International Cultural Property Protection

Background

The Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act (the Act) became law in 1983 thus enabling the U.S. to implement the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. The Act allows the U.S. to impose import restrictions on archaeological or ethnological material when pillage of these materials places the nation's cultural heritage in jeopardy.

The Impact of Pillage: An Irretrievable Loss of History

Pillage of archaeological and ethnological materials deprives a nation of its cultural heritage. On archaeological sites, pillage involves unscientific digging to retrieve those items that are valuable to the art market. Consequently pillagers destroy the context in which all archaeological materials are found. Without the proper scientific recording of context and materials from a site, it is impossible to reconstruct or understand the culture that produced it. The ultimate result is the irretrievable loss of historical information.

Goals

- Reduce the incentive for further pillage.
- Help countries protect their cultural heritage from pillage for the long term by encouraging the development of appropriate policies; inventories; management plans; training for museum professionals, customs, and law enforcement officers; public education; and, cultural tourism and other sustainable and appropriate economic activities.
- Increase international access to cultural property by encouraging interchange of materials for scientific, cultural, and educational purposes.

Eligibility

Any of the 133 countries party to the 1970 UNESCO Convention may submit a request to the U.S. for the imposition of import restrictions.

Cultural Property Agreements & Emergency Actions

Bolivia, Cambodia, Canada (expired), Colombia, Cyprus, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, Mali, Nicaragua and Peru. (Agreement with China, pending.)

Restricted objects from these countries may enter the U.S. if they are accompanied by an export permit issued by the country of origin or verifiable documentation demonstrating that they left the country of origin prior to the effective date of the import restriction.

For More Information

Cultural Heritage Center
U.S. Department of State SA-44
301 4th St., SW, Room 334
Washington, DC 20547
Telephone: (202) 453-8800
Fax: (202) 453-8803
Email: culprop@state.gov
Web site: http://exchanges.state.gov/culprop

2007