



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEALERS IN ANCIENT ART

Amsterdam, 11-05-2017

OPEN LETTER TO IRINA BUKOVA, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF UNESCO

Dear Director General,

I write concerning the issue of looted antiquities, reports of such material entering European markets and the recent introduction, via the Council of Europe, of a new criminal law convention to prevent and combat illicit trafficking and the destruction of cultural property.

Firstly, as chairman of the International Association of Dealers in Ancient Art (IADAA), I want to assure you that the legitimate trade has been highly active in raising standards and helping the authorities to tackle crime. We have invested a great deal of time and money in recent years into research and working with bodies such as the EU, Europol and others to devise the best solutions for preventing the looting and smuggling of antiquities. We do this because our interest in the field of archaeology means we are even more concerned than many to protect sites and cultural heritage in context. Quite apart from the cultural damage that looting inflicts on world heritage, we want to see an end to the looting and smuggling of artefacts because it is our reputations as honest, law-abiding trade professionals that the criminals damage when they carry out this nefarious activity.

You will understand, then, why the facts matter so much to us, as they should to anyone who wishes to target the real problems in this issue.

Our researches, reports published by the likes of the World Customs Organization, and the results of the recent European Union-wide Operation Pandora have failed to turn up any evidence that quantities of looted material from Syria and Iraq are entering European Union member states. Europol has confirmed this to us. The only reliable primary source evidence published that we have to show the scope of revenues ISIS has been making from looted antiquities comes from the May 2015 US Special Forces raid on the home of Abu Sayyaf, former head of the terrorists' antiquities operation. These documents disclosed estimates of somewhere under \$5m for the period May 2014 to May 2015, and that figure included the extraction of minerals and metals, so antiquities account for somewhat less than this.

We monitor the disclosure of evidence on a daily basis and know of no other reliable primary source evidence available.

We also hear claims that much material is being hoarded in the Middle East until it can be sold more easily. However, if that is the case, it is difficult to see how it can be funding ISIS now. It remains hearsay information, not based on facts. The same claim was made during the Iraq war, but after 15 years the anticipated flood of material onto Western markets has not happened.

To explain away the lack of evidence, we are often told that it is difficult to identify looted material because of the lack of paperwork. However, such an argument does not tally with the conflicting claim that looted material is emerging onto the market in vast quantities. If you can't identify it, you cannot know how much of it there is.

That being said, legitimate dealers have the expertise to identify such material if it ever does turn up – something that has not happened with any of our members in the past three years. We know this because we have checked.

Collectors do not want to touch anything that is not legitimately on the market, so there are no buyers for these stolen objects anyway.

We have also heard nothing about claims made on, or sums paid out from, the \$5m reward fund set up by US Secretary of State John Kerry in a great media fanfare on September 27 last year for information that helps beat such looting and smuggling.

To date, we know of no arrests or prosecutions in the US, UK or EU linked to the looting and smuggling of antiquities out of Iraq and Syria. We believe that if it was as big a problem as is being portrayed, such arrests and prosecutions would be publicised at least occasionally, if not frequently, by the authorities as a deterrent and to show the effectiveness of the global effort against these crimes. In fact, UNESCO should be pleased that the existing EU directives concerning Iraq and Syria have proven to be effective.

James McAndrew, the former head of the Homeland Security Antiquities Department assures me that the US authorities would give huge publicity to any successful operation and the lack of such publicity indicates the lack of prosecutions.

Despite all of this, the message constantly being put forward by the G7, among other politicians and campaigners worldwide, is that this is almost as serious a problem as the illegal global drugs and arms trades. The latest WCO report shows this not to be the case at all. In fact, the massive scale of the illegal drugs and weapons trade is out of all proportion to the tiny illegal antiquities trade, making such comparisons utterly misleading and inappropriate.

I note in the *Daily Mail's* March 30 article, '*G7 culture ministers discuss threat of cultural trafficking*', you are quoted as saying that there is 'plenty of evidence extremists are looting for profit', and that 'Every single day something happens somewhere that testifies to the fact that it is a systematic, I would say, looting of sites to engage with the illicit trafficking.'

We have yet to see this evidence and believe that such significant claims should be supported by the publication of this evidence to the general public, which appears not to have happened so far.

All of this is especially serious for us because measures like the new convention, while rightly attempting to strike at the heart of terrorist financing also threaten the innocent livelihoods of the legitimate trade. A cure for disease is no use if it also kills the patient.

I now appeal to you, as Director General of UNESCO, to help protect the innocent as you tackle the guilty. We find it unacceptable that the global legitimate trade in antiquities, which has been established for hundreds of years, suffers the harm that it does from overreaching legislation and other such blunt instruments in the fight against terrorism and is treated as collateral damage in this way. We are making huge efforts to find the right solutions, such as persuading the Convention signatories to honour their Article 5 obligations to protect sites on the ground and thus prevent illicit excavation.

As IADAA chairman, I call upon you and others of similar rank, whose influence spans the globe, to make a clear and public distinction between the legitimate trade and the criminals and to express your support for the former. I ask you and them to take this distinction into account when promoting new legislation or other measures intended to beat the criminals.

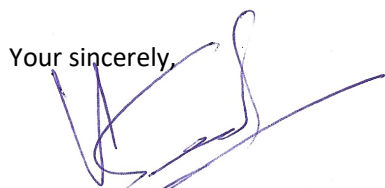
I'm sure you agree that in such a serious circumstances, facts matter and claims should be demonstrably true.

As an organization, we have been arguing the following three truths for some time:

- The trade is as horrified by the destruction and iconoclasm as anyone else and we share a common cause in wishing to defeat it.
- The trade has more incentive than anyone else to stop the crooks because of the damage they risk causing the reputation of the legitimate trade.
- We will not find a workable solution unless all parties to the debate work together, including the trade. (Law enforcement, Politicians, Academics, Archaeologists, Curators).

This last point echoes your speech at the Global Colloquium of University Presidents at Yale in April last year, when you said that we all have a stake in protecting cultural heritage. This is the reason to include the trade in the debate rather than to leave us on the sidelines.

Your sincerely,



Vincent Geerling
(Chairman)