Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk
Fighting the illicit traffic of cultural goods

Press Conference, June 15, 2010
French School of Asian Studies (EFEO), Paris

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PRESS RELEASE

Round table discussion on the illicit traffic of cultural goods
Protecting Angkor

The Kingdom of Cambodia’s cultural heritage reflects more than five thousand years of history. Today, the remains of ancient Cambodian civilizations, including the Khmer Empire, make up an important tangible heritage of great scientific and artistic value. For the past few decades, the political, economic and religious context has enabled illegal excavations of archaeological sites, as well as looting and other damage to Angkor.

In this context and in the framework of its programme dedicated to the fight against the illicit traffic of cultural goods, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) published the Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk.

This tool was developed by an international team of Cambodian archaeology and ethnology experts. It aims to highlight the categories of cultural goods that are particularly susceptible to illicit trafficking. The Red List is distributed to police and customs officials worldwide as well as to museum professionals, auction houses, art dealers, and collectors.

This project was made possible with the support of the Board of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State and through close collaboration with the French School of Asian Studies (EFEO) of Paris, whose experts served on the Red List editorial committee.

Thus, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) organised a round table discussion entitled “Illicit traffic of cultural goods: Protecting Angkor,” held at the French School of Asian Studies on June 15th, 2010 in the presence of Angkor Site heritage experts.

For more information about the Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk please enter this website:

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THE RED LIST OF CAMBODIAN ANTIQUITIES AT RISK

Ganesh, sandstone, 76 X 42 X 20 cm © NMC
The Kingdom of Cambodia’s cultural heritage reflects more than five thousand years of history. Although the country is still related to the former territory of the Khmer Empire and to the image of the Angkor Wat Temple, some other cultural groups have occupied this land and left an extraordinary heritage before the accession (6th century BC) and after the collapse (13th century AD) of the Khmer Empire. Today, all the remains of these civilizations make up an important tangible heritage and have a great scientific and artistic value.

In recent decades, this extraordinary cultural heritage has been ruined and desecrated for religious and political reasons. Tourism, which represents one of the country’s main sources of income, also contributes to the illicit traffic of cultural goods and causes irreversible damages not only to the identity of the Cambodian people, but also to the memory of human civilization.

The Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk is an important tool aimed at raising awareness and supporting the fight against the illicit traffic of Cambodian cultural goods. In order to effectively protect this cultural heritage, it is relevant to keep in mind that illicit trafficking is fueled by the dire economic situation, which creates an environment favorable to looting and the theft of works of art. Dealers benefit from the extreme poverty of many families, and from the fact that they are unaware of the laws, to encourage them to loot goods in order to swap them for money. These dealers then sell the goods on the international market at a large profit, perpetuating the destructive cycle.

It is thus not sufficient to simply take emergency action to develop tools designed to better control the art market and made available to law enforcement, experts, and potential purchasers of Cambodian cultural goods. Global political action is needed in order to offer economic alternatives to Cambodians and to make them aware of the importance of respecting and preserving their cultural heritage.
The Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk

The concept
The Red Lists are the main tool in the ICOM General Secretariat’s fight against the illicit traffic of cultural goods. The Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk was made by ICOM to prevent the illicit export and sale of Cambodian cultural goods on the art market and to contribute to the protection of this country’s rich cultural heritage. This is the seventh publication in a series that will include ten Red Lists before the end of 2010.

The development
The Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk was developed by an international team of Cambodian archeology and ethnology experts, which guarantees the accuracy of the publication.

The authors of this Red List are S.E. M. Ok Sophon, General Director of Heritage at the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, Mr Hab Touch, Director of the National Museum of Cambodia, Mr Heng Sophady, Co-Director of the Archaeology and Prehistory department and Director of the Memot Centre for Archaeology in Cambodia, Mr Bertrand Porte from the French School of Asian Studies (EFEO) in Cambodia, Mr Bruno Bruguier from the French School of Asian Studies in France, Dr Dougald O'Reilly, Heritage Watch Director in Cambodia and Mrs Helen Ibbitson Jessup, President of Friends of Khmer Culture Inc., United States of America.

The Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk is available in five languages (Khmer, Thai, English, French and German) and it is distributed to police and customs agencies worldwide as well as to museum professionals, auctioneers, art dealers and individual collectors.

The photographs that illustrate the categories are not reproductions of actual stolen objects unless otherwise indicated. They are usually made available to ICOM by museums and institutions for a Red List project, in order to facilitate the identification of objects at risk.

