

## The Italian Blue Shield Committee

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*Resumen*

### ***El Comité Italiano del Escudo Azul***

*El Comité Italiano del Escudo Azul es un organismo de coordinación entre los representantes de las organizaciones no gubernamentales dedicadas a la protección del patrimonio cultural (ICOM, ICOMOS, CIA e IFLA) y las distintas asociaciones, instituciones y entidades culturales de Italia. Su objetivo es promover el respeto y la salvaguarda del patrimonio cultural italiano, en colaboración con la UNESCO y el ICCROM. Actúa en el mismo marco que el Comité Internacional del Escudo Azul (ICBS) en el plano internacional, pero en la actualidad carece de recursos económicos suficientes. Los esfuerzos del Comité del Escudo Azul no sólo deben orientarse hacia una coordinación de las actividades en el plano regional, nacional e internacional, sino también hacia el fomento de asociaciones con las instituciones interesadas (escuelas, universidades, autoridades diversas, etc.) y hacia la formación de expertos versados en los problemas de prevención y seguridad que plantea la protección del patrimonio cultural contra los desastres naturales y los conflictos armados.*

*Résumé*

### ***Le Comité italien du Bouclier bleu***

*Le Comité italien du Bouclier bleu est une structure de coordination entre les représentants des ONG du patrimoine (ICOM, ICOMOS, CIA et IFLA), les associations, les institutions et les différents corps culturels nationaux afin de promouvoir le respect et la sauvegarde du patrimoine culturel en Italie, en collaboration avec l'UNESCO et l'ICCROM. Il agit dans le même cadre que le Comité international du Bouclier bleu (ICBS) au niveau international, mais manque actuellement de ressources économiques. Les efforts doivent tendre entre autres, vers une coordination d'activités au niveau régional, national et international, mais aussi encourager les partenariats avec des institutions intéressées (écoles, universités, autorités, etc.) et favoriser la formation d'experts aux problèmes de prévention et de sécurité dans le but de protéger le patrimoine des catastrophes naturelles et des conflits armés.*

The proposal to set up an "Italian Blue Shield Committee" was first put forward by Massimo Carcione at the conclusion of the second day of the important international conference on "War and Cultural Heritage" (UNESCO University and Heritage Forum, Venice, April 1, 2000). For the first time in Italy the ICBS was officially present at the conference, together with the UNESCO Heritage Department. A survey was

conducted of the various organisations operating in the sector in Italy: institutions, organisations and associations of different kinds and with different aims. Yet they all have one element in common: with the four professional NGOs that constitute the ICBS at an international level, they are all in a position to provide solid support for the activity and structure of the "Italian Blue Shield".

First, there are the bodies specifically dedicated to the dissemination and application of the rules and fundamental principles for the protection of heritage (1954 Hague Convention and protocols).

From the outset, these included the Italian Society for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (SIPBC), the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, (IIHL), Sanremo, a government organisation which, for more than thirty years, has included the subject in its training course for military personnel around the world, and the Command of the Carabinieri in charge of safeguarding cultural heritage, a military structure with civil duties which comes under the Ministry of Cultural Heritage.

About one year after the Venice Conference, representatives of the four Italian institutions more actively engaged in the sector (ICOM, SIPBC, IIHL and the Command of the Carabinieri-TBC) held a meeting, on March 26, 2001, at the inaugural session of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Protection of National Heritage in Armed Conflict, at Acireale, presided by Professor Umberto Lanza, one of the "fathers" of the Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention, approved in the Hague in 1999 thanks to decisive support from Italy.

The document now known as the "Acireale Declaration" referred to the previously cited "Radenci Declaration", to other UNESCO papers and those of ICBS, all of which supported the development of new organisations through new committees; the document also referred to the text of the Second Protocol.

The four institutions have agreed that it was, and still is, necessary, starting in peacetime, to promote and develop the application of measures to "safeguard" Italian national heritage, offering ICOM, ICOMOS, IFLA and ICA the experience and structures of other public and private organisations. At the time these organisations were not particularly active in the area of safeguarding and protecting endangered cultural heritage.

With this aim in mind, the organisations involved decided that, with due respect for the individual prerogatives and reciprocal autonomy, they would work together to form a support committee for the Italian Blue Shield as soon as possible, urging all the other NGOs to become members, i.e. NGOs operating in the sector at a national level and promoting active and operational collaboration with UNESCO and ICCROM, with government structures, specialized ministerial institutes, monuments and fine arts authorities, regional authorities and local government bodies. Some of the first major national associations to respond were: Legambiente (specifically through the national "Save Art Campaign") and Italia Nostra, which, for years, have been responsible for initiatives promoting standards and rules for the protection of cultural and environmental heritage so as to raise public awareness on the issues at

stake. The Observatory for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Critical Areas (OPBC) based in Naples was immediately interested. The OPBC was founded by Fabio Maniscalco, a key figure in this sector at a national level with his personal experience "in the field" in former Yugoslavia in 1995. The Italian Red Cross (CRI), while not one of the NGOs directly engaged in the sector, offered to cooperate and support the venture as, for many years now, it has been active in disseminating and supporting the Hague Convention.

