

To the Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation, Olga Borisovna Lyubimova
18th March 2022

An Open Letter

The Threat to Ukraine's Cultural Heritage

As shelling continues to major Ukrainian cities, including the capital Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and now in the west of the country, Lviv, we are deeply concerned for the loss of life and the loss of tangible and intangible culture, architectural heritage, art, monuments, archaeology, and collections of art and antiquities.

William Morris, founder of Britain's most ancient conservation group, whose ideas have had a huge influence on the conservation movement worldwide, including in Russia and Ukraine, believed that historic buildings are valuable for what they tell us about people, and therefore we contend they are inextricably linked to human suffering at a time of war.

Moreover, Russia is a signatory of the Unesco 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, that sets out legal obligations to protect culture and heritage in the event of armed conflict. This international agreement must be upheld.

Russia is only too aware of the great losses incurred to its own historic palaces and churches during fighting in the Second World War. We urge Russia to halt the shelling of Ukrainian cities, and to end the inevitable loss of human life and architectural heritage that it is incurring.

Kyiv is home to UNESCO World Heritage Sites - the Saint-Sophia Cathedral and the Church of St Cyril along with related monastic buildings, and the complex of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra with the Church of the Saviour at Berestovo – which were inscribed as heritage of humanity under the 1972 World Heritage Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Kharkiv is world famous for its constructivist and art nouveau legacy, while Lviv is one of the great Renaissance and Baroque cities of the world. Odessan culture, including

architectural heritage, is utterly unique. Chernihiv has outstanding ecclesiastical heritage that was lovingly restored after the Second World War, by both Ukrainians and Russians. We deeply lament the loss of any important buildings in these cities and others not listed here, the significance they hold for their inhabitants and for the world. We note in particular the vulnerability of historic wooden structures for which Ukraine is so famous.

We urge you to do your utmost to end the war which creates an increasing threat to both life and cultural heritage, and to plead the case with your own government for the avoidance of further destruction of cultural heritage in any form during this war. While bombing continues, loss of life and the damage and loss of such historic buildings, collections and sites is inevitable.

We are a group of UK conservationists, architectural historians, archaeologists, cultural commentators, authors and campaigners for built heritage and wider cultural heritage, who have united this week to monitor threats and losses to architectural and cultural heritage in Ukraine, during this war.

Jeremy Musson, trustee, Historic Houses Foundation

John Darlington, Executive Director, World Monuments Fund in Britain

Clem Cecil, trustee for SAVE Europe's Heritage

Henrietta Billings, Director SAVE Britain's Heritage.

John Sell, former executive Vice president Europe Nostra

Professor Olenka Pevny, lecturer in Ukrainian Studies, University of Cambridge

Oliver Caroe, Surveyor of St Paul's Cathedral, London

David Adshead, Director, The Georgian Group

James Bridge, Secretary-General and Chief Executive, UNESCO UK

Professor Colin McInnes, Chair, UNESCO UK

Dr Charlotte Joy, Non Executive Director for Culture, UNESCO UK

Mrs Kate Pugh OBE, Non Executive Director for Culture, UNESCO UK

Matt Rabagliati, Head of Policy, Research and Communications, UNESCO UK

Professor Derek Matravers, Open University, editor of *Conflict and Cultural Heritage*

Catherine Leonard, Secretary-General, International National Trusts Organisation (INTO)

Dame Fiona Reynolds, Chair, International National Trusts Organisation (INTO)

Dr Olivia Horsfall Turner, Senior Curator Architecture and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum

Sara Crofts, Chief Executive, Icon (the Institute of Conservation)

Joe O'Donnell, Director of the Victorian Society

Matthew Slocombe, Director, The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)

Dr John Goodall, architectural editor, *Country Life*

Harriet Wennberg, Executive Director INTBAU

Lizzie Glithero-West FSA, Chief Executive, The Heritage Alliance