

Press Release

UNITAR's Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT) reports major damage to cultural heritage sites in Syria – Call for protection

23 December 2014, Geneva, Switzerland - UNITAR's Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT) today issued a substantive report following detailed satellite imagery analysis of cultural heritage sites in Syria. The report documents widespread damage caused by the current conflict to cultural heritage areas, including UNESCO World Heritage Properties. Areas such as Aleppo, where settlements have been in place for over 7,000 years, Damascus, Crac des Chevaliers, Raqqa and Palmyra have all been exposed to major damage. Looting, destruction from aerial bombardment and other explosions, as well as infrastructure construction at cultural sites significantly threatens the heritage to future generations of these historic structures and objects.

A total of 18 different cultural heritage areas were analyzed using commercially available satellite imagery. UNITAR-UNOSAT found a total of 290 locations inside these 18 areas to have been directly affected during the last three years:

- 24 destroyed
- 104 severely damaged
- 85 moderately damaged
- 77 possibly damaged

UNITAR-UNOSAT's analysis is an alarming testimony of the ongoing damage that is happening to Syria's vast cultural heritage. National and international efforts for the protection of these areas need to be scaled up in order to save as much as possible of this important heritage to human-kind.

A special web-site will be available from 23 December 2014, including media-package with satellite imagery samples. Please visit www.unitar.org/unosat/chs-syria

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About the organization

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) is a principal training arm of the United Nations, working in every region of the world. We empower individuals, governments and organizations through knowledge and learning to effectively overcome contemporary global challenges. UNITAR was established in 1965 as an autonomous body within the United Nations with the mandate of enhancing the effectiveness of the work of the United Nations and its Member States. Every year UNITAR's reach extends to some 25,000 beneficiaries through face-to-face seminars and workshops, e-learning or other training-related events. (<http://www.unitar.org>)

UNITAR's Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT)

UNOSAT is a technology-intensive programme delivering imagery analysis and satellite solutions to relief and development organizations within and outside the UN system to help make a difference in critical areas such as humanitarian relief, human security, strategic territorial and development planning. UNOSAT develops applied research solutions keeping in sight the needs of the beneficiaries at the end of the process. (<http://www.unitar.org/unosat/>)