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CNES at the international Safeguarding Endangered Cultural Heritage conference in Abu Dhabi

The first international conference on safeguarding endangered cultural heritage took place in Abu Dhabi on 2-3 December with a big delegation of heads of state in attendance, among them French President François Hollande. On this occasion, CNES exhibited a series of Pleiades images of threatened heritage sites.

The aim of this first international conference of its kind organized at the initiative of France under the authority of Jack Lang was to craft concrete proposals designed to safeguard, highlight and fund the restoration of endangered heritage, notably in Syria and Iraq. The federating event brought together nations and international organizations at the highest level to discuss ambitious proposals for safeguarding cultural heritage.

On this occasion, CNES exhibited a series of Pleiades images acquired from the vantage point of space of heritage sites recently damaged as a result of conflict in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Mali, the centrepiece being a pair of 'before-after' images of the ancient city of Palmyra. Besides the symbolic significance of such images, satellite data are also regularly used to assess damage and plan operations in remote areas for which precise maps may be lacking.

In this regard, the conference underlined how technological innovation is increasingly proving a crucial aid in the area of cultural heritage, be it through virtual reality, 3D modelling or satellite imagery. This was demonstrated by the view of the Louvre Abu Dhabi that President Hollande gave to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi during a visit to the construction site of this exceptional museum set to open in 2017.

After the conference, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall commented: "France is in the vanguard of efforts to safeguard endangered world heritage sites, and satellite imagery serves to alert us to threats as well as during reconstruction and restoration. In this area, CNES is playing a leading role with its Pleiades satellites, the first of which—Pleiades 1A—will soon be marking its fifth year in orbit."

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