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**Item No. 9 on the agenda: International Protection of Cultural Property:  
Implementation and status of the 1995 Convention**

(prepared by the Secretariat)

<i>Summary</i>	<i>Report on the status and follow-up activities</i>
<i>Action to be taken</i>	<i>The Governing Council is invited to take note of the activities to promote the UNIDROIT instruments on the international protection of cultural property</i>
<i>Mandate</i>	<i>Work Programme 2026-2028</i>
<i>Priority level</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Related documents</i>	<i>UNIDROIT 2026 – C.D. (107) 2</i>

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The [UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects](#) (“the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention”) was opened for signature in Rome on 24 June 1995 and entered into force on 1 July 1998 following the deposit of the fifth instrument of ratification pursuant to Article 12 of the Convention.

2. The high level of priority accorded to the implementation of UNIDROIT instruments was again confirmed in the 2026-2028 Work Programme. This document provides an update on UNIDROIT’s activities concerning the promotion and implementation of the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention and the Model Provisions on State Ownership of Undiscovered Cultural Objects since the 105<sup>th</sup> session of the Governing Council in May 2025. For activities through December 2025, please refer to the 2025 Annual Report (UNIDROIT 2026 – C.D. (107) 2).

**II. STATUS**

3. As of 10 March 2026, the Convention had 56 Contracting States (see the Annexe for details).

4. UNIDROIT is currently assisting several States that are far advanced in the process of accession towards finalising the formal deposit of the instrument with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Depositary of the Convention (among which, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Mauritania, Mongolia and Sudan). To this end, UNIDROIT will continue to hold virtual meetings of the Informal Ratification Task Force.

### III. INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

5. UNIDROIT pursued its cooperation with several institutions, among which UNESCO, INTERPOL, UNODC, ICCROM, the International Council on Archives (ICA), the African Union, ASEAN, ICESCO, the European Commission, NATO, the Antiquities Coalition and the Qatar National Library.

6. On 22 October 2025, UNIDROIT welcomed a high-level delegation from the Spanish Ministry of Culture (*Consejo de Patrimonio Histórico Español*), together with representatives of the Civil Guard and the National Police, to discuss Spain's recent initiatives to combat illicit trafficking of cultural property and promote the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention.

#### A. The G20 for Culture Working Group - South Africa

7. Within the framework of the G20 Culture Working Group under the South African Presidency, a series of thematic webinars were organised in 2025. In April, UNIDROIT participated in the first webinar on Priority 1, "Safeguarding and restitution of Cultural Heritage to protect Human Rights," with Ms Marina Schneider, Principal Legal Officer and Treaty Depository, contributing as both speaker and moderator. The session aimed to promote knowledge exchange, identify gaps and priorities, and develop recommendations for the Working Group, and highlighted the role of UNIDROIT instruments – particularly the 1995 Convention and the Model Provisions on State Ownership of Undiscovered Cultural Objects – in supporting these objectives and reflecting the Presidency's themes of solidarity, equality and sustainability.

8. UNIDROIT welcomed the [KwaDukuza Declaration of the G20 Ministers of Culture](#), adopted on 29 October 2025, which refers to UNIDROIT's work in paragraphs 14 and 34. It recognises culture as a driver of sustainable development and calls for stronger international cooperation to safeguard and return cultural heritage, including through effective implementation of instruments such as the 1995 Convention. This was followed by the [G20 South Africa Leaders' Declaration](#) of 23 November, which acknowledges the importance of the return or restitution of cultural property of fundamental spiritual, historical and cultural value for countries of origin, and reaffirms support for open and inclusive dialogue on these issues.

#### B. European Commission Sub-group of experts on dialogue with the art market

9. Since 2023, UNIDROIT has taken part in the work of the European Commission's Sub-group of experts on dialogue with the art market, which meets twice a year. The Sub-group of experts represents a component of the European Commission's 2022-2025 Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods and aims to establish a regular dialogue with the art market on subjects relevant to the fight against illicit trafficking. Due to the interest shown by the members and the Commission, the decision was made to maintain the Sub-group beyond 2025.

10. In February 2025, UNIDROIT participated in the third online meeting of the Sub-group to continue discussions, in particular on measures to combat trafficking on online platforms, including the potential use of the Digital Services Act, and an EAC-funded project presented by ICOM under the Action Plan against Trafficking in Cultural Goods. In February 2026, UNIDROIT was represented at the fourth meeting of the Expert Sub-group, held in person in Brussels, to discuss policies, studies (namely, the latest Supranational Risk Assessment Report (SNRA) on money laundering and terrorist financing, with a focus on high-value goods, works of art and antiques, as well as the "Study on the scale and economic dimensions of the EU art market"), and other initiatives (recent research and innovation for the protection of cultural goods against illicit trafficking, including the Common European Data Space for Cultural Heritage) related to the protection and trade of cultural property in the single market.

