



Blue Shield actions for safeguarding heritage in Haiti

The Blue Shield reasserts its solidarity with the Haitian authorities and population as well as all National and International Organisations working to help the injured and homeless and rebuild sustainable infrastructures vital for the Haitian people's survival.

Culture being a core component of Haiti's social fabric, protecting and rescuing the country's heritage is essential for its recovery. In this perspective, the Blue Shield, through its constituent organisations and its National Committees around the world, has been taking unprecedented action since 12 January 2010 in order to assist the Haitian authorities, cultural associations and stakeholders as well as the Haitian population in their effort to defend and restore Haitian heritage. Haiti can count on the BlueShield member organisation's expertise and support with regard to archives, audiovisual documents, libraries, monuments and museums.

Actions taken by the Blue Shield since 12 January

The various member organisations of the Blue Shield have swiftly reacted to the Haitian disaster and have made every effort to prepare the current action phase, by taking the following preparatory steps:

Damage and needs assessment

Through the member organisation's local networks, personal contacts and field missions, the Blue Shield followed the lead of the Haitian authorities by conducting thorough evaluations of the damage suffered by Haitian cultural heritage and the best ways to assist the Haitian authorities, institutions and associations in their efforts to rescue Haitian heritage. This effort together with the expertise of the Blue Shield's constituent bodies has made the organisation a favoured source of information on Haitian cultural heritage issues for NGOs, governments and International organisations.

Circulation of information

The Blue Shield has made all information gathered available to the international communities willing to help the Haitians in their efforts to rescue their heritage. In addition to traditional means of communication, the Blue Shield has set up a dedicated website, as well as a Facebook page and a Twitter thread.

Coordination with Haitian and international communities

The Blue Shield met the Haitian Minister of Culture, Mrs Marie Laurence Jocelyn Lassegue and her team on 16 February and assured her of its full support and determination to collaborate with the Haitian authorities. Moreover, the Blue Shield is coordinating its actions with its members' National Committees, ISPAN (Haiti's Institute for the Protection of the National Heritage) and the Haitian Crisis Unit "Patrimoine en Danger", set up following the earthquake by heritage and cultural association members to coordinate heritage safeguarding actions.

The Blue Shield and all its member organisations have actively taken part in the creation of the UNESCO International Coordination Committee (ICC) for Haitian culture and have given full support to the steps UNESCO has taken to ensure that culture and heritage issues will be taken into account fully in the United Nations' efforts to reconstruct Haiti, in particular during the forthcoming 31 March meeting in New York City.

The Blue Shield is also in contact with OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) and other relevant organisations to prepare its actions in Haiti.

Preparing action plans

Through its website, the Blue Shield has so far collected more than 700 application files from volunteers all around the world covering all heritage fields. Each constituent organisation also directly appealed to its members to volunteer their expertise.

Blue Shield actions in progress

The Blue Shield is coordinating the actions of its members where possible in order to strengthen their impact. As the recovery efforts vary for each type of heritage item, each member organisation is also taking additional steps. The following joint actions were resolved:

Marking cultural sites with the Blue Shield emblem

As a response to the urgent problem of demolition and bulldozing of buildings of cultural value and/or content, the Blue Shield produced 250 weather-resistant signs (30x50cm) with the following inscription in English, French and Haitian Creole:

*Cultural Property
Protected by the Convention of The Hague, dated 14 May 1954
www.blueshield-international.org*

These signs are currently being distributed to the Blue Shield's local partners, ISPAN and the Crisis Unit "Patrimoine en Danger" to mark relevant buildings and sites.

Offering the international community a Damage assessment and project follow-up tool

The Blue Shield has enriched its dedicated website with pages devoted to each identified cultural site. They can be used by the Haitian and international authorities and NGOs to track projects and avoid overlap. Fifty pages are already published, based on data collected and status reports from the Blue Shield member organisations. They can be accessed under:

<http://haiti2010.blueshield-international.org/directory>

Sending of building engineers

Architects and building engineers will be sent for the emergency evaluation and reinforcement of damaged buildings. This will make the evacuation of items in museums, libraries and other heritage buildings possible.

Creation of a Cultural Recovery Centre for the treatment of cultural items

The Centre will include facilities for urgent repairs and restoration of archives, books or museum objects that might be rescued from the rubble and damaged buildings. It will be used for hosting international volunteers and other NGOs willing to participate in Blue Shield-related actions, and provide working and training facilities for Haitian volunteers.



*Front gate to the joint Cultural Recovery Centre near Port-au-Prince Airport (left). Dr. Richard Kurin, Smithsonian Institution and Corine Wegener, U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield, at the proposed Cultural recovery Centre site with containers purchased by FOKAL in the background
Photos by Corine Wegener and Diana NDiaye, 7 March, 2010*

The Blue Shield has had the opportunity to cooperate with the Haitian organisation FOKAL (Fondation Connaissance et Liberté or Open Society Institute) to establish this Centre on a 3,000m² field near the airport, thanks to "Haiti Habitat" and in close cooperation with Bibliothèques Sans Frontières. Blue Shield member organisations are planning how the site will be organized with tents, electricity and secure storage, in coordination with Bibliothèques Sans Frontières and FOKAL, who have already purchased and placed nine 40 ft. containers on site. MINUSTAH should provide security for the site and UNESCO is interested in funding the fencing of the premises.

The Cultural Recovery Centre will be equipped with more containers for temporary storage of rescued cultural goods and relevant equipment to treat cultural property.

The Blue Shield

The Blue Shield is the protective emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention, which is the basic international treaty that formulates rules to protect cultural heritage during armed conflicts. The Blue Shield network consists of organisations that deal with museums, archives, audiovisual supports, libraries, as well as monuments and sites.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), founded in 1996, comprises representatives of the five Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in this field:

- The International Council on Archives (www.ica.org),
- The International Council of Museums (www.icom.museum),
- The International Council on Monuments and Sites (www.icomos.org), and
- The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (www.ifla.org)
- The Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (www.ccaaa.org)

National Blue Shield Committees have been founded in a number of countries (18 established and 18 under construction). The Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS), founded in December 2008, coordinates and strengthens international efforts to protect cultural property at risk of destruction in armed conflicts or natural disasters. The ANCBS headquarters are in The Hague.

Contact Information:

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The actions of the Blue Shield can also be followed on

- Our website: <http://www.blueshield-international.org>
- Our Facebook page: [Haiti 2010 Blue Shield Solidarity](#)
- Our Twitter thread: blueshieldcoop