

October 30, 2015

The Honorable Robert Casey
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable David Perdue
383 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senators Casey, Grassley, and Perdue:

The undersigned organizations write to express their thanks for your sponsorship of the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act of 2015 (S. 1887). It is our hope that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will consider and approve this important legislation as soon as possible.

As you know, it has long been the policy of the government and armed forces of the United States to take all reasonable measures to safeguard the physical cultural resources of nations experiencing political turmoil, armed conflict, and natural and man-made disasters. In the decades since 1945 a network of international agreements, federal statutes, and Department of Defense directives has developed to implement this policy. Nevertheless, there are certain improvements that could be made to tighten the net and better preserve humanity's shared cultural heritage, and S. 1887 would make some of those important changes.

For example, Syria is currently undergoing an extremely traumatic and destructive civil war, one that is threatening its enormously rich and significant cultural resources. Already a large number of historic sites have been destroyed, and even more have been plundered of their artifacts to sell on the black market, from which both the Assad regime and the so-called Islamic State are receiving some degree of financial support. Given the present circumstances, it is not possible for the United States and the Assad government to work cooperatively at this time for the creation of import restrictions, as current law requires. S. 1887 would close this loophole by granting the President the authority to impose restrictions on the importation of Syrian cultural materials without a formal request from the Syrian government. The legislation also permits such objects to be placed in the custody of U.S. institutions for the purpose of safeguarding them, and implement the obligations of the United States under Security Council Resolution 2199.

Further, S. 1887 would bolster the nation's infrastructure for global cultural resources protection by establishing the position of U.S. Coordinator for International Cultural Property Protection at the State Department. The person named to this post would work with a new Coordinating Committee to synthesize the international cultural property protection activities of numerous federal agencies and non-governmental organizations. Having policy in this area overseen by a single officer in the Executive Branch will promote increased efficiency, and ensure that the U.S. is able to bring to bear the maximum amount of emphasis when and where it is needed around the globe.

In closing, we thank you again for your strong support of this important legislation, and look forward to working with you on securing its passage in the Senate.

American Alliance of Museums (AAM)

The American Alliance of Museums is the one organization that supports all museums. Through advocacy and excellence, the Alliance strengthens the museum community. It supports 30,000 museums, individuals and companies by developing standards and best practices, providing resources and career development, and by advocating for museums to thrive.

American Anthropological Association (AAA)

With more than 10,000 members, the American Anthropological Association, dedicated to advancing human understanding and addressing the world's most pressing problems since its founding in 1902, is the world's largest organization of professional anthropologists.

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC)

AIC advances the practice and promotes the importance of the preservation of cultural material as a means toward a deeper understanding of our shared humanity. AIC plays a growing international leadership role as it expands its services to the field by providing educational opportunities, establishing and upholding professional standards, promoting research and publications, and fostering the exchange of knowledge among conservators, allied professionals, and the public. As the national membership organization supporting conservation professionals, AIC serves a membership that has grown from fewer than 500 members at the time of its founding in 1972 to more than 3,400 today.

American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR)

The American Schools of Oriental Research, founded in 1900 and currently located at Boston University, is the preeminent organization of archaeologists and historians who initiate, encourage, and support research into, and public understanding of, the cultures and history of the Near East.

Antiquities Coalition (AC)

Founded in 2013, The Antiquities Coalition is a not-for-profit organization that promotes the appreciation of our shared heritage and empowers local communities to protect it. The Antiquities Coalition unites a diverse group of experts in the global fight against cultural racketeering: the looting and trafficking of antiquities by organized criminals and terrorist organizations. By promoting public-private partnerships, The Antiquities Coalition aims to bring innovative solutions to preserving our heritage.

Archaeological Institute of America (AIA)

Founded in 1879, the Archaeological Institute of America is North America's oldest and largest archaeological organization. Today, the AIA has over 200,000 members and 110 local societies in the United States, Canada, and overseas. The AIA promotes archaeological inquiry and public understanding of the material record of the human past to foster an appreciation of diverse cultures and our shared humanity. The AIA supports archaeologists, their research and its dissemination, and the ethical practice of archaeology. The organization educates people of all ages about the significance of archaeological discovery and advocates for the preservation of the world's archaeological heritage.

International Center of Medieval Art (ICMA)

The purposes for which the International Center of Medieval Art was formed are to promote and encourage the study, understanding, and appreciation of the visual arts of the Middle Ages

produced in Europe, the Mediterranean region, and the Slavic world, during the period between ca. 300 and ca. 1500 C.E.; and to this end to sponsor and otherwise support study, teaching, conferences, exhibitions, displays, and publications devoted to medieval art and culture.

International Council of Museums National Committee-United States (ICOM-US)

Founded in 1946, the International Council of Museums is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that is dedicated to the improvement and advancement of the world's museums and the museum profession as well as the preservation of cultural heritage. ICOM has about 30,000 members in 137 countries and territories. ICOM-US has approximately 1200 members and 59 institutional members.

Lawyers' Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation (LCCHP)

The Lawyers' Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation is an association of attorneys, law students, and members of the interested public who have joined together to promote the preservation and protection of cultural heritage resources in the United States and internationally through education and advocacy.

Preservation Action

Preservation Action is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization created in 1974 to serve as the national grassroots lobby for historic preservation. Preservation Action seeks to make historic preservation a national priority by advocating to all branches of the federal government for sound preservation policy and programs through a grassroots constituency empowered with information and training and through direct contact with elected representatives.

Society for American Archaeology (SAA)

The Society for American Archaeology 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. SAA has members in all 50 states as well as many other nations around the world.

Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA)

With more than 2,300 members, the Society for Historical Archaeology is the largest organization in the world dedicated to the archaeological study of the modern world and the third largest anthropological organization in the United States. Most members are professional archaeologists who teach, work in museums or consulting firms, or have government posts. Through SHA's close relationship with the Advisory Council for Underwater Archaeology, its members also include many of the world's underwater archaeologists.

United States Committee of the Blue Shield (USCBS)

The United States Committee of the Blue Shield, founded in 2006, is a nonprofit organization committed to the protection of cultural property worldwide during armed conflict. USCBS coordinates with the International Committee of the Blue Shield, other national Blue Shield committees, and a number of U.S. cultural heritage organizations to offer emergency assistance for cultural property at risk due to armed conflict. USCBS supports implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and coordinates with the Armed Forces, other branches of the United States Government, and other cultural heritage nongovernmental organizations in preserving cultural property abroad threatened by political instability, armed conflict, or natural or other disasters. The Blue Shield is the symbol specified in the 1954 Hague Convention to mark protected cultural property.

U.S. National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) Founded 50 years ago this year, the U.S. National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites is one of over 120 national committees forming a worldwide alliance for the study and conservation of historic buildings, districts, and sites. It is the focus of international cultural resources exchange in the United States, working to share preservation information and expertise worldwide. It also highlights and interprets for the rest of the world the unique American system of historic preservation: the partnership between private organizations and federal, state, and local governments, and the cooperation between the academic community, professionals and civic volunteers.