Heritage for Peace (H4P) is a non-profit, non-government organization. It was registered in Girona, Spain, on March 1, 2013, as an NGO under Catalan law. H4P was started in February 2013 after the idea of supporting Syrian preservation efforts gained momentum at the World Archaeological Congress (WAC-7) meeting in Jordan. The association runs its office from Girona, Spain. In addition to the (Syrian) Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer, there is a General Coordinator, a Point of Contact/Press Officer, and a Funding Coordinator. We are currently working on projects to save Syria’s heritage during the present crisis.

Heritage for Peace’s mission is to support heritage workers as they protect their collections, monuments, and archaeological sites during armed conflict.

In addition to the defined posts, Heritage for Peace is composed of an international network of volunteers: academics, heritage professionals, and independent advisers or researchers from Syria, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We are all experts in heritage protection in conflict situations or in Syrian heritage. Presently, there are 20 people from 8 countries but the organization is growing. We work according to our expertise and availability of time. Some of us prefer to remain anonymous, and H4P respects that.

It quickly became clear that despite the valiant efforts of those working in the country, Syria’s cultural heritage was being catastrophically compromised. We felt that it was not enough to wait until the conflict ended before offering support. Since then we have engaged in continual dialogue with Syrian heritage workers of all denominations on a neutral basis to find ways to assist them in saving and preserving their collections, monuments, and archaeological sites during the armed conflict. Through our heritage-protection projects we hope to foster peace. Our work is based on extensive international experience of heritage protection, as well as substantial local knowledge of Syria, her people, and her history.

Syria’s cultural wealth is known to all. It has been the crucible of human culture for thousands of years. This rich culture includes six World Heritage sites and thousands of other sites which represent the historic, artistic, scientific, religious, and cultural values of mankind. To give just a few examples: in Aleppo, the Ummayyad mosque came under artillery fire, destroying its ancient minarets; heavy fighting also damaged the Crusader castle Crac des Chevaliers. Museums at Apamea, Aleppo, and Raqqa experienced thefts, and the archaeological sites of Deir ez-Zor, Mari, Dura Europos, Halbia, Buseira, Tell Sheikh Hamad, and Tell es-Sin have been damaged by looters, who sell stolen artifacts to local and foreign dealers.

Syrian heritage professionals, including the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, have worked valiantly to safeguard monuments, museums, and sites, but the challenges of operating during wartime require special expertise, and they cannot operate in many areas of the country for security reasons.

Our projects include:

- Creating an electronic platform containing simple and useful resources
- Preparing a “no-strike” list for the Old City of Aleppo
- Developing the Task Force on Antiquities and Museums
- Designing a Risk Assessment and Protection plan for the Aleppo Museum
- Drawing up a “Resolution” for Geneva talks on Peace in Syria (January 2014) requesting all warring parties to protect Syria’s cultural heritage
- Publishing the bi-weekly “Damage Mailing List” that updates subscribers with news about damage to Syrian heritage
- Publishing a report on international actions Towards a Protection of the Syrian Cultural Heritage: A Summary of the International Responses
- Running training programs on
  a. Basic Tools to Protect Cultural Heritage in Syria Now
  b. Evacuation: Handling, Packaging, and Storing
  c. Damage assessment.

Heritage for Peace needs assistance to continue its work in support of Syrian cultural heritage. Knowledgeable and experienced volunteers are needed, as is funding. You can support our network by donating to our organization.
For more details of our work, and information on how to donate, please refer to our website http://www.heritage-forpeace.org or contact us at contact@heritageforpeace.org.

René Teijgeler, the Senior Cultural Advisor for Heritage for Peace, has an extensive background in preservation. His expertise includes the protection of cultural heritage in times of disaster, natural and man-made. He has written disaster preparedness plans for museums and libraries in Europe and the Middle East. In 1997 he established Culture in Development, a consulting firm that specializes in heritage preservation. He has been a senior cultural advisor in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Figure 1: 19th-century Syrian covered bowl, private collection. Photo by M.V. Cloonan