Cultural Property, too.

All too often, we only appreciate the value of such objects after they have been harmed or destroyed. To prevent such damage from occurring in the first place, global efforts are underway to protect cultural property by planning and undertaking preventive measures to preserve and maintain the most important assets. Protection of Cultural Property originated in the international law of armed conflict, was strongly influenced by the massive damage inflicted by the Second World War and is based on fundamental international principles that Switzerland, too, has ratified. As such, our country has pledged to respect the cultural property of other states and to prepare preventive protection measures for our own cultural heritage.

The main significance of cultural property is its ability to create a shared identity and cohesion within a community – for a village, a canton or for the country at large. I experienced this for myself after the landslide in Gondo-Zwischbergen in the year 2000. In addition to the enormous human suffering that it wrought, this landslide also destroyed cultural property. The partial reconstruction of the damaged Stockalper Tower has become a visible symbol for the rebuilding of this terribly afflicted community. Today, as before, the tower has once again

become the cultural and historic landmark of the village.

This is why it is so important to select important cultural goods for protection against the effects of armed conflicts, disasters or emergencies. And it is for this purpose that we have created the revised Protection of Cultural Property Inventory, which is recognized as an exemplar in other countries. It provides a reliable overview of the most significant monuments, archaeological sites and collections and holdings in our country. Let us take care to ensure that we can hand over the cultural-historic heritage of our country as intact as possible to future generations.

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