This was the spirit which prevailed on June 24, 2001, at "Farnesina", the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry, i.e. the headquarters of the government entity dealing with international cultural relations, international cooperation and the preparation and ratification of international conventions in this field, when a meeting was held to initiate the procedure required to set up the Italian Blue Shield Committee.

The outcome of the first meeting was extremely positive, at least ten organisations, institutions and associations took part, either directly or indirectly, and it was decided that the Italian Blue Shield (SBI) would be a body coordinating non-governmental organisations and associations, institutions and cultural bodies of national importance in order to promote action to respect and safeguard the cultural heritage of the country. It was considered appropriate that initially the newly formed committee should be a private association, involving public institutions in a second phase.

The question of the headquarters for the Italian Blue Shield was discussed and the majority present were in favour of it being based in one of the many international institutions in Rome (the final choice being the headquarters of the UNESCO National Commission). The decision does not infringe the Statutes which provided for the position of President in rotation with an operational structure (a technical secretariat) which could be in more than one base.

Another positive aspect was that the meeting with civil servants from the Italian Foreign Office showed the situation and path followed by Italy for the ratification of the 1999 Second Protocol. It was clear that inter-ministerial consultations had been under way for some time to initiate the ratification procedure; this entailed asking the different administrative bodies involved to define the normative, technical and administrative impact which the Protocol would have on Italian law. This is an essential technical stage in drawing up the bill to be presented in Parliament and when the NGOs were able to formulate their own observations and findings on the procedure and efficacy of rules for putting a protocol into practice (nationwide use of the symbol, recognition of the SBI by the State, etc.).

A second meeting of the support committee was held in December 2001, hosted this time by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and coinciding with the annual meeting of ICOM. Eleven member organisations were officially represented and many other public and private institutions displayed interest in the establishment of the SBI (*Scudo Blu Italiano*), expressing the wish to cooperate and offering support. A third meeting followed in June 2002 (once again at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage) and was attended by twenty public and private bodies interested in the project.

*List of Official Members:*

- ICOM Italia - museums;
- AIB (IFLA Italia) – libraries;
- ANAI (ICA Italia) – archives;
- ICOMOS Italia – monuments and sites;
- SIPBC - Italian Society for the Protection of National Heritage – an association of experts;
- IIHL - International Institute of Humanitarian Law, Sanremo – an association of members of military forces;
- Observatory PBC Isform – studies, publishing and missions abroad;
- ANC - National Association of Carabinieri, Rome – voluntary association for civil defence (P.C.);
- Legambiente, Roma – national voluntary association for civil protection (P.C.);
- UNESCO University & Heritage Forum, Italian section – relations with universities;
- TPC Carabinieri Command – public military structure;
- TPA Revenue Officers Command – public military structure.

*Meetings were Attended by:*

- Italian National Commission for UNESCO;
- Foreign Office – Development & Cooperation Division – public entity;
- Central Institute of Restoration – Ministry for Cultural Heritage – public cultural entity;
- Florence Workshop of Semi-precious Stones – public cultural entity;
- UNIDROIT - Institute for the Unification of International Law, Rome – international studies and research;
- Italia Nostra, Rome, - national cultural association;
- CRI - Italian Red Cross – dissemination;
- CNV - National Voluntary Service Centre, Lucca – Voluntary Civil Defence service (P.C.).

*Contacts with other Institutions:*

- IBC - Cultural Heritage Institute;
- SIOI (Italian Society for International Organisation);
- SIDI (Italian Society of International Law);
- ADSI-UEHHA (Historical Houses);
- MUVISS (Firemen's Association).

Once the project has acquired a consistent "base", the time will be ripe to establish institutional, administrative and technical relations (which may or may not be formalized as either protocols or conventions) with the Ministries of Cultural Heritage, the Environment, Defence, Civil Defence, the Interior and, most importantly, with their specialized institutes. Of course regional authorities must not be overlooked (with their operational and research structures) together with all the local authorities. All this should be done through the respective networks.

On September 27, 2002, at the headquarters of the Italian National Commission for UNESCO, the formalities required to set up the SBI were concluded. The occasion was the official meeting of the four NGOs that comprise the Blue Shield at the international level (ICOM, ICOMOS, ICA and IFLA). The meeting was hosted by UNESCO, the international reference institution for them all.

