The World Archaeological Congress

January 13, 2020

WAC statement on US President Mr. Donald Trump’s twitter statement on threatening to attack Iran’s cultural sites

The World Archaeological Congress expresses grave concern over a statement issued by President Donald Trump of the United States of America threatening to attack ‘Iranian sites’ that are ‘high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture’ (quoted from his own tweet of 7:52 on 5 January 2020). We act in solidarity with those archaeological, anthropological and heritage communities in the United States and many other nations that have expressed concern and objection to any such action. Many point out that such an act would breach the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (The Hague 1954) and its 1999 Protocol, as well as the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (Paris 1970) which obliges states at war to protect cultural heritage and prohibits them from deliberately targeting cultural heritage sites. Cultural property protection is also an integral part of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions (arts 53 and 85(4)(d)); the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (arts 8(2)(b)(ix) and 8(2)(e)(iv)); and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347. A breach of these conventions would constitute a war crime.

In 2014 the World Archaeological Congress adopted the ‘Accord on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (‘The Dead Sea Accord’) * that urged all states to comply with international laws and principles in the event of armed conflict. This Accord specifically emphasizes that the protection of cultural heritage is a human
right. We contend that when cultural heritage is declared a target of military attack in
the flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, basic human rights themselves
are also under attack.

We are relieved that President Trump retracted his twitter statement. We sincerely hope
that the current tension between Iran and the US will not lead to an armed conflict or to
violence and destruction of human lives and cultural heritage. We urge President Trump
and others who are involved in these decisions to be respectful of international
humanitarian laws, culture, cultural property, and above all, human lives.


Koji Mizoguchi

President of the World Archaeological Congress,
on behalf of the WAC Council representing the membership

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Background information
The World Archaeological Congress, with members in more than 90 countries, is the only
fully international and representative organisation of practicing archaeologists. WAC’s
mission is to (1) promote professional training for disadvantaged nations and
communities; (2) broaden public education, involving national and international
communities in archaeological research; (3) develop archaeological practice so that it
empowers Indigenous and minority groups; (4) contribute to the conservation of
archaeological sites threatened by looting, urban growth, tourism, development or war;
and (5) re-dress global inequities amongst archaeologists.