



July 17, 2012

The Honorable Dioncounda Traore
President, Republic of Mali
c/o Embassy of the Republic of Mali
2130 R Street NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear President Traore:

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) expresses its sadness and deep concern regarding the ongoing willful and intentional destruction of irreplaceable cultural sites in central and northern Mali, in particular the area in and around Tombuctou. We ask that your government do everything in its power to halt this transgression upon the cultural heritage of the people of Mali and the world.

SAA is an international organization that, since its founding in 1934, has been dedicated to the research about and interpretation and protection of the archaeological heritage of the Americas. With more than 7,000 members, SAA represents professional archaeologists in colleges and universities, museums, government agencies, and the private sector. With members in all 50 states as well as 62 nations around the world, SAA represents professional archaeologists and advocates for protection of cultural heritage throughout the globe.

It is our understanding that a number of the mausoleums that are part of Tombuctou's World Heritage Site complex of mosques and burial areas have been destroyed by insurgents, and that other sensitive heritage resources in the north are in danger. These razings are a deliberate, sectarian assault upon Mali's Muslim cultural heritage by an extremist group of fellow Muslims. This kind of attack only serves to deprive all Malians, and the rest of the world, of knowledge of the long history and rich cultural traditions that resulted from the intersection of West Africa and Islam.

As a signatory to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, along with its First and Second Protocols, Mali has recognized that cultural resources should never be used as weapons—or targets—during war. While we are aware that recent internal difficulties have made protecting threatened sites more difficult, we urge the government of Mali to call upon all relevant international organizations so that all resources can be brought to bear to halt this senseless destruction.

SAA stands ready to assist in any way possible.

Sincerely,
William F. Limp
President

CC:

Ambassador Mary Beth Leonard
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Bamako, Mali

The Honorable Irina Bokova
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The Honorable Philippe Allard
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