Since then, and in compliance with the international statutes, the Blue Shield has been operating under the auspices of UNESCO with mandatory support from the four international NGOs concerned and without which the Blue Shield could not exist. On the basis of the three preparatory meetings, and with the undertaking to refer to the support committee at the following meeting, (this was actually done at the fourth and last meeting, on February 12, 2003), the September 2002 meeting formally endorsed the undertaking in the guidelines for the five institutions to set up and support the SBI, and consequently formally endorsed the decision to initiate the procedure for obtaining international recognition, and officially announcing the news through a press release distributed in Italy by UNESCO.

At the end of this complicated itinerary, and with assistance from the Director of ICOMOS, Gaia Jungeblodt, at the ICBS meeting on November 18, 2002, the International Committee formally approved the founding of the Italian Committee on the basis of the draft statutes which had been approved by the supporting parties.

Italy, therefore, now has a National Committee, without legal status (acting as a coordinating "board"), with the same configuration as ICBS at an international level. Our intention, in a second phase, would be to give it legal status with organizational autonomy as associations. The Statutes of the SBI set three key objectives for the organisation:

1. to promote a culture of safety and protection of cultural heritage (highlighting the hypothesis of endangered cultural heritage, as in the case of armed conflict or natural disasters);
2. to promulgate relevant international rulings among specialists in the sector (members of the armed forces and civilians), i.e. the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and the 1999 Hague Protocol to the 1954 Convention);
3. to promote a timely ratification of the relevant international rulings by the Italians.

In the meantime several initiatives are already under way, although, unfortunately, they are limited by the fact that, to date, the SBI still has no financial resources, nor has it had any premises of its own, being compelled to avail itself of the generous hospitality of the separate institutions involved in the scheme. Initiatives include:

- the activation of a Web page and a regular news bulletin via e-mail (ICOM);
- the organisation of conferences, courses and meetings (under the auspices of ICOM, SIPBC, the PBC Observatory, UNESCO Forum, etc.);

- the publication of articles on almost all magazines in the sector (published by ICOM, ICOMOS, ANAI, AIB, Journal of Architecture, IBC, etc.);
- the publication of books, technical manuals, proceedings of meetings in the sector, plus the promotion of technical and information libraries (to be handled by ICOM, SIPBC, the PBC (*Protezione dei Beni Culturali*) Observatory, UNÉSCO Forum, AIB, etc.);
- bilateral operational collaboration, such as the joint project between ICOM-ICMS and Legambiente for the training and organisation of qualified volunteer staff for the protection of cultural heritage; this has already been tested, at least in theory, with the floods in Northern Europe and recent earthquakes in Italy.

### Prospects

Once all partners have finalised their membership or partnership with the association registered under private law and only then will it be possible to operate on a more significant level: i.e. that the various initiatives (by no means small in number, or unimportant) by individual institutions operating for some time now will be authorised to use the Blue Shield "brand". Every effort will be made to coordinate these and launch joint activities. It must be clear, however, that what is being established is coordination and not another bureaucratic structure duplicating the efforts of the single organisations or even trying to incorporate them. Their competence, specific experience and unquestionable prerogative, almost all being recognised both nationally and internationally, will form the basis and be the assets of the Italian Blue Shield, and should by no means be seen as a limitation.

On the basis of experience in recent years, it can certainly be stated that the first task facing the new organisation, apart from the institutional work in the international field already mentioned, will be in dealing with the need for activity technically defined as "dissemination", a term more or less synonymous with information, raising public awareness and training. This activity will have to be widespread and with steady backing throughout all sectors of society, including military and civilian. The first thing is to increase the number of supporters from schools, universities, and authorities, both military and civilian, and, most importantly, with the institutions which, for at least the past fifty years, have been primarily responsible for safeguarding and protecting heritage in times of danger. These institutions are only concerned about the more prestigious, spectacular and costly operations of recovery and restoration once the damage has been done. Restoration is a sector where, and with justifiable pride, we are at the forefront internationally, but this may be because we make no effort to avoid the damage occurring in the first place.

In this respect, all international Conventions – scrupulously ratified by Italy and just as scrupulously ignored – lay down rules to make the parties concerned aware of the problems and offering training, so the first responsibility for the SBI is clearly to rectify this failing. This may coincide with the first appearance of the SBI and be the first opportunity to attract more supporters.

