

CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES IN MENA REGION

TRAINING AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TOOLS

by BIJAN ROUHANI*

1. The impact of conflicts on the cultural heritage of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

The impact of the ongoing conflict situation on the cultural heritage of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been tremendous, and the response to it has not been proportionate. Armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, security situation, intentional destruction, looting, and social upheavals in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and other parts of this region have led to an unprecedented pace of destruction of cultural properties, exacerbated by the economic crisis, neglect, and poor management. All types of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the MENA region have significantly suffered since the beginning of instability, protests, and armed conflicts. Archaeological sites, historic cities and villages, cultural and historic monuments and buildings, vernacular architecture, religious places and shrines, museums, libraries, and archives have sustained different degrees of damage, some of them have been demolished and destroyed forever, others can be hardly recovered or restored. The cultural heritage is the victim of both intentional and incidental damage. Military activities, ground battles, air strikes and the use of heritage places for military purposes have led to the vast destruction of them.

The current situation has put the cultural diversity of the MENA in peril, and if not responded timely and appropriately will deprive the next generations of their cultural roots and resources. The loss of cultural heritage is not only losing a significant source of knowledge, tradition and identity, but it also means the deterioration of socio-economic resources that are necessary for the recovery and development of societies. Cultural heritage, as a key component of cultural diversity, is also a critical consideration for any strategy to build the resilience of communities.

The cultural heritage does not only suffer from incidental or deliberate direct hostility during an armed conflict; indirect effects of war also

* *Director of AMAL in Heritage and Vice President of ICOMOS-ICORP, e-mail: bijanrouhani@gmail.com*