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Cairo Declaration to protect Middle East cultural heritage

Conference examined ways to prevent theft and illegal export of cultural and historic artefacts

Nevine El-Aref , Monday 18 May 2015



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After discussions and workshops at a two-day conference, Cultural Property Under Threat, held in Egypt four days ago, six recommendations were issued to combat cultural theft.

Minister of Antiquities Mamdouh Eldamaty told Ahram Online that the recommendations were issued under the title Cairo Declaration, and they insist on the launching of a working group from the ten Arab countries who participated in the conference: Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Libya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman and Egypt.

The working group, he explained, is to play a major role to combat the threat against archaeological and cultural property in the Middle East, as well as protecting it and preventing its looting and smuggling abroad.

The establishment of an international advisory committee to support the working group, as well as suggesting measures to

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fight against illicit looting and trading of stolen antiquities, is another recommendation.

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An international cultural awareness campaign in countries that allow trading in antiquities is to be launched very soon in an attempt to decrease the purchasing of stolen antiquities.

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The conference members agreed on starting discussions to form and sign a cultural and regional memorandum of understanding in collaboration with international partners to prevent trading in plundered cultural artefacts.

Establishing an independent agency to fight against antiquities laundering, through providing fake identification certificates to the stolen object, is another recommendation to be discussed with concerned international agencies.

The Cultural Property Under Threat (CPUT) conference was officially inaugurated by UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova and Eldamaty. It was organised under the patronage of UNESCO by the Antiquities Coalition and the Middle East Institute, in cooperation with Egypt's ministry of antiquities and foreign affairs.

The conference was an attempt to raise awareness throughout the world in an attempt to safeguard cultural heritage in the Middle East and to debate the measures to fight cultural racketeering.

It also aims to raise awareness about and find specific solutions to stop the looting of antiquities and terrorist financing.

During the two-day conference, several discussions took place between UNESCO, governments, NGOs and the private sector that can either individually or collectively protect the common cultural heritage.
