

Statement regarding illegal archaeological activity in Palestine (East Jerusalem, West Bank, Gaza), and the Golan Heights. (Occupied Syria).

Recently, there has been increased illegal activity by Israeli authorities relating to the material cultural heritage of the region, including destruction and excavation of sites in the Palestinian West Bank.

In February 2025, an archaeological conference held in East Jerusalem signalled the intention of Israeli authorities to expand the existing programme of illegal excavation in the West Bank (which they refer to as Judea and Samaria).¹ We are now witnessing the excavation of the major site of Samaria-Sebaste in Area C of the West Bank by Israeli archaeologists with no involvement of the Palestinian Authorities under whose jurisdiction the site legally lies.

It is highly likely that other sites in the West Bank will be similarly appropriated. We express here our objection to these developments, past, present and future, which seek to disenfranchise the Palestinian population of their heritage, and frequently act as a vanguard to further illegal settlement in this part of Palestine

The PEF, as a charity concerned with the study, exploration and protection of material cultural heritage reaffirms its commitment to upholding international law, which prevents the excavation of an archaeological site, the removal of archaeological material, or the destruction of cultural heritage by an occupying power.^{2, 3}

As such, and as expressed in our ethical policy,⁴ we will not publish material from these excavations, nor give a platform to those involved in them, or assist them with their research in connection to this illegal activity. We strongly emphasise that this is a restriction based on activity, not on nationality. As a non-partisan organisation, all those who respect and adhere to international law in their academic output are very welcome at the PEF, to research and publish their work with us, and to present lectures to our members.

1: You can download statement regarding this conference from our website home page here:
<https://www.pef.org.uk/>

2, 3: The Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949 & Additional Protocols 1977: Articles 16 & 53 pertaining to the misuse and/or destruction of cultural heritage and places of worship; Article 147 – Grave breach. Destruction and appropriation of Cultural Heritage. <https://theblueshield.org/resources/law-library/customary-law-international-humanitarian-law-and-the-laws-of-armed-conflict/the-geneva-conventions-1949-and-additional-protocols-1977/>

2nd Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict: CLT-12/7.COM/CONF.201/7 Paris, 12 November 2012.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000231238>

4: <https://www.pef.org.uk/about/ethical-policy/ethical-policy/>