



KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

NATION RELIGION KING

MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND FINE ARTS

**The International Conference on Cultural Property Protection:
The Prevention of the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Properties –
An ASEAN Perspective**

Siem Reap, Kingdom of Cambodia, 5-8 September 2022

MEDIA STATEMENT

1. The International Conference on Cultural Property Protection: The Prevention of the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Properties – An ASEAN Perspective was held in hybrid format on 5-8 September 2022 in Siem Reap, Kingdom of Cambodia. The Conference was welcomed by H.E Phoeurng Sackona, Minister of Culture and Fine Arts of the Kingdom of Cambodia, and opened by Cambodia's Deputy Prime Minister H.E Prak Sokhonn, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The Conference was attended by international partners, the ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat. The International Conference was followed by an interface between international partners and ASEAN, as well as closed door meetings among ASEAN officials and experts.
2. The Conference recognised the critical and urgent need to safeguard Southeast Asia's shared heritage by combating the illicit trade in cultural property and building a responsible art market. In recent years, Cambodia and the ASEAN Member States have made great strides in protecting their rich history from cultural losses due to organised looting and theft, while working tirelessly to strengthen responsible cultural exchanges with foreign governments, museums, and the private sector. However, the global art market continues to be full of stolen cultural objects. Cambodia is dedicated to collaborating with the ASEAN Member States, and other international partners, to combat the illicit trade and promote the protection of cultural property. This mission is pursuant to Cambodia's broader goals of safeguarding and fostering ASEAN Identity, as well as maintaining and enhancing peace, security, and stability in Southeast Asia.
3. The Conference acknowledged the principles and mandates of the 2000 ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage, 2016 Vientiane Declaration on Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Cooperation in ASEAN, 2017 ASEAN Declaration on Culture of



Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society, and the 2020 Narrative of ASEAN Identity.

4. The Conference recognised that organised looting, illicit trafficking and sale of cultural objects are not just threats to the protection of world heritage, but to legitimate markets, cultural rights, national economies, and regional security. It is a serious transnational crime that is harming local communities, disrupting historical records, and defrauding consumers, while furthering the proliferation of crimes and destruction of cultural heritage. This deleterious development may lead to damages to cultural sites, and resulting in significant loss of scientific value of these cultural objects, as well as curtailing cultural appreciation for posterity. In contrast, cultural preservation plays a key role in driving economic growth, sustainable development, and responsible tourism, as well as uniting the people of Southeast Asia across borders, languages, and faiths.
5. The Conference worked towards its goals through many sessions open to the public and press, as well as closed-door meetings to strengthen cooperation at all levels, and site visits to share lessons learned and best practices. It explored various topics that sought to better understand the problem, strengthen the law and law enforcement, as well as to put in place effective measures to prevent theft and organised looting, building a responsible art market, heritage tourism, cultural diplomacy, and repatriation.
6. At the sideline of the Conference, consultation sessions were held with international policy makers and cultural experts from around the world and intergovernmental organisations such as UNESCO among others to exchange best practices and experiences on key priorities. It noted the importance of strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and information sharing among individual Member States, within ASEAN, and between ASEAN and its partners including foreign governments, intergovernmental organisations, and the private sector. A recurring theme was the need to develop mechanisms to increase dialogue with the art world and other relevant industries such as the financial, technology, and transportation sectors, with the goal of reinforcing legal markets and responsible trade practices.
7. The Conference had a fruitful discussion and exchange of views on combating the illicit trade in cultural property among the ASEAN Member States, which underscored the need for a long-term, regional strategy. Cambodia explored possible concrete actions to pursue including to convene a regional working group to discuss cultural property protection; endorsing best practices at the national level; encouraging countries to ratify and fully implement the relevant regional and



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international agreements; exploring how to fill gaps in the legal and regulatory framework; and supporting communities in crisis through on-the-ground initiatives, training and other capacity building, and channeling financial mobilisation from grants and investments.

8. The Conference is committed to continuing action, and looked towards exploring the feasibility of creating a regional platform with experts and stakeholders. Cambodia shall seek the support of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) to task the Senior Officials Responsible for Culture and Arts (SOMCA) to deepen cooperation in the promotion of cultural property protection, specifically, in exchanges of best practices and lessons learnt, information sharing and coordination, as well as capacity building and training. Cambodia shall work with SOMCA to potentially develop a sustainable, multi-year action plan that addresses cultural property protection comprehensively. Further, Cambodia encourages the convening of the Conference annually so that regular dialogue could be held to further strengthen the coordinated response to promoting cultural property protection.

9. The Conference expressed their appreciation to Cambodia for the warm hospitality accorded to the delegates in Siem Reap which is the ASEAN City of Culture and for the excellent arrangements made for the conference.

