

PRESS

RELEASE



RED LIST OF COLOMBIAN CULTURAL OBJECTS AT RISK



RedList
ListeRouge

ICOM



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MUSEES
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Press release

Paris, 9 March 2011

Launch of the tenth ICOM Red List: the *Red List of Colombian cultural objects at risk*

As the International Council of Museums (ICOM) celebrates the 10-year anniversary of its famous Red List series, it is pleased to announce the publication of the *Red List of Colombian Cultural Objects at Risk*. ICOM will officially launch this Red List on 10 March, 2011, at 6 pm, in the Teresa Cuervo Borda Auditorium at the National Museum of Colombia, Bogota, in the presence of Ms. Mariana Garcés Córdoba, Ministry of Culture of Colombia, Mr. Julien Anfruns, Director General of ICOM, and H.E. the Ambassador of the United States of America, Mr. Peter Michael McKinley.

As a member of the international group of experts recognised by the United Nations in the fight against illicit traffic in cultural goods, ICOM is very active, through its programmes, in the prevention of this traffic. The Red Lists are effective tools that support the work of police and customs worldwide, and all other professionals concerned with cultural property, by helping them identify the categories of objects that are particularly vulnerable to illegal purchase, transaction and export.

Illicit trafficking is a constant threat to the preservation of cultural heritage, as it destroys essential scientific elements in the reconstruction of life models of Colombian society, and leaves historical gaps that distort the significance and interpretation of this cultural heritage.

The International Council of Museums and its partners unite their efforts to raise awareness on the importance of protecting cultural heritage against criminal activity. The *Red List of Colombian Cultural Objects at Risk*, developed with the valuable assistance of a multidisciplinary team of specialists, and the generous support of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State, supports the efforts of the Colombian authorities and their National campaign against illicit traffic in cultural goods.

ICOM will also hold a workshop on Red Lists and the prevention of illicit traffic on 11 March, in Bogota, in the presence of local, national and international experts.

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« The Red Lists are effective tools that support the work of police and customs worldwide, and all other professionals concerned with cultural property »

Colombian cultural heritage

The cultural heritage of South American nations, constituted from the bequest of pre-Colombian civilisations and of colonial and republican societies until the beginning of the 20th century, bears witness to invaluable archaeological, artistic and documentary riches.

Situated at the crossing point of South and Central American, Caribbean and Pacific civilisations Colombia possesses an exceptional cultural heritage which reflects this diversity of influences. Apart from their artistic values, the inherent information of Colombian cultural objects also gives account of past ways of life. This allows us to better understand the socio-cultural evolution, not only in Colombia, but also in the entire Latin-American and Caribbean region. Illegal excavations of archaeological sites and theft from public and private collections have disastrous consequences for scientific research.

Since the “discovery of the New World” many adventurers followed the description of the ways of life of pre-Colombian peoples and of the abundance of gold and precious stones. The tradition of the *guaquería* (pillage), kept alive until today due to the difficult economic situation in many communities, constitutes one of the main supply routes for the illicit traffic in Colombian cultural objects. Within the last decades the illicit traffic in cultural goods also expanded on a transnational level and is at times related to other forms of organised crime.

In order to protect Colombian cultural heritage and to regulate its circulation, since the 1930s, Colombia progressively adopted strict legal measures. Nevertheless, given the extent of pillages and thefts in the 1980s and 1990s, the Colombian authorities launched a national inter-institutional campaign to fight against the illicit traffic in cultural objects. This initiative included several strategic measures: the training of heritage professionals, police and customs authorities as well as students, the publication of specific tools for professionals, public awareness raising campaigns, and the strengthening of legislations, including the ratification of several international instruments.

« Illegal excavations and theft have disastrous consequences for scientific research »

« The Colombian authorities launched a national campaign to fight against the illicit traffic in cultural objects »

« ICOM contributes to international efforts in the prevention and the fight against this illicit traffic »

« The fight against illicit traffic in cultural goods requires a long-term commitment »

With the publication of the *Red List of Colombian Cultural objects at Risk* and its worldwide distribution to police and customs officers, as well as professionals in museums and on the art market, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) actively contributes to international efforts in the prevention and the fight against this illicit traffic.

The fight against illicit traffic in cultural goods requires a long-term commitment. The capacity of authorities in regard to providing economic alternatives, developing comprehensive public awareness and education campaigns, and to the safeguarding of museums, places of worship and archaeological sites, are some of the main challenges which will determine the outcomes of these efforts in the future.

