

Berlin, 26 June 2015

PRESS BRIEFING

#UNITE4HERITAGE: Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz works with UNESCO in the fight against illicit traffic of Syrian and Iraqi artefacts – New SPK Magazine specially devoted to this topic

– Check against original text in German –

UNESCO and the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation) have just signed an agreement to strengthen the cooperation in the fight against the illegal trade of artefacts from Iraq and Syria. The agreement focuses on the production of awareness-raising materials (in the framework of the [#UNITE4HERITAGE](#) campaign) as well as on a close collaboration in knowledge sharing and capacity building activities.

Wanton destruction and especially the illegal trade in artefacts constitute a massive threat facing the entire cultural heritage of the Middle East. Terrorists groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Al-Nusra Front (ANF) are generating income from engaging directly or indirectly in the looting and smuggling of cultural heritage. In this context, the General Assembly of the United Nations recently adopted a resolution prohibiting cross-border trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property, if this was illegally removed from Iraq after 6 August 1990 or from Syria after 9 May 2011. This prohibition only ceases to apply if it can be proven that the cultural property was exported from the country concerned before the specified cutoff dates.

#UNITE4HERITAGE aims to raise awareness of these crimes. The SPK will address this topic in its website and through social media as well as in flyers throughout the museums. Furthermore, the new SPK Magazine, which will come out on 1 July, is dedicated to the global protection of cultural property.

Hermann Parzinger, President of SPK, says: “With our cooperation agreement with UNESCO we wish to jointly ensure more awareness. Nobody should be able to claim that they were unaware that purchasing an archaeological artefact, with no verification of origin and no export permit, and that it is simply a small souvenir, amounts to the destruction of humanity’s cultural heritage. The less buyers there are for such illegal dealings, the less worthwhile illicit excavation will become.”

THE PRESIDENT
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

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“Museums play a crucial role in the fight against the destruction, looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property. The Pergamon Museum is already a strong partner of UNESCO and this campaign with the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz is an opportunity to strengthen our efforts to sensitize the public on the importance of cultural heritage.” says UNESCO Director-General, Irina Bokova.

UNESCO and SPK are also working together on the dark field research project ILLICID: a cooperation led by Markus Hilgert, curator for the Vorderasiatisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, to re-search the illicit trade in artefacts, is supported by UNESCO as a partner. UNESCO is also in close contact with the Syrian DGAM (Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums) to strengthen skills in working with illicit excavations and illegal trade there. For the past three years the Museum für Islamische Kunst of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin has also been working alongside the DGAM and the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut on the documentation of Syria's cultural heritage in an online database. In the Syrian Heritage Archive Project, initiated by museum curator Stefan Weber and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, primarily Syrian employees document the damages on site (damage assessment); the art market is also observed.



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