



Egypt: Securing History, Fighting Terror

Egypt is working alongside regional and international partners to stem the flow of stolen antiquities. The theft and sale of ancient artifacts imperils our shared heritage and funds terrorists seeking to destroy modern society. On 13-14 May, Egypt hosted an international conference —“Culture Under Threat”— to explore ways to prevent antiquities-financed terrorism and protect our archeological treasures. Egypt is on the frontlines of this battle, and only a united, global effort can stop the illegal trade of stolen artifacts and defeat terrorists who profit from erasing history.



Culture Under Threat Conference

Earlier this month, Egypt hosted the “Culture Under Threat” conference in Cairo, bringing together the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as well as ten nations from the region including Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Lebanon and UAE to address the growing destruction, looting and trafficking of antiquities across the Middle East. During the two-day conference, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, stressed, “The destruction of cultural heritage, the cultural cleansing, is being used as a tactic of war to terrify populations, to finance criminal activities and to spread hatred.” Bokova praised Egypt’s efforts against this “war crime” saying, “Egypt has succeeded in proving to the whole world its capability to protect its cultural heritage.” The conference resulted in several recommendations under the auspices of a new “Cairo Declaration,” including:

- A working group formed from the ten participating Arab countries to combat looting and smuggling.
- The establishment of an international advisory committee, chaired by Egypt, to support the working group and study means to combat antiquity looting.
- Exploring additional regional and global efforts to fight against illicit looting and trading of stolen antiquities.

Antiquities Theft: Financing Terror

The rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL) has led to a marked increase in the theft and illegal sale of antiquities across the Middle East and North Africa:

- ISIL operated antiquities trafficking from Iraq and Syria was valued at billions of dollars.
- According to UNESCO, artifacts smuggled out from war zones across the world accounts for \$2.2 billion in illicit global trading annually.
- Revenue from stolen antiquities is now believed to be ISIL’s second-largest source of financing after oil.
- In Iraq, nearly 4,500 archeological sites are now under ISIL control.
- ISIL advances in Libya threaten major UNESCO heritage sites, including one of the world’s best-preserved Roman cities, Leptis Magna.

Fighting Cultural Terrorism

Egypt is developing and implementing solutions – political, diplomatic and security – to preserve its own cultural heritage as well as help protect antiquities across the Arab world.

- Egypt is negotiating Memorandum of Understanding agreements on a bilateral basis with many western countries to impose restrictions on exhibiting and trading in stolen Egyptian antiquities.
- Egypt has recently secured the repatriation of stolen artifacts from the U.S., U.K., Germany and France, including dozens of ancient pieces and a sarcophagus as part of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s “Operation Mummy’s Curse.”
- Egypt has increased security around museums and archaeological sites.

