

Antiquities Coalition Launches New Think Tank Promoting Innovative Solutions To Combat Cultural Racketeering

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st-hilaire-cover-imageWASHINGTON, Nov. 18, 2016 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The Antiquities Coalition today launched a Cultural Heritage Think Tank to explore innovative solutions to pressing challenges in cultural heritage, publishing the first in a new series of policy briefs by distinguished specialists from the public and private sectors.

Attorney Ricardo A. St. Hilaire wrote the inaugural paper, "How to End Impunity for Antiquities Traffickers: Assemble a Cultural Heritage Crimes Prosecution Team." It explores how the Department of Justice (DOJ) can take a leadership role in the global fight against cultural racketeering—the illicit antiquities trade—by appointing designated prosecutors to pursue criminal cases against smugglers, corrupt dealers, and their accomplices. St. Hilaire is an experienced litigator, former chief prosecutor, and former cultural property law professor, who authors the award-winning Cultural Heritage Lawyer Blog.

Cultural racketeering is one of the greatest threats now facing our world heritage. However, its consequences go far beyond preservation, to impact economics, foreign policy, and national security. Experts warn it has become a multi-billion dollar illegal industry that funds armed conflict and violent extremist organizations around the globe. But when compared to similar transnational crimes—from arms running, to drug smuggling, or even the illicit wildlife trade—there is still much we do not know. As the looting and smuggling of ancient treasures increases, especially across the Middle East and North Africa, the demand for strong scholarship is greater than ever.

The Antiquities Coalition's think tank will meet this need by bringing high-quality, innovative, and results-oriented research to the world's policymakers. It aims to strengthen public understanding of the threats facing our shared heritage, and more importantly, develop better solutions to protect it. To achieve this goal, the think tank is drawing from a wide range of international experts as authors, from the fields of preservation, business, law, security, and technology.

"With this new think tank, the Antiquities Coalition is providing leading thinkers a platform to promote innovative recommendations to safeguard our cultural heritage," said Deborah Lehr, the organization's chair and founder. "We are focused on developing concrete and practical solutions for policy makers that are based on economic, cultural, and political realities."

The think tank's first publication, by St. Hilaire, puts forward one such concrete and practical response to a major problem confronting our cultural heritage: the failure of the U.S. criminal justice system to criminally prosecute antiquities looters and smugglers.

In his brief, St. Hilaire notes that in the last decade alone, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has recovered and returned more than 7,500 illicit artifacts to thirty countries as part of its fight against cultural racketeering. These restitutions, however, have rarely led to the successful prosecution, conviction, or imprisonment of antiquities traffickers. As a result, known wrongdoers have remained in business, and the American art market's vulnerability to cultural heritage contraband has persisted. By prioritizing repatriations over indictments, the Federal government's 'seize and send' policy has failed to curb a vast black market industry, which officials say is funding transnational crime, conflict, and terrorism.

"If you can imagine a world where police recover stolen cash, illegal drugs, and hijacked autos but let the bank

robbers, narcotics dealers, and carjackers go free, then you can understand the unrestrained business of transnational antiquities trafficking," said St. Hilaire. "It's time for a team of skilled and motivated prosecutors to build solid criminal cases to convict and imprison smugglers, corrupt importers, and crooked dealers; to stop ringleaders from continuing to orchestrate looting, distribution, and financial networks, and to send a strong signal that assailing peoples' heritage will be met with tough consequences."

St. Hilaire's brief is available in full on our website. New papers will be released on a regular basis. Future authors include the University of Chicago's Dr. Lawrence Rothfield, and Oxford University's Dr. Neil Brodie, among others.

To subscribe to the think tank publications—and to stay informed of the Antiquities Coalition's other work to fight cultural racketeering—please sign up for our e-newsletter [here](#)

About the Antiquities Coalition The Antiquities Coalition unites a diverse group of experts in the fight against cultural racketeering: the illicit trade in antiquities by organized criminals and terrorist organizations. This plunder for profit funds crime and conflict around the world—erasing our past and threatening our future. The Coalition's innovative and practical solutions tackle crimes against heritage head on, empowering communities and countries in crisis. Learn more at theantiquitiescoalition.org.

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