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TWENTY YEARS BLUE SHIELD (1996-2016)⁶

The International Committee of the Blue Shield was established in Paris in 1996. It was established by ICOM, ICOMOS, ICA and IFLA. The rationale for founding of the Blue Shield was increased frequency of destruction of cultural assets in many countries in the world struck by wars or natural disasters. The aim of the organization was to promote the protection of cultural assets according to the definition of the 1954 The Hague Convention against all types of treats and strategic intervention with the decision makers and international organizations to prevention and response to disasters caused by the nature or by humans.

According to the Second Protocol of the Hague Convention, the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) had a representative and consultative role towards UNESCO and its committees. The organization was strengthened in the period after the establishment. National Committees of the Blue Shield should have been established in order to organize the activity in their respective countries. In order to be recognized, the national committees have to accept the entire Charter enacted by ICBS in Strasbourg in 2000 and the following principles enacted in 2001:

- joint actions
- independence
- neutrality
- professionalism
- respect of cultural identity
- work on a not-for-profit basis.

The first national committees were established immediately after that. They were established in Belgium, The Netherlands, Great Britain, France followed by: Poland, The Czech Republic, Italy, and Switzerland. Now, there are

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more than 20 recognized National Committees of the Blue Shield and another 20 which are in a process of recognition, certainly if they meet the prescribed principles.

In the following period, efforts were made to identify the forms of activities, thus the actions were through statements, specific activities, seminars, and workshops. There was a great flood in the Czech Republic in 2002 which affected several museums and other cultural institutions, ICBS reacted and the Dutch National Committee of the Blue Shield provided assistance.

Efforts were made to strengthen the organization of the Blue Shield. The first ICBS Conference was organized in Torino in 2004 which covered the following issues:

- The situation of cultural assets in Iraq, Afghanistan and other locations in the world;
- Initiative for establishment of an Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield which was realized in The Hague in 2008.

The Second ICBS Conference was held in The Hague in 2006 under the following topic: *Towards Solid Organization: Infrastructure and Awareness*. The following topics were discussed:

- The model of the work structure of ICBS; and
- Preparation for establishment of the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield.

The Founding Conference of the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS) was held in The Hague in December 2008. (The Macedonian National Committee of the Blue Shield (MNCBS), established in 2002 was invited to be one of the six founders of the Association: USA, France, Belgium, Macedonia, The Netherlands and Norway). The following decisions were adopted on the founding conference:

- The Association's Statute was adopted;
- The Operational Program and Financial Program were adopted;
- The Association's board with ten members was appointed, including the Macedonian representative;
- Karl Von Habsburg from Austria was appointed president;
- Association's headquarters in The Hague.

Theoretical and practical aspects of the Blue Shield activities were presented at the Conference. In the following period, certain activities for organization of ANCBS, such as:

- Cologne, Germany, demolished Archive, 2009. First ANCBS mission which included volunteers;

- Abruzzo, Italy, 2009, earthquake;
- Gaza, Palestine, 2009, war conflict;
- Port-au-Prince, Haiti, earthquake, 2010, a large ANCBS missions with volunteers;
- Chile, 2010, Earthquake.

A ANCBS Conference was organized in Vienna in 2010, together with the World Archeological Congress, under the topic: *Archeology in Conflict*. Meanwhile a rivalry between the ICBS and ANCBS occurred about the activities in Haiti and who should lead the action.

After the internal war conflict, a monitoring was realized in Libya and Egypt in 2011.



Mission of the ANCBS President Karl Von Habsburg and associates in Libya.

A joint meeting of ICBS and ANCBS was held in Paris in 2013 with a hope to overcome the conflict and rivalry.



Attendants at the Paris meeting in 2013.

A General Conference of ANCBS was organized in Vienna in 2012 with the following agenda:

- Appointment of a new Board;
- Reports of the National Committees of the Blue Shield;
- Theoretical and practical aspects of functioning.

In 2013, the President of ANCBS realized a mission with his associates in Timbuktu, Mali, following the internal war conflict.

An extraordinary General Conference of ANCBS was held in Rome in 2014. At the Conference, ICBS and ANCBS agreed to join in a single organization which will be called BLUE SHIELD.



Some of the attendants at the Conference

Several decisions were adopted at the Rome Conference such as:

- The Statute of the organization was adopted;
- A Board with ten members was appointed and Karl Von Habsburg was appointed President;
- The organization's headquarters will be in The Hague;
- The registration should be according to the Dutch legislation.

The present activities are mainly directed towards protection of cultural assets in countries struck by war conflicts, especially:

- The issue of protection of cultural assets in Syria;
- Mapping of archeological sites in order to prevent bombing;
- Activities in Mali;
- In Pakistan;
- In Afghanistan and other sites in the world.

At the end we can conclude that:
The period is too short to see all the options, by the Blue Shield has significant activities in the endangered cultural assets protection; the Blue Shield in a young organization with underdeveloped infrastructure which makes the activities more difficult; There is need for greater dedication of the national committees in order to achieve better results.