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PAM celebrates the World Heritage Day

Every year, 18th April is celebrated as the “World Heritage Day”, proposed in 1982 by the International Council for Monuments & Sites (ICOMOS) and approved by UNESCO General Conference in its 22nd session in 1983. Purpose of this celebration is to raise public awareness on the importance of diversity of cultural heritage and preserving these heritage for the generations ahead; and the efforts required to protect and conserve it. The theme for World Heritage Day for the year 2020 is ‘Shared Culture’, ‘Shared heritage’ and ‘Shared responsibility’, which is important as an expression for global unity with current worldwide health crisis.

Cultural heritage includes not only tangible heritage – made up of sites, historical and archaeological ruins, religious heritage and aesthetic value – but also immaterial and intangible heritage consisting of traditions, customs, practices, beliefs, languages, artistic expressions and folklore. Today, there are a grand total of 1,121 UNESCO World Heritage Sites worldwide, of which 869 are cultural, 213 are natural and 39 are a mixture. 53 of these are in danger.

The heritage of the Mediterranean region is one of the richest in the world, bringing together cultures, languages, religions and peoples for centuries. Its protection and promotion, in all its ramifications, is a priority for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM). The Assembly’s Third Standing Committee on "Dialogue among Civilizations and Human Rights" deals with this topic, organizing, supporting and promoting initiatives and seminars, in cooperation with others international organizations and all relevant institutions, as well as adopting dedicated reports and resolutions.

PAM organized a few years ago an international seminar, dedicated to “[The Protection of World Cultural Heritage Threatened with Destruction](#)”, generously hosted by the Parliament of the Kingdom of Morocco in Rabat, Morocco, under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohamed VI. The meeting was part of PAM’s response to the urgent call, by both the UN Secretary General and the UN Security Council ([S/RES/2199 \(2015\)](#)) to international organizations to mobilize their constituencies and capabilities to protect the cultural heritage from destruction, looting, smuggling, and illegal trade by criminal and terrorist organizations, especially in light of the episodes of destruction of historical sites and museums across Iraq, Libya and Syria.

In Morocco, PAM adopted the “Rabat Declaration on Protection of World Cultural Heritage Threatened with Destruction”, and participants agreed to create a "Special Reflection Group on the Protection of the World Cultural Heritage". This is aimed at raising awareness among

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all government and parliamentary organizations and institutions, on the importance of World Cultural Heritage, as well as strengthening the joint action mechanisms in order to develop policies and legislation to protect this global humanitarian legacy.

Since then, PAM has closely followed the problem of the destruction of cultural and historical heritage with concern. It remains committed to continue working with UN CTED, UNODC, UNESCO and ISESCO, to safeguard it and prevent all forms and aspects of trafficking in cultural property and related offences that benefit criminal or terrorist groups. Two dedicated resolutions on Protection of Cultural Heritage were adopted in [2017](#) and [2018](#).

The commitment of PAM to the protection and safeguard of cultural heritage, is an ongoing process coordinated with all member parliaments. In particular, the Assembly enjoys excellent cooperation with UNESCO, also for what concerns the [Mediterranean Diet](#), and regularly grants its high auspices to cultural initiatives such those carried out by the [Restoring Ancient Stabiae Foundation \(RAS\)](#), and the [International Seminar](#) on “Mediterranean heritage and citizenship: destruction-reconstruction, memory preservation and citizen participation”. PAM is also engaged, as sponsor and leading institution, in the project “Custody of the cultural heritage in the scriptoria of the great Abbeys”, promoted by the University of Salerno and launched on 10 May 2019.

Defending the cultural heritage is a major challenge for ensuring peace, security and sustainable development, and requires all PAM Member States to make every kind of efforts to implement the international normative framework and to improve their cooperative actions. In this regard, once the precautionary health measures connected to COVID 19 will be lifted, and as decided in Athens by the President of the PAM 3rd Standing Committee on Human Rights, Hon Yana Ehm (Italy), PAM will dedicate a parliamentary debate to cultural heritage.

PAM is convinced that such a unique heritage of the Euro- Mediterranean region will be instrument in relaunching economy and tourism for the benefit of all the people of the region.

