

Iraq an endangered site: preservation group

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The entire country of Iraq has been named one of the world's most endangered cultural sites, according to a U.S.-based preservation society.

Known as the cradle of civilization, Iraq was among a list of 100 of the most endangered sites in the world unveiled by the privately financed, non-profit World Monuments Fund, founded in 1965 and dedicated to the preservation of historic art and architecture worldwide.

Issued once every two years, the World Monuments Watch list is compiled from nominations put forth by archeology, arts and culture experts from around the globe.

"This is the first time we have listed a country as endangered, and I think that we can all understand that every site in Iraq that is significant in terms of cultural heritage is at risk today," fund president Bonnie Burnham told a news conference Tuesday.

Continued violence in the region following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, looting for black market sale and the inability to begin restoration efforts are placing thousands of historically important sites in Iraq at risk, Burnham said.

"It is not only the heritage of Iraq that is at stake. ... World heritage is at stake," said Iraq's deputy UN ambassador, Feisal Amin al-Istrabadi, who was present at the conference.

Others on the list range from ancient to modern and are found in 55 countries worldwide. They include:

- The Roman-engineered Segovia Aqueduct in Spain, which dates from about 50 A.D.
- Afghanistan's Haji Piyada Mosque, which dates from the ninth century and is considered the earliest Islamic building in the country.
- Ernest Shackleton's 1908 expedition hut in Antarctica.
- Edward Durrell Stone's 1965 Modernist building at 2 Columbus Circle in New York.
- Ernest Hemingway's Cuban abode, Finca Vigia, which was built in 1886.
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"Time is of the essence here," said John Stubbs, the fund's vice president of programs. He added that for some areas, the only thing they can do is "Wait, watch and pray."

The New York-based group has distributed about \$35 million US to restoration efforts in the past decade. The goal of the list is to urge national governments to do more to protect their own cultural heritage, as well as to raise further funds for the protection of these and other endangered sites.



Hemingway's crumbling Cuban home must be bolstered by wood scaffolding. (AP file photo)