Red List of Colombian cultural objects at risk

Concept

« It describes several categories of cultural items that are liable to be illegally purchased and sold »

This Red List is intended to help museums, art dealers, collectors, customs and police officials identify objects that may have been illicitly exported from Colombia. In order to facilitate identification, the Red List describes several categories of cultural items that are liable to be illegally purchased and sold.

The illegal nature of trading and trafficking in these objects resides in the fact that Colombian legislation prohibits their export and sale. Therefore museums, auction houses, art dealers and collectors are exhorted not to acquire them without having thoroughly checked their origin and relevant legal documentation.

Due to the large diversity of objects, styles and periods, the *Red List of Colombian Cultural Objects at Risk* is not exhaustive. Any antiquity which could have originated in Colombia should be subject to detailed scrutiny and precautionary measures.

Making of

« The Red List was developed with the help of an international team of experts »

The *Red List of Colombian cultural objects at risk* is the result of ICOM's meticulous work. It was developed with the help of an international team of experts in archaeology, colonial and republican history of Latin America in general and of Colombia in particular.

Experts who contributed to the List: María Isabel Gómez A., coordinator of the group "Cultural goods" and of the National campaign against illicit traffic, Department of heritage (Ministry of Culture); Blanca Victoria Maldonado, Mónica Clavijo Roa, Helena Wiesner Tobar and Natalia Barón, conservator of movable goods, Department of heritage; María Clemencia García, conservator of movable goods, General National Archives; Víctor González Fernández, archeologist, Colombian Institute for anthropology and history; Ángela Gómez, curator, National Museum; Camilo Páez, historian, National library; Gustavo Adolfo Ortiz, president of ICOM-Colombia; Martín Andrade, Ministry of Culture; Robert D. Drennan, archaeologist and anthropologist, University of Pittsburgh (USA); and Blanca Alva Guerrerro, director of the Defense of historical heritage, National Cultural Institute (Peru).

« *The Red List of Colombian cultural objects at risk is available in five languages »*

The *Red List of Colombian cultural objects at risk* is available in five languages (Spanish, French, English, Portuguese and German). 10.000 printed copies will be distributed to police and customs officers from around the world, as well as museum professionals, auctioneers, private collectors and art dealers.

Its publication is accompanied by a CD-Rom that includes the brochure in all five languages. The information contained in the Red List can be accessed through a new innovative database available on ICOM's website and the actual Red List can be downloaded at the same address: <http://icom.museum>

Objectives

« *The object categories as described in the list are protected by national legislation and international legal instruments »*

The *Red List of Colombian cultural objects at risk* was edited to call attention to the categories of objects particularly vulnerable to illegal excavations, looting, robbery and plundering, which help to fuel the international illegal market for art and antiques. The categories of objects as described in the list are protected by national legislation and international legal instruments protecting the cultural heritage of Colombia. ICOM wishes to support the efforts of the institutional authorities and cultural professionals of this country in raising awareness about the harm caused by illicit trafficking in cultural property.

ICOM encourages potential buyers to refrain from acquisition of objects resembling any of those presented in the *Red List of Colombian Cultural Objects at Risk*, without having taken all necessary measures to ensure the authenticity of their origin (certificate of survey) and the legal status of their origin (valid title of property). Moreover, police and customs authorities are encouraged to undertake a detailed investigation in the event that they find cultural goods as described in the *Red List of Colombian Cultural Objects at Risk*.

However, given the diversity of the cultural heritage of this country, the *Red List of Colombian Cultural Objects at Risk* does not intend to be exhaustive. As a consequence, any cultural good coming from Colombia and more generally from any country for which a Red List has been published should be the subject of special attention and precautionary measures.

This Red List was developed with the support of :



*U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Educational
and Cultural Affairs*



ICOM's fight against illicit trafficking

The proliferation of projects in the Red List ICOM programme over recent years reflects the growing interest of both countries whose cultural heritage is threatened by the illicit trade, and also the entities that support and finance our initiative. International awareness efforts made by ICOM and its partners against illegal trafficking tend to give results.

ICOM has already published Red Lists for 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
- *Red List of Cambodian Antiquities at Risk*, 2009
- *Red List of Endangered Cultural Objects of Central America and Mexico*, 2009
- *Emergency Red List of Haitian Cultural Objects at Risk*, 2010
- *Red List of Chinese Cultural Objects at Risk*, 2010

A number of other Red Lists are in process for West Africa and for the Dominican Republic.

