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**Written statement* submitted by Association of World Citizens,
a non-governmental organization on the Roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[7 January 2009]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

Protection of Educational and Cultural Institutions in Time of Conflict

1) There has always been a close relation among human rights standards, humanitarian law and efforts to protect educational and cultural institutions in times of conflict.

2) The early efforts to protect educational and cultural institutions following the massive destruction in the First World War began in the 1920s by trying to find a universally-accepted symbol that could be placed on educational and cultural institutions in the way that a Red Cross had become a widely-recognized symbol to protect medical institutions and medical workers.

3) The need for such protection of educational and cultural institutions has been highlighted by the current conflict in Gaza. The Islamic University of Gaza was deliberately hit by six separate air strikes. The extent of the damage is not known, but there were no human casualties as the University had been evacuated. The Islamic University of Gaza was established in 1978 and has some 20,000 students, 60 per cent of whom are women. One of the buildings destroyed was the Ladies Building where women students attend classes. The other building was the science faculty. Science and the education of women are key elements in progress for the Middle East. The significance of the destruction of the Ladies Building and the Science Faculty must not be overlooked.

4) The American International School of Gaza has also been destroyed. The school offered a curriculum in English from Primary to the end of Secondary school. Some 250 students were enrolled in co-ed classes while most schools in Gaza are single sex institutions. The International School was empty when bombed, although the night watchman was killed. Again, the symbol of modern, co-ed education must be underlined.

5) A number of mosques have been destroyed. Places of worship are often considered by some as holy or as a symbol of the Divine or representative of the religion. Therefore, religious institutions should be protected, even if they have no outstanding artistic significance.

6) Tragically, UN-administered schools in which there were refugees, have been destroyed with a loss of life. Therefore, the Human Rights Council must build up existing human rights standards, humanitarian law, and the world law protecting cultural and educational institutions.

7) Humanitarian law – the Geneva Conventions and the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross are well known, especially by those working in Geneva. The efforts to protect cultural and educational institutions are less well known.

8) Early efforts for the protection of educational and cultural institutions were undertaken by Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), a Russian and world citizen. Nicholas Roerich had lived through the First World War and the Russian Revolution and saw how armed conflict can destroy works of art and cultural and educational institutions. For Roerich, such institutions were irreplaceable, and their destruction was a permanent loss for all humanity. Thus, he worked for the protection of works of art and institutions of culture in times of armed conflict. He envisaged a “Banner of Peace” – three red circles – that could be placed upon institutions and sites of culture and

education to protect them, as the symbol of the Red Cross is to protect medical workers and medical institutions in times of conflict.

9) Roerich mobilized artists and intellectuals in the 1920s for the establishment of this Banner of Peace. Henry A. Wallace, the US Secretary of Agriculture and later Vice-President was an admirer of Roerich and helped to have an official treaty introducing the Banner of Peace – the Roerich Peace Pact- signed at the White House on 15 April 1935 by 21 States in a Pan-American Union ceremony. At the signing, Henry Wallace on behalf of the USA said “At no time has such an ideal been more needed. It is high time for the idealists who make the reality of tomorrow, to rally around such a symbol of international cultural unity. It is time that we appeal to that appreciation of beauty, science, education which runs across all national boundaries to strengthen all that we hold dear in our particular governments and customs. Its acceptance signifies the approach of a time when those who truly love their own nation will appreciate in addition the unique contributions of other nations and also do reverence to that common spiritual enterprise which draws together in one fellowship all artists, scientists, educators and truly religious of whatever faith.

10) After the Second World War, UNESCO has continued the effort, and there have been additional conventions on the protection of cultural and educational bodies in times of conflict, such as The Hague Convention of May, 1954 though no universal symbol as proposed by Nicholas Roerich has been developed.

11) Therefore the Human Rights Council has a duty to articulate more clearly the crucial link among human rights standards, humanitarian law, and world law to protect educational and cultural institutions in times of conflict. As Nicholas Roerich said in a presentation of his Pact “The world is striving toward peace in many ways, and everyone realizes in his heart that this constructive work is a true prophesy of the New Era. We deplore the loss of the libraries of Louvain and Oviedo and the irreplaceable beauty of the Cathedral of Rheims. We remember the beautiful treasures of private collections which were lost during world calamities. But we do not want to inscribe on these deeds any words of hatred. Let us simply say: Destroyed by human ignorance – rebuilt by human hope.”