The Red Lists are distributed in brochure format and are also available on the ICOM website at http://icom.musem/redlist

Goals of the Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk
The Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk was developed to draw attention to the different categories of objects that are vulnerable to clandestine excavation, looting, theft and other damage that fuel the international market of art and antiquities in spite of the national legislative corpus and the international normative tools that protect the Cambodian cultural heritage. Therefore, ICOM wishes to support the efforts made by institutional authorities and culture professionals, especially the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, to raise awareness on the international art market and among the Cambodian people.

ICOM encourages potential buyers not to purchase objects that appear in the Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk without first checking the authenticity of their origin (appraisal certificate) and the legal character of their provenance (valid ownership certificate). Moreover, the police and customs authorities are encouraged to undertake a detailed investigation in the event that they find cultural goods described in the Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk.

Nevertheless, given the diversity of the Cambodian cultural heritage, the Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk does not intend to be an exhaustive list. As a consequence, any cultural object coming from Cambodia and more generally from any country for which a Red List has been published should be subject to special attention and precautionary measures.
ICOM’S FIGHT AGAINST ILlicit TRAFFIC

Hooks, rings and palanquin cylinder-shaped tubes adorned, bronze © NMC
ICOM Red Lists

In recent years, more and more ICOM Red List projects have been undertaken, which reflects increasing interest on the part of both countries with endangered cultural heritage and financial backers who support our initiative. The international efforts by ICOM and its partners to raise awareness about the necessity of protecting cultural heritage against illicit traffic have begun to pay off.

ICOM has already published Red Lists for 6 different countries and regions:
- Red List of African Archeological cultural objects (2000),
- Red List of Latin American Cultural Objects at Risk (2003),
- Emergency Red List of Iraqi Antiquities at Risk (2003),
- Afghanistan Antiquities at Risk (2006),
- Red List of Peruvian Antiquities at Risk (2007), and
- Red List of Central America and Mexico endangered cultural properties (2009).

A number of other Red Lists are in process or in the final stages of completion:
- Red List of Colombian Antiquities at Risk
- Red List of Chinese Antiquities at Risk
- Red List of West African Cultural Objects in Danger
- Emergency Red List of Haitian Cultural Objects at Risk
- Red List of the Hispaniola Island Cultural Objects in Danger

**Red List success**
Thanks to the ICOM Red Lists, law enforcement officials have seized many cultural goods.

Some examples:
- In January 2006, an Iraqi foundation nail was identified during an auction in Drouot (Paris). After the UNESCO Iraq standing delegation complained, the Parisian legal prosecutor carried out an investigation.
- In March 2006, more than 6,000 artifacts stolen from archeological sites in Niger and seized by French customs officials in 2004 and 2005 were given back to their country of origin.
- In 2008, a cuneiform table was identified on the Swiss e-Bay website. Swiss authorities were informed and e-Bay was able to stop the auction just in time.
- In 2008, French customs officials seized a freight stamped “craftwork” which came from Togo and contained Nigerian artifacts. ICOM approached a specialist to appraise the objects, one of which was revealed through thermoluminescence testing to be a genuine Nok statuette. The steps required to restore the object to Nigeria are currently being undertaken.
A successful international partnership

Thanks to its international network of professionals, ICOM is now recognized by many national and international organisations as one of the main actors in the fight against the illicit traffic of cultural property. The collaboration between ICOM and its partners includes the sharing of information and experiences, the organisation of consciousness-raising campaigns, the development of training programmes for law enforcement authorities, and the dissemination of ICOM publications on illicit traffic to these authorities.

ICOM, UNESCO and UNIDROIT

The countries that have adopted the 1970 Convention commit themselves to preventing museums in their territory from purchasing illegally exported cultural goods, to prohibiting the import of cultural goods stolen from a museum or public institution in another country that has signed the Convention, and to seizing and returning stolen or exported cultural goods to their country of origin.

The UNIDROIT Convention of 1995 completes the 1970 text, in particular concerning private law. One of the main clauses provides that any owner of a stolen cultural good must return it. This rule thus places full responsibility on buyers to make sure that the objects put up for sale reached the market legally.

The normative framework provided by these two international Conventions could be efficient if the number of State Parties was large enough. As of today, however, relatively few countries have signed on, and continued efforts are needed to fight illicit traffic. This is why ICOM, through its National Committees, highly encourages the adoption of these tools.

