



## The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention turns 25

On 24 June 1995, the [UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects](#) was adopted at the conclusion of a diplomatic Conference attended by more than 80 States, after almost ten years of work. It now has 48 States Parties and several States are working towards ratification.

Twenty-five years had elapsed between the adoption of [the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property](#) and that of UNIDROIT. Increased threats to heritage throughout the world, coupled with a change in awareness, made it possible to elaborate a balanced, but compromised, text on the thorny issue of the restitution of stolen or illegally exported cultural property. The UNIDROIT Convention strengthened the provisions of the 1970 Convention by addressing its weaknesses on private law issues.

In the 25 years since the adoption of the UNIDROIT Convention, the threat to heritage has diversified but not ceased. The actors involved and the number of legal instruments at the national, regional and international levels have increased. The challenge remains, keep a balance between protecting cultural heritage and maintaining a fair place for lawful trade and cultural exchanges to promote understanding among peoples and the dissemination of culture. Striking the right balance is not always easy.

The rule of law creates confidence and makes economic operations more fluid. This principle applies equally to the protection of cultural goods and the art market. In order to guarantee the protection of cultural goods and the legal and financial security of operations and actors, the market must be effectively regulated by law. It is the rule of law which defines and imposes the instruments and mechanisms to reassure contracting parties and facilitate licit transactions, but also to prevent illicit transactions. UNIDROIT has demonstrated its expertise in these areas.

As stated in the Preamble of the 1995 Convention, “this Convention will not by itself provide a solution to the problems raised by illicit trade, but that it initiates a process that will enhance international cultural co-operation and maintain a proper role for legal trading and inter-State agreements for cultural exchanges”. Where does this process stand today?

A **conference to be held in Rome on 8 and 9 October 2020** (in presence and virtually) will attempt to take stock of the achievements of the 1995 Convention, raise awareness of the importance of uniform laws for the restitution and return of cultural objects, strengthen synergies between other international instruments and other areas of UNIDROIT’s work and, finally, explore future steps and projects to be developed within the framework of the Academic Project on the 1995 Convention (UCAP) whose main objective is to promote a legal environment favourable to the restitution and return of stolen or illegally exported cultural objects.

[Programme](#)

[Preregistration](#) (to obtain the link to connect to the Conference)