Thanks to the ICOM Red Lists numerous successful operations were carried out by police and customs. Here are 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 stolen 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. The Swiss authorities were informed and e-Bay was able to stop the auction just in time.

In the same year French Customs officials seized crates which came from Togo and contained Nigerian artefacts. One of them was revealed to be a genuine Nok statuette. The steps required to return the object to Nigeria are currently being undertaken.

ICOM Red Lists

« Ten Red Lists in
ten years »

Successes

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International cooperation

« As an advisor 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 »

« Furthermore ICOM is member of the expert network, recognised by the United Nations, in the fight against illicit traffic in cultural goods »

ICOM and the international conventions

As an advisor 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 14 November 1970, and the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, adopted in Rome on 24 June 1995.

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

The UNIDROIT Convention of 1995 completes the 1970 text. One of the main clauses provides that any owner of a stolen cultural good must return it. This rule thus places responsibility on buyers to ensure 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, too few countries have signed on, and continued efforts are needed to fight illicit traffic. This is why ICOM highly encourages the ratification of these two conventions, and the development of national legislations which protect a country's cultural goods.

ICOM, member of the international experts network

ICOM was created at the same time as UNESCO and holds an advisory status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Furthermore ICOM is member of the expert network, recognised by the United Nations, in the fight against illicit traffic in cultural goods. This group is also formed by UNESCO, UNIDROIT, INTERPOL, the WCO (World Customs Organisation) and the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime).

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

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

ICOM and 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 of the Fight against crime against goods (DJB) of the Federal Police, Belgium, the Federal Office of Police (FedPol) in Switzerland, Arma dei Carabinieri in Italy, Scotland Yard Metropolitan Police, Art and Antiquities Unit, United Kingdom, the FBI Art Theft Program, and the Department of Homeland Security, USA.

In addition to the Red Lists, ICOM edits a number of other tools to fight illicit traffic.

ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums

Exemplary ethical practices by museum professionals are essential for ICOM members.

ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums was adopted in 1986 and revised in 2006. It establishes the values and principles shared by ICOM and the international museum community. It is a reference tool translated into 36 languages and it sets minimum standards of professional practice and performance for museums and their staff. By joining ICOM, each member agrees to respect this code.

One Hundred Missing Objects

The *One Hundred Missing Objects* publication series gives account of cultural goods that have been stolen and which disappearance has been reported to the police. Each object is registered in the INTERPOL database. So far ICOM has published in this series:

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 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 Khmer in Angkor. A dozen archaeological artefacts coming from Africa were found and returned to their countries of origin. At least six items of religious art were returned to Europe.

Other objects included in these publications have been found, but their restitution is subject to negotiations between the current owners and the country or institution of origin. Parties interested in finding an amicable solution can request the mediation of ICOM, the support of which contributed to the happy outcome of the donation of the Makonde Mask from the Barbier Mueller Museum in Geneva to the National Museum of Tanzania.

Other instruments

« In addition to the Red Lists, ICOM edits a number of other tools to fight illicit traffic »

« Neither ICOM nor its international partners issue certificates or permissions for the export or import of cultural goods »

Object ID

The international standard Object Identification (Object ID) is an efficient tool to describe archaeological, artistic and cultural objects in order to facilitate their identification in case of theft. This standard was launched by the Getty Foundation in 1997. ICOM holds the licence to promote the use of this standard among museum professionals and other concerned parties.

Apart from trainings for the use of the Red Lists, ICOM also organises capacity building workshops for museum professionals, government representatives, as well as police and customs agents in the use of Object ID and its function in the protection of collections. Meeting its standard requirements, the use of the Object ID standard permits INTERPOL a more effective update of its stolen objects database if the object that disappeared was catalogued using the proposed guidelines.

Warning

It is important to emphasize that neither ICOM nor its international partners, in no case, issue certificates or permissions for the export or import of cultural goods. Unfortunately this delicate question prevails as a central issue as faked documents with the name and logo of ICOM and UNESCO are regularly intercepted by authorities. Local authorities are the only bodies authorized at issuing similar permissions of exportation.

The International Council of Museums

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 socialization, while also serving as witnesses to the past for future generations.

Created in 1946, ICOM (International Council of Museums) 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.

ICOM is:

- A diplomatic forum made up of representatives from 137 countries and territories. ICOM gathers museum professionals specialized in a wide variety of disciplines.
- Standards of excellence for museums, in particular with its *ICOM 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 mobilize 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.

« Today more than ever, museums are at the heart of cultural, social and economic issues in contemporary societies »

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