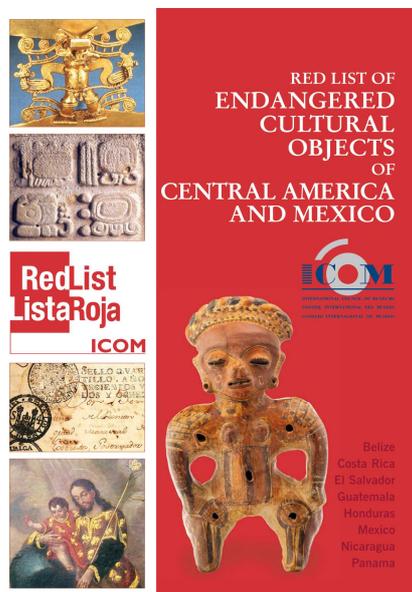


PRESS FILE

Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico
Fighting the illicit traffic of cultural property



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PRESS RELEASE

Launch of the *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico* Fighting the illicit traffic of cultural property

Over the past 20 years, illegal exports of cultural objects have been intercepted, proving the increased interest in antiquities of Central America and Mexico on the international market. This demand has encouraged clandestine diggings in archaeological sites as well as increased theft from churches and museums.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM), Central American and Mexican institutions and authorities together with cultural heritage experts of these countries have rallied to make people aware of the disappearing of cultural property from several pre-Hispanic civilisations and from the colonial and republican times.

In this context, ICOM published the *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico*. It is the seventh in the series of Red Lists by the ICOM to fight against the illicit traffic of cultural property. This project received the support of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State.

On the occasion of the launch of this publication, an awareness-raising campaign is organised which is aimed to highlight the importance of the regional collaboration to prevent illicit traffic. This campaign will successively take place from June 8th in Mexico and in the seven countries of Central America: Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

**For more information about ICOM Red Lists, please enter this website:
<http://icom.museum/redlist/index.html>**

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RED LIST OF ENDANGERED CULTURAL OBJECTS OF CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO



Jaina figurine, Mexico, 600-900 AD, ca. 20 cm © INAH

Central America and Mexico Cultural Heritage

During the pre-Hispanic period, the region of Central America and Mexico was the cradle of main state empire civilisations as well as cultures based on local chiefdoms. Archaeological remains of urban centres like Teotihuacan, Tenochtitlan, Tikal or Copan and stone and ceramic objects or goldsmith's art inherited from the pre-Hispanic societies in the region are priceless witnesses of their socio-political, scientific and technical development.

Today, the cultural heritage of Central America and Mexico is in danger, including the Colonial and Republican tangible legacy and in particular religious cultural objects. The increasing demand in antiquities and works of art on the international market has encouraged illegal excavations on archaeological sites and boosted thefts in museums or places of worship, causing thus a lot of damage not only to these countries but to the entire humankind's memory.

Therefore, the *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico* has been designed to highlight the categories of objects that are most susceptible to clandestine diggings, looting and other damages and that are frequently found on the illicit market in spite of being protected under national and international legislations. This initiative of ICOM aims to support the efforts made by the different authorities and institutions of these countries in order to raise awareness among the local population and international actors of art market.

In order to effectively protect this cultural heritage, it is relevant to keep in mind that illicit trafficking is fuelled by the dire economic situation, which creates an environment favourable 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 archaeological and cultural goods in order to swap them for money. These dealers then sell the objects 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 objects from Central America and Mexico. Global political action is needed in order to offer economic alternatives to the populations of these countries and to make them aware of the importance of respecting and preserving their cultural heritage.

Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico

The concept

The Red Lists are the main programme of ICOM General Secretariat to fight against the illicit traffic of cultural property. The *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico* was made by ICOM to prevent the illicit selling and export of cultural items from these countries on the art market and to contribute to protect their cultural heritage. This is the seventh publication of a series that will include ten Red Lists before the end of 2010.

The development

The *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico* was developed by an international team of experts in archaeology, anthropology, Colonial and art history of Central America and Mexico.

The authors of this Red List are: Gladys Barrios (Guatemala), former Chairman of ICOM-Guatemala and Director of San Carlos University Museum (MUSAC), Michael J. Snarskis (Costa Rica), Archaeology Consultant, Gregorio Bello-Suazo (El Salvador), Archaeologist and former Director of the David J. Guzman National Museum of Anthropology, Oscar Eduardo Mora Gomez (Guatemala), Coordinator of the Monitoring Unit for Prevention, Control and Recovery of Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property at the Culture and Sports Ministry of Guatemala, Eva Martinez (Honduras), Vice-administrator of Heritage at the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History (IHAH), the late Felipe Solis Olguin (Mexico), Archaeologist and Director of the National Museum of Anthropology, Edgar Espinoza Perez (Nicaragua), Archaeologist and Director of the National Museum of Nicaragua, and Isabel Rodriguez de Frias (Panama), former Director of the Reina Torres de Arauz Museum of Anthropology.

