

15 October 2013

Cultural Heritage Center (ECA P/C)
SA-F, Fifth Floor
Department of State
Washington, DC 20522-0505

Dear Madam Chairperson and Members of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee:

On behalf of myself and the Society for American Archaeology, I am writing to support the proposed renewal of the *Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Honduras Concerning the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Archaeological Material from the Pre-Columbian Cultures of Honduras* (MOU). I also support the request by the Honduran government to amend the MOU to include materials from the Colonial and Republican periods of its history.

I am a practicing archaeologist with over thirty years of experience working in Honduras, first as a graduate student and then as an academic teaching at Gettysburg College (Gettysburg, PA). My research has taken me to Copán, the lower Ulúa River Valley (sometimes referred to as the Sula Valley), and the Department of Yoro, all areas of importance to the Pre-columbian history of the region. My multi-year project at the site of Cerro Palenque, in the lower Ulúa Valley was supported by grants from the National Science Foundation (BCS-0207114) and the H. John Heinz III Fund. The NSF grant included support for undergraduate involvement in research both in Honduras and in the United States. My dissertation work at the Maya site of Copán was funded in part by an NSF Graduate Fellowship and an NSF Dissertation Improvement Grant (BNS-8319347).

Renewal of the MOU is critical to the continued protection of Honduras's important cultural patrimony and to reinvigorating efforts to develop local, national, and international cooperative partnerships aimed at preserving this patrimony and using it as the basis for economic development. The Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History (IHAH) while under the directorship of Dr. Dario Euraque (now Professor of History and International Studies at Trinity College, Hartford, CT) had been, until the coup d'état in 2009, making significant efforts under the existing MOU to encourage archaeological research throughout the country, develop cultural tourism opportunities, involve local residents in educational and tourism efforts, and foster research and training partnerships between foreign experts such as myself and local archaeologists and students. In May of 2009, I participated in a workshop that was part of a series designed by Dr. Euraque and sponsored by IHAH. This workshop brought together archaeologists who had worked at the site of Cerro Palenque with residents of the neighboring towns of Santiago, Pimienta, and La Lima as well as with representatives from local media outlets. I made presentations on the history of research at the site, conducted site tours with groups of local residents, and spoke to the local media about the value of the site. These efforts contributed to Dr. Euraque's larger goal of developing archaeological and historic sites throughout the country into national parks.

Since the unfortunate political events of June, 2009, much of this work has slowed or halted all together, as IHAH has suffered a series of disruptions and loss of key personnel. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that municipalities, academic institutions, and private citizens recognize the value of preserving the archaeological resources of the country. These organizations and individuals, under a renewed MOU, can

provide the basis for a revitalized program of research and development. Let me briefly describe four examples.

- First, grassroots efforts to protect Cerro Palenque have continued through volunteer work by the residents of Santiago and Pimienta. I have maintained contact with these groups and can attest that they are trying to protect the site from looting and keep it maintained physically by periodically cutting brush. They maintain an active Facebook group and regularly post information about their activities.
- Second, the municipality of San Pedro Sula, the largest city in the country, is actively promoting information about the *Parque Arqueológico Currusté* (Currusté Archaeological Park), also located in the lower Ulúa River Valley. Created through the efforts of Dr. Jeanne Lopiparo (Rhodes College, Memphis, TN) and Dr. Euraque, information about the park is prominently featured on the city's website.
- Third, the *Museo de Antropología e Historia de San Pedro Sula* (Museum of Anthropology and History) is a privately run institution in San Pedro Sula that has a strong preservationist and educational mission. I have studied the collections there and had positive interactions with the director and other members of the staff. The Museum does not encourage looting through the purchase of artifacts. It has been recognized by IHAH as a repository for archaeological and historic collections, and has thus provided a way for materials formerly in private collections to become part of the inventory of cultural patrimony maintained by IHAH. The Museum's staff includes skilled conservators who have supported conservation of important finds from scientific excavations at Currusté and other sites in the Lower Ulúa River Valley.
- Fourth, the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras* (National Autonomous University of Honduras) has developed a degree program in anthropology that includes an emphasis on archaeology. Archaeological projects directed by foreign academics would provide a key resource for training UNAH students interested in becoming practicing or academic archaeologists.

All of these efforts are fragile due to issues of funding and the larger economic and political instability of the country. I have not returned to Honduras since 2009 because of this instability, which has made the country too dangerous to safely bring undergraduates there. The decision by the Peace Corps to withdraw volunteers already in place and to suspend the placement of any new volunteers was a clear signal of the extent of the problem, which is driven in part by escalating drug trafficking and in part by a general breakdown of rule of law.

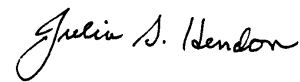
In spite of these difficulties, however, renewal of the MOU would send a strong signal that the United States supports Honduras's efforts to combat looting and to preserve its cultural patrimony. Honduran antiquities, especially Ulúa marble vases and Ulúa polychrome pottery, remain desirable to collectors. Both of these kinds of objects were produced in the lower Ulúa River Valley. Polychrome pottery of this type was also produced by communities in the Comayagua Valley and in the Lake Yojoa region. Archaeological research, including my own, has provided important insights into how production of these beautiful objects was organized, how they were used in ritual and daily life, and how they became part of local and long-distance exchange networks. Having the archaeological context -- knowing where an Ulúa marble vase was found, what it was found with, and how it was deposited -- has been crucial to the development of these insights. It is often assumed that such elaborate and highly crafted objects were used exclusively by those of high social status or that such objects were used as funerary offerings. My own work and those of other archaeologists in the Ulúa and Comayagua Valleys and in the Lake Yojoa

region has demonstrated that Ulúa polychrome vessels, for example, are rarely used in burials. Instead, they were used as serving and eating dishes by people participating in the cycle of ritual events that took place in large and small communities throughout the area.

While renewal of the MOU will not solve these problems, it will send a strong signal that the United States continues to value Honduras's efforts to preserve its cultural patrimony. More broadly, the MOU reflects the long history of economic, intellectual, security, and cultural ties between the two countries.

I thank the Committee for this opportunity to express my support for the renewal of the MOU.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia A. Hendon".

Julia A. Hendon
Professor of Anthropology