

OPENING STATEMENT

**H.E. Mr. Abdul-Karim Hashim Mostafa, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,
Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations office in Geneva**

ON BEHALF OF THE CORE GROUP OF RESOLUTION A/HRC/RES/37/17 // A/HRC/DEC/45/113

Geneva, 14 June 2021

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to deliver this statement on behalf of the “Cultural rights and the protection of cultural heritage” resolution core group (A/HRC/RES/37/17), comprising of eleven countries, from across the world, including Argentina, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Mali, Poland, Serbia, Switzerland, and my own country Iraq.

Excellencies,
Distinguished panellists,
Dear participants,

Allow me to express the core group’s sincere appreciation to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for its invaluable efforts in organising this intersessional workshop, as mandated by resolution A/HRC/RES/37/17 and subsequently amended by decision A/HRC/DEC/45/113, given the one-year postponement “owing to the [...] liquidity crisis affecting the United Nations Secretariat and the restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic”.

Furthermore, the core group wishes to thank the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Professor Karima Bennouna. The role of the Special Rapporteur is integral in keeping the issue of cultural rights and cultural heritage on the agenda of the Human Rights Council. As the six-year tenure of Professor Bennouna draws to a close, we wish to thank her for her sincere commitment and work done throughout these years including for her contribution to this workshop. We hope your successor will build on your very rich legacy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The purpose of this two-day workshop is to “develop appropriate tools for the dissemination of an approach to the protection, restoration and preservation of cultural heritage that promotes universal respect for cultural rights by all.” The expert panellists, representing all regions of the world, will present ideas, approaches, and questions focusing on the following:

1. mainstreaming a human rights-based approach to cultural heritage, including tools,
2. cultural heritage in crisis, and

3. supporting the work of cultural rights defenders working on cultural heritage protection.

We look forward to the report before the forty-ninth session of the Human Rights Council, which will encapsulate the key issues the experts will present today and tomorrow, and their suggested “tools” with the aim to disseminate an approach to the protection, restoration and preservation of cultural heritage.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cultural rights are core to the human experience. During the challenging circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic we realised how much culture is of innate interest. It highlights the imperative to protect cultural rights, including cultural heritage, and not allow the pandemic as well as other crises (including armed conflicts and terrorist acts), to be used as a justification to incur on the right to partake in cultural rights, including in the enjoyment of cultural heritage, both tangible or intangible.

As the core group, we are confident that the intersessional workshop will contribute further to the mainstreaming of cultural rights and the protection of cultural heritage within the human rights agenda. A holistic approach is absolutely crucial and, within this context, the human rights perspective is a key aspect which has frequently been overlooked and needs to be strengthened.

This was the main purpose of our 2018 resolution: aiming not only to highlight the detrimental impact on the exercise and enjoyment of cultural rights, caused by acts that damage or destroy cultural heritage, but also to work towards a positive agenda, by narrowing in on apt “tools” the experts will raise during this workshop for strengthening our approach to the protection, restoration and preservation of cultural heritage.

We are particularly pleased that this seminar has become a reality as we are convinced that it can act as a platform for a meaningful exchange of views and practices. We thank all participants and stakeholders for their contribution and encourage them to engage in a positive and constructive manner. As the core group, we reaffirm our dedication to the issue. We wish everyone a successful and productive workshop.

I thank you.