The *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico* is available in four languages (Spanish, French, English and German) and it is distributed to the police and customs agencies worldwide and to the museum professionals, auctioneers, art dealers and to 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 make the objects identification easier.

The Red Lists are distributed in brochure format and they are available on line on ICOM website: <http://icom.museum/redlist>

The Central America and Mexico endangered cultural objects Red List goals

The *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico* 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 cultural heritage of Mexico and Central America. Therefore, ICOM wishes to support the efforts made by the institutional authorities and culture professionals from these countries to raise awareness of the international art market and among the local population.

ICOM encourages the potential buyers not to purchase objects that appear in the *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico* without first checking the authenticity of their origin (appraisal certificate) and the legal character of their provenance (valid ownership certificate). Moreover, police and customs authorities are encouraged to undertake a detailed investigation in the event that they find cultural items described in the *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico*.

However, given the diversity of the cultural heritage of this region, the *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico* does not intend to be an exhaustive list. As a consequence, any cultural object coming from Central America and Mexico and more generally from any country for which a Red List has been published should be subject to special attention and precautionary measures.

FIGHTING THE ILLICIT TRAFFIC AT ICOM



Jade plate, Petén, Guatemala, 250-900 AD, 9.5 x 8.5 cm © MCD-MUNAE

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 of 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 Archaeological Objects (2000),
Red List of Latin American Cultural Objects at Risk (2003),
Emergency Red List of Iraqi Antiquities at Risk (2003)
Red List of Afghanistan Antiquities at Risk (2006),
Red List of Peruvian Antiquities at Risk (2007), and
Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America
and Mexico (2009)*

A number of other Red Lists are in process or in the final stages of completion:

*Red List of Colombian Cultural Objects 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 artefacts looted from archaeological 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 tablet 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 crates stamped « craftwork » which came from Togo and contained Nigerian artefacts. 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 recognised 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 museum professionals and law enforcement authorities, and the dissemination of ICOM publications on illicit traffic to these authorities.

ICOM, UNESCO and UNIDROIT

As a counsellor to UNESCO and UNIDROIT, ICOM took part in the development of two international conventions that play a crucial role in protecting cultural heritage against illicit traffic: the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, adopted in Paris on November 14th, 1970,¹ and the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, adopted in Rome on June 24th, 1995.²

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 items 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 ratification of these Conventions.

ICOM, INTERPOL and the WCO

ICOM also benefits from the great support of police and customs agents worldwide. On January 25th, 2000, ICOM signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Customs Organisation (WCO), and on April 11th, 2000, an Official Agreement for Cooperation with INTERPOL.

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

National Agencies

ICOM also collaborates with specialised national law enforcement agencies, such as the Central Office for the Fight against Traffic in Cultural Goods (OCBC) in France; the Directorate for the Fight against Property Crime (DJB), Art Service in Belgium; the Federal Office of Police (FedPol) in Switzerland; the Carabinieri in Italy; Scotland Yard Metropolitan Police, Art and Antiquities Unit in the U.K; the FBI Art Theft Program in the U.S.A., and the Colombian National Police.

¹ http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13039&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

² <http://www.unidroit.org/english/conventions/1995culturalproperty/1995culturalproperty-e.htm>

Other tools to fight illicit traffic

In addition to the Red Lists, 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 professional practice for museums and their staff members. It reflects the principles that are generally accepted by the international museum community.

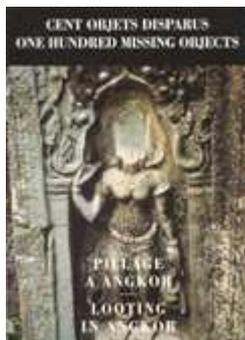
One Hundred Missing Objects

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.

As of now, ICOM has published in this collection:

Looting in Angkor (1993, 2nd edition in 1997), *Looting in Africa* (1994, 2nd edition in 1997), *Looting in Latin America* (1997) and *Looting in Europe* (2001).

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 certain stolen objects to be found:

- At least ten objects were identified and returned thanks to the publication dedicated to the Khmer Angkor site.
- A dozen archaeological artefacts 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 artefacts 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), conceived of by the Jean Paul Getty Trust in 1997, gives essential information about archaeological, artistic and cultural objects in order to facilitate their identification in case of theft. ICOM holds a license to promote the use of this standard among museum professionals. In collaboration with UNESCO and INTERPOL, ICOM also organises workshops on its implementation to train government representatives and police and customs agents. INTERPOL has included the Object ID standard in its stolen works of art database.

Regional workshops

In addition, ICOM organises workshops and training seminars that bring together museum 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 property.

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 specialisation, 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 democratisation, while also serving as witnesses to the past and guardians of humanity's treasures for future generations.

Created in 1946, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) is the major 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 specialised 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 in accordance with 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 mobilise the most famous specialists worldwide.
- A **think tank** comprised of 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 in emergency preparedness 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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