

# President Signs Engel Bill to Stop ISIS From Looting Antiquities

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Press Release

New Law Cracks Down on Funding Source for ISIS While Protecting Syria's Cultural Heritage

**WASHINGTON**—Representative Eliot L. Engel, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, today welcomed the [President's signature into law of Rep. Engel's legislation to crack down on the sale of artifacts looted by ISIS from cultural sites in Syria](#). The Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act would contribute to the comprehensive policy of degrading and destroying ISIS without risking American lives or costing American taxpayers.

The new law imposes tough new import restrictions on antiquities that are trafficked out of Syria, bringing U.S. policy in line with a UN Security Council Resolution that called on governments to deny funding to ISIS by preventing trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property.

"As part of America's effort to degrade and destroy ISIS, we need to do all we can to cut off resources for this terrorist group. Today, we're putting a new tool to use. My legislation will crack down on the trafficking of looted Syrian artifacts, which has put millions of dollars in the hands of ISIS extremists," said Rep. Engel. "This legislation has earned support from lawmakers of both parties and in both Houses, as well as numerous cultural heritage preservation groups. I want to thank the President for signaling his support as well, and for signing this bill into law."

Numerous outside groups and experts voiced their support for the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act when it passed the House late last month.

**Deborah Lehr, Chair of the Antiquities Coalition**, said, "The passage of the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act is a critical, bipartisan demonstration of American leadership. The looting of antiquities is a direct threat to American national security and to humanity's shared heritage. By closing the U.S. market for blood antiquities from Syria, the United States is cutting off a key source of terrorist financing. We applaud Representatives Engel, Keating, Royce, and Smith, as well as the entire House and Senate, along with the many individual citizens and groups whose hard work and dedication made the passage of this bill possible. We look forward to working together with them all to ensure its implementation."

**Brian I. Daniels, Director of Research at the Penn Cultural Heritage Center, University of Pennsylvania Museum**, said, "The protection of human history is a non-partisan issue. Representative Engel has demonstrated great leadership in working with Chairman Royce and other members of the House and Senate in authoring a bipartisan bill that makes a difference in the preservation of cultural heritage. H.R. 1493 ends the incentive for ISIS to loot antiquities by making it clear that there is no legal market for the artifacts stolen from Syria during the present conflict. But this bill goes even further by encouraging Federal agencies to work together on preserving human history—and holding them accountable to do just that. In recent years, we have watched how terror groups have conspired to erase the history of ethnic and religious groups that they oppose. This bill is insurance that does not happen."

**Patty Gerstenblith, Distinguished Research Professor at the DePaul University College of Law**, said, "With this legislation, the United States has taken a significant step toward reducing the destruction of cultural heritage in the Syrian conflict and preventing the sale of looted antiquities from providing income to ISIL and others engaged in the conflict. The 15 cultural heritage organizations that supported this legislation

thank Congressman Engel for his leadership in providing a practical response to the funding of terrorism.”

On June 1, 2015, Representative Engel’s legislation unanimously passed the House. The Senate approved a slightly modified version of the legislation on April 13, which [the House passed by voice vote on April 26](#).

The law imposes new import restrictions on cultural artifacts removed from Syria. Similar restrictions were enacted in 2004 with respect to Iraqi antiquities. The law provides exceptions to allow artifacts to enter the United States for temporary protection and restoration. Restrictions will remain in effect until the crisis in Syria is resolved and America is able to work with a future Syrian government to protect cultural property from trafficking under a bilateral agreement, in accordance with America’s national interests.

Additionally, the law expresses support for a new interagency coordinating body to enhance cooperation among the government agencies, including the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security, already working on cultural preservation issues. It also takes steps to enhance Congressional oversight of this issue.

Representative Engel introduced the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act along with Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs; Rep. William R. Keating (D-MA), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade; and Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ), Chair of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations.