



United Nations
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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

The Assistant Director-General for Culture a.i.

Mr Vincent Geerling
Chair
International Association of Dealers
in Ancient Art
c/o Nieuwe Spiegelstraat 37'
1017 DC Amsterdam
Kingdom of the Netherlands

31 August 2017

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Dear Mr Geerling,

On behalf of the Director-General, I wish to thank you for your letter of 11 May last, which we received during the 5th session of the Subsidiary Committee of the Meeting of States Parties to the 1970 Convention.

I was particularly glad to welcome you once again on this occasion, after having met you in March 2016, when you participated as an official speaker in the UNESCO round table entitled "The movement of cultural property in 2016", organized in close cooperation with the *Conseil des ventes volontaires* and key representatives of the international art market. UNESCO is committed to involving official art dealers in the fight against the illicit traffic of cultural heritage, making a clear and public distinction between the legal trade in cultural objects and the illegal activities of illicit traffickers.

Regarding your reference to the new Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property, this new treaty is supported by UNESCO, as it raises standards at the international level and contributes to the harmonization of the legal and operational measures to be implemented by States. In this regard, I wish to welcome efforts undertaken by the art market, and especially IADAA, to enhance the industry's professional rules and to increase awareness on the looting of cultural objects, particularly from the Middle East. The implementation of several new codes of conduct will further strengthen our decades-long cooperation with high-level representatives of the art market, including IADAA.

With regard to the points you raised about the evidence surrounding the illicit traffic of cultural objects from Syria and Iraq and the possibility of obtaining evidence of unlawful activities, I would like to note that information regarding seizures is based on voluntary contributions from States. This data is provided by various entities (police, customs, heritage managers, etc.) depending on the agency that made the seizure. These seizures are, unfortunately, frequent in countries that share a border with Syria and Iraq. These contributions are not mandatory, and it is up to States to decide whether they want to share this data or not. Many countries willingly share information on drugs and weapons, as they represent traditional areas of enforcement. Cultural heritage is often not considered a priority, and this is directly reflected in the quantity of seizure data shared. That is why, since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2199, we have asked UNESCO Member States to share this information on the global level.

Regarding the current market situation, I would like to invite you to contact the head of the ILLICID project, Markus Hilgert (e-mail: m.hilgert@smb.spk-berlin.de). His team has been researching the number of Iraqi and Syrian objects sold in Germany (online and through auction houses).

Regarding the systematic looting of sites, the best evidence comes from satellite imagery (provided by UNITAR, among others), which can compare the state of archeological sites as they appeared in 2011 and 2014, for example. The difference is clear and indicates looting activities. For more information, you may wish to refer to the following study: <https://www.aaas.org/page/ancient-history-modern-destruction-assessing-status-syria-s-tentative-world-heritage-sites-7>.

With the adoption of UN Security Council Resolutions 2199, 2253 and 2347, the international community has recognized a clear link between illicit trafficking and the financing of terrorism. There is a universal embargo on the circulation of Syrian and Iraqi objects, whether they contribute to terrorist financing or not. The level of looting and destruction we are witnessing is unprecedented. Art market stakeholders can help by suppressing the demand. By offering objects from regions in conflict for sale, these actors are not saving them but, on the contrary, increasing the demand and the risk for more illicit excavations. For more information, I would suggest that you consult the public reports issued by the Sanctions Monitoring Team, and that you directly contact the expert from this team, Ms Frederique Gautier (e-mail: gautierf@un.org).

In closing, allow me to highlight one important point: extremists aim to destroy the diversity of humanity's heritage and cultural expressions, a diversity which is embodied in cultural objects. Once cultural objects are illicitly excavated their archeological context is lost and we lose our ability to study them and learn more about our past. As a result of their historic, cultural and social importance, the world needs these objects now more than ever. All of us, and particularly the international community and associations such as yours, need to work together to protect this heritage for future generations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Bandarin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Francesco Bandarin