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September 25, 2021

United States Department of State

RE: Memorandum of Understanding regarding the cultural heritage of Peru

To whom it may concern:

As an art historian, museum professional, cultural property consultant to US and Canadian Customs authorities, university professor and author, I have been actively engaged with antiquities issues for the last forty years. During this time, the cultural patrimony of Peru has been consistently in danger from the forces of the international art market. When I worked as a museum curator, I was presented with "freshly unearthed" pre-Columbian works from Peru and other countries on an almost daily basis. As a consultant to US and Canada Customs, I worked to authenticate several seizures containing numerous pieces smuggled out of Peru, including the Sipan case in the late 1980s. It has been my experience during these times that the Peruvian government has actively sought to prevent looting within its national borders and also litigated to have stolen materials returned. A few years past, I served as an advisor to the German attorneys seeking the return of Peruvian antiquities, smuggled out of its borders by Leonardo Patterson. Of the several hundred items I identified, a majority were Peruvian. More recently (published 2020), I contributed an article on the pre-Columbian art market for a book on that topic. In doing research on the antiquities currently offered by the major auction houses, the larger specialty galleries, online auctions such as Heritage, and on eBay and other online vendors, I found a significant percentage of the items offered were Peruvian materials, although not all were authentic but that is a different legal matter.

It is my firm belief that despite the best efforts of the Peruvian government and highly dedicated Peruvian archaeologists, the cultural heritage of Peru is still under attack by agents (looters, smugglers, and dealers at various levels) of the international art market and the Memorandum of understanding must be renewed in order to help our neighbor and ally preserve its national patrimony and heritage. I encourage you to renew this agreement.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy L. Kelker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Nancy L. Kelker, PhD  
Professor of Art History