

April 22, 2015

The Honorable Ed Royce
Chairman, House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Eliot Engel
Ranking Democrat, House Committee on Foreign Affairs
B-360 House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Royce and Congressman Engel,

The undersigned organizations write to express their strong support for the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act of 2015 (H.R. 1493). We urge the Foreign Relations Committee to rapidly consider and approve this important legislation during tomorrow's scheduled markup.

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) 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.

Since the Second World War, it has 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. H.R. 1493 would make some of those important changes.

For example, under current law the U.S. can place trade restrictions against the importation of looted archaeological and ethnological materials from a nation experiencing difficulties only if 1) the nation in question is one of the State Parties to the 1970 Cultural Property Convention; and 2) only if it requests a bilateral agreement under the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act, which request must be submitted to the U.S. through regular diplomatic channels. 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. Although Syria is a State Party to the 1970 Convention, it is not feasible for the United States and the Assad government to work cooperatively at this time for the creation of import restrictions. H.R. 1493 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. It would also implement the obligations of the United States under Security Council Resolution 2199. At this time, the European Union, including the United Kingdom, which imposed criminal penalties, and Switzerland have already restricted the import of Syrian cultural materials illegally removed after the beginning of the revolt against the Assad regime. If the United States fails to act, we will be the only Western art market nation that remains open to looted

Syrian cultural materials. There is also precedent for this provision—similar action was taken in 2004 with Iraq.

Further, H.R. 1493 would establish the position of U.S. Coordinator for International Cultural Property Protection. The person named to this post would, as an Assistant Secretary in the State Department, work with a new Coordinating Committee to synthesize the international cultural property protection activities of numerous federal agencies and non-governmental organizations, including the Departments of State, Justice, Defense, Homeland Security, and Interior, the Smithsonian, the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield, and the Agency for International Development. 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. Congress would also have a specific individual to hold accountable for any difficulties in implementing U.S. policy and law with respect to the protection of cultural property. We also note that the creation of this Coordinating Committee would not usurp the role of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee, which has a specific, limited statutory role with respect to the imposition of import restrictions on undocumented archaeological and ethnological materials pursuant to the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act.

In closing, H.R. 1493 would allow the U.S. to rapidly increase its presence and impact in this often under-appreciated, but vital, area that resides at the intersection of trade, defense, and foreign affairs. We respectfully request that this important legislation be approved by your committee when it comes up for consideration tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Society for American Archaeology

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) 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.

American Anthropological Association

With nearly 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

The American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), 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

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. By promoting public-private partnerships, The Antiquities Coalition aims to bring innovative solutions to preserving our heritage.

Archaeological Institute of America

Founded in 1879, the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) 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 Council of Museums

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 US is one of 137 national committees of ICOM.

Lawyers' Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation

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 Historical Archaeology

With more than 2,300 members, the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) 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

The United States Committee of the Blue Shield (USCBS), 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.

US National Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM)

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.