



*Protect Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage –
A Petition by the Alliance for the Restoration of Cultural Heritage (ARCH International)*

**To the Peace Negotiating Teams and the Coordinating and Facilitating Countries
of the Afghan Peace Talks in Doha, Qatar:**

We hereby join the Afghan people in urging both sides in the Afghan peace talks to commit to being responsible custodians of Afghanistan's cultural wealth. We ask them to affirm that they will protect and preserve it, for the benefit of their country and the world.

The rich culture and history of Afghanistan, the resilience of its people and the great works of art, literature and architecture that it has produced across so many centuries, deserve our admiration and support. In ancient times, Afghanistan was a leader in mining technology. It was home to a powerful Buddhist empire. Alexander the Great built multiple cities, and some of the structures are still visible today. Its merchants traveled on the Silk Road. Beautiful mosques, minarets and ancient fortresses speak to the Islamic empires that formerly enfolded Afghanistan and that still grace its landscape. These are the elements of a uniquely complex identity. They testify to its own citizens and to the world that this country represents so much more than forty years of destruction and devastation. People across the world study its history, its art and poetry, they find it intriguing and fascinating and it makes them want to learn more. Its culture, history and heritage are priceless treasures for the future development and prosperity of Afghanistan. It is important to note that these are also priceless and cherished relics of European, Central Asian, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern history.

Unfortunately, in its recent history there have been significant instances of preventable, irreparable damage and loss of the country's iconic treasures. The causes ranged from deliberate destruction as in Bamiyan, to tolerated looting, to mining contracts undertaken with reckless disregard of priceless archaeological deposits including entire underground cities on a par with Pompeii. This is also an enormous loss of scientific, educational and economic potential for a country that will badly need as many of its resources as possible.

We would like to note that Islamic countries all over the world take pride in their cultural heritage and in broader global art, architecture, archaeology and history. Prime examples are Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, the UAE and others, who maintain and display their historic sites and are leaders in museum design and the support of the arts. We ask these countries to support Afghanistan in optimally managing their cultural heritage artifacts, monuments and sites.



Antiquities are a valuable resource and an asset of a country's sustainable economic development. They also shape and contribute positively to reconciliation and rebuilding after a conflict and to the healing of shared national identity. Afghanistan is the home of a cultural heritage that can take a proud place in the world, and whose treasures enrich all of humanity. Furthermore, the support of the international community and its citizenry will depend on the new Afghan government conforming to accepted international norms, including the protection of cultural heritage.

We ask all involved delegates and organizers of the peace talks to affirm their respect for Afghanistan's multi-cultural and multi-ethnic heritage and to include their commitment to its preservation in the final peace agreement.