

MEDIA RELEASE

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CULTURAL HERITAGE IN IRAN UNDER THREAT

The World Archaeological Congress expresses its strong opposition to aggressive military action (including air strikes) against Iran by the US government, or by any other government.

“Such action could have catastrophic consequences for millions of people and will seriously endanger the cultural heritage of Iran and of the Middle East in general,” said Professor Claire Smith, President of the World Archaeological Congress.

“The Iraq war was a disaster for cultural heritage in this region. The world can not afford to replicate mistakes such as this.”

“The World Archaeological Congress strongly opposed the war in Iraq, and we strongly oppose any war in Iran,” said Professor Smith.

“War destroys both lives and cultural heritage. Any differences with Iran (as with any other country) should be resolved through peaceful and diplomatic means.”

“There was a lot of debate around the issue of whether archaeologists should provide advise and expertise to the military on archaeological and cultural heritage matters,” said Professor Smith.

“There is a strong view by some members that a refusal by archaeologists and others to work with the military would send a message that war with Iran is hugely unpopular amongst cultural heritage professionals,” said Professor Smith. “The view here is that providing advise and expertise to the military during the war planning against Iran would offer cultural credibility and respectability to the military action.”

“Other members take the opposite stance, that it is their responsibility as cultural heritage specialists to attempt to mitigate the damage done to cultural heritage wherever there is conflict as this cultural heritage could be an essential building block in the peace process,” said Professor Smith.

A resolution suggesting that no archaeologists or cultural heritage specialists assist the military in planning to protect the cultural heritage was passed by the Plenary session of the WAC-6 Congress for consideration by the World Archaeological Congress Assembly, Council and Executive but was not approved as a formal statement of the position of the organisation as a whole.

“This debate highlights how strongly people feel about any impeding military engagement with Iran,” said Professor Smith.

Since 2003 the World Archaeological Congress has had a Task Force on Archaeologists and War with an explicit remit to investigate the ethics implications of working with the military.

In order to address these issues from a global perspective the World Archaeological Congress will be holding an Inter-Congress with the theme “Archaeologists, Ethics and Armed Conflict.” This is likely to be held in the Hague in 2010.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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BACKGROUND:

The World Archaeological Congress (WAC) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization and is the only elected international body of practising archaeologists. WAC holds an international congress every four years to promote the exchange of the results of archaeological research; professional training and public education for disadvantaged nations, groups and communities; the empowerment and betterment of Indigenous groups and First Nations peoples; and the conservation of archaeological sites.

The Sixth World Archaeological Congress (WAC-6) was held from 29th June—4th July at the University College Dublin. This was the first World Archaeological Congress to be held in Ireland. It was attended by over 1,800 archaeologists, native peoples and international scholars from 74 nations. Motions from the Plenary session of the Congress were considered by subsequent meetings of the World Archaeological Congress Council and Executive.

The Congress Patron for WAC-6 was President Mary McAleese. Previous Congress Patrons include Harriet Mayor Fulbright, Prince Charles and Nelson Mandela.