

**Testimony of Dr. Jerry Sabloff on the Importance and Effectiveness of MOUs under
the Cultural Property Implementation Act of 1983**

**Before the Cultural Property Advisory Committee
U.S. Department of State**

June 04, 2024

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Jerry Sabloff. I very much appreciate the opportunity to briefly discuss why I feel the work of Cultural Property Advisory Committee (CPAC) is so important. I am pleased to represent both myself and the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) in these remarks. I am a former President for the SAA, as well as a former chair of the CPAC.

We all know that there was extensive looting and destruction of archaeological and historical sites around the world in the past, and that many of the pillaged items ended up being trafficked to wealthy nations. This devastation resulted in an incalculable loss to the affected peoples and the world in general. Recognizing this reality, and that the U.S. was a major destination for looted materials, Congress passed the Cultural Property Implementation Act (CPIA) to both help preserve and protect cultural resources in other nations, and to prevent the importation of stolen items into the country. It is clear to me that the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) that CPAC recommends to the State Department under the CPIA have helped in efforts to lessen such activities, slow the sale of looted materials, and where possible facilitate the return of trafficked materials to their countries of origin. Unfortunately, looting of sites and trafficking of objects remains a serious problem. Because of this, the MOUs continue to be an invaluable resource in the fight to protect the world's cultural heritage.

In addition to this important, basic understanding of the key roles of the MOUs and of CPAC, I would like to make three other points.

First, the training that MOUs can facilitate to countries that sign with the U.S. has helped stop looting within countries *before* potential export. Such training that U.S. experts can provide to customs offices, police, government officials in cultural ministries, and the like has significantly helped countries protect their vital cultural resources and heritage. One small example of the positive results of such training is the improved signage at archaeology sites and airports warning against looting and the export of looted materials in a couple of Latin American countries.

Second, the import restrictions within the MOUs strengthen efforts around the globe to stop the funding of criminal cartels and terrorist groups, such as ISIS, which have utilized the sale of looted antiquities to support their criminal activities. This has been particularly true in countries such as Mali, Yemen, Libya, and in Latin American nations that have been plagued by violent actions. For example, in Colombia the MOUs have spurred the growth of police activity that has led to the disruption of organized looting and smuggling networks, resulting in a major decline in levels of observable pillage.

Third, the MOUs have helped increase the amount of international scientific exchange between the U.S. and countries with MOUs and stimulated the growth of domestic archaeological and cultural education and expertise in those countries. In Honduras, the export of archaeological materials for scientific research is encouraged, especially to the U.S.

The government welcomes large numbers of researchers from other nations, including those who instruct Honduran students, who are involved in field projects in that country. Honduran professors and students also attend scientific conferences and training programs in the United States. It is these types of collaborations that the MOUs help create and foster.

I will also make this observation: in the last 23 years the number of MOUs has grown substantially. In 2001, there were ten nations with which the U.S. had an MOU, or upon which we had placed emergency import restrictions for archaeological materials. Today, there are more than thirty. I believe that the growth of the network of MOU's is a strong indicator of their effectiveness. More and more countries are realizing the benefits to their heritage, and global appreciation of their histories and cultures, by entering into these agreements.

The positive benefits of the work of the CPAC to assess and recommend MOUs are both numerous and important. I applaud the CPAC's work and hope that the significant and impactful efforts of the Committee and the Department of State's staff will continue for many years to come. If there is time for questions from committee members, I am happy to entertain them. Thank you.