ICOM, INTERPOL and the WCO
ICOM also benefits from the great support of police and customs agents worldwide. In Brussels, on January 25th, 2000, ICOM and the WCO (World Customs Organisation) signed an Official Cooperation Agreement with INTERPOL.

To give just one example, in 2006, more than 600 pre-Columbian artifacts from Equator, stolen and exported to the United States, were seized and restituted thanks to close collaboration between ICOM, INTERPOL and the national police involved.

National Agencies
ICOM also collaborates with national law enforcement agencies, such as the Central Office for the Fight against Traffic in Cultural Goods (OCBC) in France, the Direction de la lutte contre la criminalité contre les biens (DJB) Art Service in Belgium, the Federal Office of Police (FedPol) in Switzerland, Arma dei Carabinieri en Italia, Scotland Yard Metropolitan Police, Art and Antiquities Unit, the FBI Art Theft Program, and the Colombian National Police.

Other tools to fight illicit traffic

In addition to the Red List, ICOM has developed a number of other tools to fight illicit traffic:

**ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums**

*ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* (Paris, 2006) was made from *Ethics of Acquisition* (1970) and from the *Ethics Code* adopted in 1986 and reviewed in 2004. This Code sets the standards of practice and professional performance standards for museums and their staff. It reflects the principles that are generally accepted by the international museum community.

**One Hundred Missing Objects**

This series presents a selection of objects that have been stolen and whose disappearance has been reported to the police. Each object is registered in the INTERPOL database.


A new publication project for the Maghreb region is currently being undertaken in the framework of this programme.

The four ICOM publications cited above have permitted some stolen objects to be found:

- At least ten objects were identified and returned thanks to the publication dedicated to Khmer in Angkor.
- A dozen archeological artifacts coming from Africa were found and returned to their countries of origin.
- *Looting in Latin America* played an essential role in the seizure of almost 6,000 pre-Hispanic artifacts and in the arrest of three people in July and September 2006 in the United States and in Ecuador (the photographs of some of these objects are available online at http://icom.museum/pdf/ecuador-photos.pdf).
- At least six items of religious art were returned in Europe.

More information is available at: http://icom.museum/100objects.html

Other objects included in these publications have been found, but their restitution is the subject of negotiations between the current owners and the country or institution of origin. Some of these negotiations have been going on for several years. ICOM highly encourages the parties to reach an amicable agreement, and to that end, as of 2006, ICOM offers mediation services to interested parties.

**Object ID**

The international standard Object Identification (Object ID) gives essential information about archeological, artistic and cultural objects in order to facilitate their identification in case of theft. Conceived of by the Getty Foundation in 1997, ICOM holds a license to promote this standard among museums professionals. In collaboration with UNESCO and INTERPOL, ICOM also organizes workshops on its implementation to train government representatives and police and customs agents. INTERPOL has included the Object ID standard in its stolen objects database.

**Regional workshops**

In addition, ICOM organises workshops and training seminars that bring together museums professionals, police and customs agents, and government representatives. These workshops aim to strengthen cooperation between the different actors involved in the fight against the illicit traffic of cultural goods.
THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS
About ICOM

Today more than ever, museums are at the heart of cultural, social and economic issues in contemporary societies. Whatever their specialization, their public or their location, museums must face unique challenges related to their social, political and ecological environment. Museums play a key role in development through education and democratization, while also serving as witnesses of the past and the guardians of humanity’s treasures for future generations.

Created in 1946, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) is the only organisation that represents museums and museum professionals. It is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that maintains formal relations with UNESCO and has a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

ICOM is:

• A diplomatic forum made up of representatives from 137 countries and territories. ICOM gathers museums professionals specialized in a wide variety of disciplines.

• Standards of excellence for museums, in particular with its *Code of Ethics for Museums*. ICOM makes ethical standards for museum professionals evolve according to contemporary concerns.

• A professional network made up of almost 30,000 international museum institutions and professionals. ICOM is among the few global organisations that are able to quickly mobilize the most famous specialists worldwide.

• A think tank composed by 31 International Committees which represent diverse museum specialties and conduct advanced research in their respective fields.

• Missions of international public service particularly in the fight against illicit traffic and emergency response in case of natural disasters or military conflicts.

To inquire about the global museum community or to arrange an interview with the ICOM Director General, please contact the press office:

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