In Italy, besides urging the Government to ratify the new 1999 Protocol, the Blue Shield National Committee will have to be ready to act and operate autonomously or on behalf of the State, with tasks such as:

- preparing a periodic report for UNESCO on the state of the application of the Hague Convention in Italy;
- preparing a list of suitable names to be proposed for the position of General Commissioner for Cultural Heritage to be included in the international list compiled by UNESCO, and also for positions as inspectors, experts and/or collaborators or consultants;
- making submissions on property to be registered on the List of Property Under Special Protection and, in the future, a List of Property under Intensified Protection (introduced by the recent 1999 Protocol), and which should include Italian cultural heritage already on the UNESCO World Heritage List;
- proposing and planning initiatives to safeguard the most important national assets, property and sites: first those already on the World Heritage List, and with special reference to surveys and security arrangements, the inclusion of items on military maps and the possibility of marking them with the Blue Shield;
- closer and more regular collaboration with universities, for the purpose of training specialists (both military and civilian) and voluntary staff for cultural and civil protection groups;
- the study, organisation and management of international cooperation projects and missions, perhaps initially at a purely technical level or as consultants, but in the future this could be operational;
- the organisation of structures for coordination and emergency response (obviously avoiding any conflict with official state authorities, therefore as support, joint ventures or consultancy) for future disaster or risk situations threatening national heritage; these opportunities, unfortunately, are only too frequent.

These high-quality services must be implemented, not only because they are required under rules laid down in international conventions which Italy has ratified, but also because so far no one in the different organisations, either governmental or NGO, has shown any desire to take steps in this direction.

The second field of activity for the SBI at a national level could be to provide proper technical courses to train experts in prevention and security. This requires a very different cognitive and operational base and instead of relying on individual initiatives, structures and knowledge of various organisations involved, it would be better to form a real partnership sharing the as yet limited and little known experience gained through contacts at the international level and the lessons which our experts have learned through their experience in recent disasters.

This will require certain tools:

- the development of a "National Risk Card", instead of waiting for data, as happened with the dramatic disasters in Piedmont, Marche, Umbria and Irpinia, qualified volunteers should collect and transmit data;
- the immediate updating of the National Civil Protection Plan, with explicit provisions on regulations, procedure and measures to be

adopted for the protection of real estate and personal property; to date such details have not been treated;

- the establishment of a position for a person in charge of risk prevention for cultural heritage, working jointly with museum professionals, i.e. the curator, restorer and chief of security. It can be assumed that for 90% of sites this position would be filled by a person who is a qualified staff member of the Civil Protection Force;
- the opportunity to organise periods of practical training during maintenance work in museums and on monuments, when filing systems are being upgraded, when collections or works in storage are being rearranged and when exhibitions are being prepared. This would help establish good relations with those in charge, while also giving trainees first-hand knowledge of the different problems involved and of the actual premises;
- the introduction of systematic national and regional campaigns to assess and verify the specific risks to which the different categories of cultural heritage are exposed: this could include proper maintenance of roof guttering and drainpipes to avoid water seepage and dampness, keeping a check on shops and any dangerous activities near or within the museums, libraries and monuments, ensuring that suitable containers and space for packing are available in the event of emergency evacuation of works of art, recording security measures in smaller museums, churches, villas and castles where there is a risk of looting, checking burglar alarms in museums and churches, etc.;
- involving a specialist in security measures for national heritage (professional or voluntary) in all the different civil protection commissions and structures in the municipality, province, region and civil protection departments, etc.;
- an emergency telephone number for reporting situations where national heritage is at risk; calls could be noted so that reports, warnings, suggestions and offers from staff available are forwarded to the authorities concerned.

These measures could be formally adopted by the State or Region and then passed on first to public authorities, but with clear indications that in the event of any organisational or logistic difficulty the authorities concerned are formally obliged to consult and collaborate with the Italian Blue Shield which would thus take on the role of an auxiliary service to the public authorities, in a similar position to the Red Cross in the field of public health and social services. It goes without saying that these services which are already highly important in the everyday task of prevention and protection of heritage, would be essential and decisive in every situation of danger or possible damage, including (while always hoping that this will never be the case) disasters such as terrorist attacks or even war.

To conclude, while Italy is at the forefront of world States for the quality and quantity of our artistic heritage, plus the capacity and quality of our restoration work, but also for the damage to our monuments and the theft of our works of art, we should learn to think in terms of prevention and protection. This should not be limited to the basic essentials of fire prevention which, incidentally, has seen a sad series of theatres, churches, buildings and libraries irreparably destroyed or damaged (one

cannot help thinking of the Fenice theatre and the Chapel of the Holy Shroud), but should cover all potential risks, such as a lighted candle or any flame in a small shop next to a famous museum, or a blocked roof gutter on a famous cathedral.

These are risk factors which could be eliminated for a small cost, but which, in an instant, or with time, can cause damage costing inestimable amounts, provided, of course, that restoration is still possible.

***With the collaboration of Massimo Carcione - ICOM Italy and Coordinator of the National Blue Shield Committee in Italy.***