



# CRUCIAL HEARING ON TRADE RESTRICTIONS APPROACHES PROTECTION OF PERU'S CULTURAL HERITAGE AT STAKE

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**T**he State Department will hold a very important hearing that will go a long way toward determining whether vital U.S. trade restrictions on certain categories of Peruvian archaeological artifacts will continue.

The looting of archaeological sites is among the most serious threats facing the world's cultural heritage. The cultural patrimony of developing nations is in particular jeopardy, with much of the looted material from those areas being sold on the international market. In 1970, in response to the global tracking of illegally procured archaeological materials and the widespread destruction of sites caused by the trade, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) established the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. The Convention was designed in part to deter looting and trafficking of the cultural heritage of signatory nations by stopping the international trade in illegally procured archaeological and ethnographic materials.

The Cultural Property Implementation Act of 1983 (CPIA) put the 1970 UNESCO Convention into effect in the U.S. Under the CPIA, nations experiencing looting can request and enter into bilateral agreements with the U.S. These agreements, once evaluated and approved by the State Department, can include restrictions on the importation of specific cultural items from those nations to prevent illegally removed artifacts from ending up on the U.S. market. The agreements, which run for five years, are periodically reviewed for effectiveness and can be renewed, upon the request of the other nation, if it is determined that the threat to that nation's cultural heritage still exists.

The Cultural Property Advisory Committee (CPAC) is the entity within the State Department that evaluates requests for new bilateral agreements and reviews the effectiveness of, and considers requests for, the renewal of existing agreements. For more information, the CPAC website is located at

<http://exchanges.state.gov/culprop/>. During its deliberations on individual requests, CPAC holds public sessions so that interested persons can provide input on the subject.

The U.S. currently has a number of bilateral agreements with Central and South American nations, including Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Peru. The SAA is working to preserve and expand this vital network of protection. As bilateral agreements with other Central and South American nations (including El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Colombia) have come up for approval or renewal, SAA has worked to provide CPAC with expert archaeological witness testimony at the public sessions. The witnesses, having spent much or most of their professional careers as experts in the archaeology of the countries in question, give CPAC crucial firsthand knowledge of what the "on the ground" situation is in those areas, and how catastrophic looting can be on a people's cultural heritage. The witnesses also give CPAC a real sense of the importance of the import restrictions in the effort to curb looting, and things would be much worse if the restrictions were lifted. In recent actions, CPAC has renewed the bilateral agreements with El Salvador and Nicaragua and approved a new agreement with Colombia.

The renewal of the agreement with Peru is particularly important, given the high worldwide demand for cultural artifacts from that nation. Those opposing the trade restrictions are likely to urge CPAC to not renew the agreement. Such an outcome would greatly increase the destruction of Peru's cultural heritage. SAA is arranging for expert witnesses to testify at the hearing, but the more CPAC hears from the scientific community on this issue, the better. SAA members who have experience in Peruvian archaeology can submit remarks on their own behalf to CPAC in writing. The specific procedures for submitting testimony can be located at <http://exchanges.state.gov/culprop/cpacproc.html>. When the date of the meeting is officially scheduled, SAA will publicize it in the Government Affairs Update.