

**Concept Note: First Regional Conference on Cultural Property Protection**

**Background**

The international illicit trade in cultural property, specifically antiquities, is not only a major threat to the cultural heritage of the MENA region, but also a significant source of revenue for radical organizations operating in the region.  While bilateral cultural property protection agreements are an important step to counter this trade, stronger collaboration among the countries of the region is needed to better partner on this issue.

In response to this, the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) in partnership with the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) and the US Department of State has initiated a series of regional workshops. This initiative will bring together Ministry representatives and other officials from the region to discuss case studies, best practices, and expand their professional networks in the area of cultural property protection.

**The** **First Regional Conference on Cultural Property Protection**

The conference will consist of three-parts that will take place between August 2021-December 2022. The first part of the conference will be a virtual series from August 10-12, 2021. It will then be followed by two in person workshops – the first of which will take place in Cairo, Egypt in early 2022, followed by a final conference in late 2022 that will take place in Petra, Jordan.

**Participants**

The First Regional Conference on Cultural Property Protection will bring together government officials, experts, and organizations from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco that are involved in cultural heritage and property preservation.

**Organization and Panels of the Virtual Conference**

The virtual component of the conference will take place over three days consisting of three parts and seven sessions focusing on the following topics:

**Part I: Digitization, Management, and Sustainability of Heritage Collections**

* ***Session 1: Sustainable Collection Management Strategies.***

Presentation of case studies which aim to establish widespread adoption of common documentation methods, terminology, procedures, and platforms (open-source); also focus on issues of open access and data control.

* ***Session 2: Building, Managing, and Sustaining Documentary Digitization Efforts***.

Case studies and panel discussion of successful efforts to digitize and make accessible threatened manuscript, documentary, and photo collections- both public and private.



**Part II: Site Management and Security**

* ***Session 3: Innovative Approaches to Site Management and Administration.***

Case study presentations and discussion related to alternative site management approaches, including public-private partnerships, semi-autonomous authorities, and royal trusts/commissions.

* ***Session 4: Enhancing Site Security through Local Collaboration.***

Presentation of case study efforts to engage different local stakeholders in preventing site destruction and looting.

* ***Session 5: Protecting Heritage Architecture and Traditions.***

Case studies and panel discussion of specific challenges facing preservation of traditional architecture/buildings not covered by most antiquities’ laws; including key threats (development, climate change) and opportunities/challenges posed by adaptive reuse.

**Part III: Public Engagement and Outreach**

* ***Session 6: Enhancing Heritage Protection through Public Awareness and Outreach.***

Case study presentations of successful outreach/awareness efforts.

* ***Session 7: Understanding Public Perceptions (and Values) of Heritage***.

Case studies and panel discussion of diverse ways in which publics and communities use, perceive, and value heritage, often in contrast or contradiction to values/practices of heritage professionals.

**Expected Outcomes**

The virtual conference will contribute producing a formal “white paper” document that will be further discussed at the in-person conferences. It will provide common and shared principles for successful strategies and practices (via case studies) to meet the needs and challenges in the areas of digital documentation and site management across the region. It will also identify needs and challenges that are more country and/or situation specific, and therefore might require different or customized approaches. It will also provide recommendations for furthering/sustaining successful strategies, both regionally and within specific contexts. Lastly, we expect this conference to produce a concept note for a long-term training program in one or both of the subject areas to aid in both regional collaboration and produce sustaining results.

The “white paper” document will be used in guiding the two follow on in person conferences that will take place in 2022. The first conference will take place in Cairo, Egypt early 2022 and will focus on Documentation and Digital Inventories. The final conference will take place in Petra, Jordan in late 2022 and will focus on Site Management.