



Concept note

Online Expert Meeting

26 June 2020

2:30 pm – 5 pm GMT +2

Combating Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property during COVID-19 - illicit excavations and online trade

50th Anniversary of the 1970 Convention (2020)

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our societies in many different ways: first on health, and also socially, economically and culturally. Faced with an unprecedented global sanitary crisis, a vast majority of countries have enforced quarantine and lockdown measures. The focus on sanitary measures and restriction of movement has affected the surveillance of cultural sites and museums, leading to an increase in illegal excavations of archaeological sites and illicit trade including on line.

The more than 130 Ministers of Culture convened by UNESCO on 22 April highlighted this issue among their key concerns in their response to the impact of COVID-19 on culture.

Furthermore on 14 May 2020, UNESCO held an online meeting with [key partners](#) in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property in times of COVID-19, to share experiences and reinforce joint actions. Participants noted that the global sanitary crisis and lockdown have shifted priorities away from cultural property protection, leading to an increase in related crime. This was also confirmed by researchers of the [Antiquities Trafficking and Heritage Anthropology Research \(ATHAR\)](#) Project, who reported the increase of online trade of illegally excavated cultural objects in April 2020.

On this basis, and in the framework of the celebration of the 50th year of UNESCO's fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural property in 2020, UNESCO is organizing an Online Expert Meeting to discuss the increasing threat of looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property during the COVID-19 pandemic, and explore possible measures to be urgently undertaken to support countries' efforts in protecting their cultural property.

Objectives

The discussion will focus on how to combat the increase in illegal excavations and online trade during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. The objectives of the meeting will be to better understand a) illicit trafficking of cultural property during the current COVID-19 crisis; b) the process of online trade and how to better regulate them; c) the measures taken by the different actors to reinforce the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property and d) the possible contributions of each actor to combat this scourge going forward.

Experts from across the globe will be invited to participate in two respective panels to share their experiences and exchange on priority measures to be undertaken.

The Online Meeting will reach out to cultural heritage and museum professionals as well as the general audience in order to raise awareness of the issue of illicit excavations and trade of cultural property.

Venue and timing

The debate will take place online on 26 June 2020 from 2:30 pm to 5 pm (Paris time) and will be transmitted live on [UNESCO's YouTube channel](#).

Working language: English

The debate will be opened and moderated by Ernesto Ottone R. (UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture). It will bring together international experts on illegal excavations and online trade, including Katie A. Paul and Amr Al Azm (ATHAR Project), Corrado Catesi (INTERPOL), Marina Schneider (UNIDROIT), Vincent Michel (University of Poitiers, France), Mariya Polner (World Customs Organization), Eva Martinez (Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History, Honduras), Christos Tsirogannis (University of Aarhus, Denmark) and Lazare Eloundou (UNESCO).