Dear Secretary of State

Ratification of the 1954 Hague Convention and the UK’s Cultural Protection Fund

We write further to a letter sent to your predecessor in November 2015 concerning the above. In that letter we expressed our delight regarding the June 2015 announcement that the UK was to finally ratify the 1954 Hague Convention and its Protocols. We are even more delighted to have monitored the steady progress of the Cultural Property (Armed Conflict) Bill through the House of Lords and hope for a speedy passage in the Commons this autumn. Ratification will, as you know, make the UK the only Member of the UN’s Permanent 5 to have ratified the Convention and both its Protocols and will make us one of the leading players internationally regarding the protection of cultural property during war. We are confident that we can rely on your continuing support for the ratification process.

We also applaud the creation of the UK’s Cultural Protection Fund and plead that it be put to its most effective use. The November letter stressed that a co-ordination centre was the “top priority for funding” and we reiterate this belief now. While time-constrained projects funded through the Fund will have, no doubt, significant impact on a particular site or locality they cannot be expected to provide long-term support for the cultural property in the region nor for colleagues struggling to protect this internationally important heritage. We urge you to act creatively and to support the funding of a small, central co-ordination capacity in London for the Blue Shield. In this way the projects financed by the Fund could be supported in the long-term and many other activities could also be developed, and further funding secured. As you will know, the Blue Shield is the international NGO with primary responsibility to advise on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict that was created, with no funding, in anticipation of the 2nd Protocol of the Convention. There is a necessity for a small central team to support UNESCO and to co-ordinate its international work and that of its growing number of voluntary national committees. The Fund provides the opportunity to enable this critically important NGO to deliver.

Together with ratification, if the UK were to fund such a central capacity we would become the leading player internationally regarding the protection of cultural property during war. We understand that Newcastle University, which hosts the only UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property...
Protection & Peace in the world, has indicated that it would very likely match-fund a £3 million grant from the Fund with the interest from a £2 million endowment it already holds. We ask the Government to enable the UK to be established as the primary guardian of the world’s cultural property threatened by conflict through the judicious use of a small part of the Fund’s resources.

Yours sincerely

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