## C. ICOM

11. On 11 March 2025, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Hellenic National Committee, with the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, launched the “Red List of Greek Cultural Objects at Risk” at the Acropolis Museum, in the presence of Minister Ms Lina Mendoni and ICOM Director General Ms Medea S. Ekner. UNIDROIT took part in a dedicated roundtable in support of this tool, which strengthens due diligence under the 1995 UNIDROIT. The event also marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Red Lists.

12. On 12 November 2025, Principal Legal Officer Ms Schneider was invited to participate in a side event to the General Conference of ICOM in Dubai, UAE, entitled “Illicit trafficking of cultural property and digital tools”. Her first presentation highlighted how the digital tools developed by UNIDROIT’s partners support better implementation of the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, while her second covered the UNIDROIT Project on Orphan Cultural Objects (Private Art Collections) and the interest for museums to join the dialogue and share their best practices.

## IV. THE 1995 UNIDROIT CONVENTION’S 30<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

13. The year 2025 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects. An online conference entitled “*Desafíos de la Restitución de Bienes Culturales. 30º aniversario del Convenio UNIDROIT de 1995*” was held on 24 June 2025 to celebrate this important anniversary, organised jointly by the Department of Law, Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences, Universidad Loyola Andalucía, and the Departments of Civil Law and Business Law, Law Faculty, Universidad Externado de Colombia, within the framework of the UCAP Academic Project.

14. UNIDROIT also contributed to two other valuable opportunities to celebrate this anniversary. First, on the occasion of the launch of the Oxford Commentary to the 1970 UNESCO and 1995 UNIDROIT Conventions on Stolen or Illegally Transferred Cultural Property (published in 2024 as part of the series [Oxford Commentaries on International Cultural Heritage Law](#)), UNIDROIT organised a dedicated side event to the 105<sup>th</sup> session of the Governing Council in Rome (May 2025). In addition, on 4 February 2026, UNIDROIT Legal Officer Priscila Andrade delivered a presentation on the role of due diligence in the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention in a Portuguese-language webinar organised by the Court of Auditors and Public Prosecutor’s Office of the State of Paraíba (Brazil), the Postgraduate Program in Legal Science of the Federal University of Paraíba, and the Brazilian branch of the International Law Association.

## V. UNIDROIT CENTENARY

15. A Workstream Committee on Cultural Property (CPWS) has been created for the Centenary, chaired by Prof. Manlio Frigo (Honorary Professor, University of Milan, and partner in Bonelli Erede) and responsible for the drafting of a *white paper* assessing the UNIDROIT instruments in this field and developing a strategy for the future. The Workstream has been focusing on several key instruments, including the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995), the UNESCO–UNIDROIT Model Provisions on State Ownership of Undiscovered Cultural Objects (2011), and the ongoing UNIDROIT Project on Orphan Cultural Objects (Private Art Collections).

16. The CPWS is coordinated by Principal Legal Officer and Treaty Depositary Ms Marina Schneider from the Secretariat. The remaining participants are H.E. Angelo Dan (Ambassador, Deputy Permanent Representative, Embassy of Benin to France), Keun-Gwan Lee (Member of the UN International Law Commission and Professor, School of Law, Seoul National University), Vincenzo Negri (Researcher, *Institute des Sciences Sociales du Politique*, ENS Paris-Saclay), Marc-André Renold (UNESCO Chair in International Law for the Protection of Cultural Property and Honorary Professor, University of Geneva, Switzerland), and Ana Filipa Vrdoljak (Professor, UNESCO Chair in

International Law and Cultural Heritage and Co-coordinator, UNESCO-UNITWIN Network on Culture in Emergencies). The CPWS is also coordinating with the Workstream on Sustainable Development.

## **VI. CONFERENCES, TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES**

### **A. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries**

17. UNIDROIT was invited to participate in the inaugural International Forum on “Culture Education for Integrated Heritage Protection” (1-2 May 2025) followed by an Education Module on Integrated Heritage Protection - Focus on the Fight against Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property in the GCC, held in Abu Dhabi from 3 to 6 May 2025 and organised by the Department of Culture and Tourism of Abu Dhabi (DCT). The event brought together a leading group of policymakers, academics, educators, cultural heritage experts, legal professionals, and technology specialists to explore the intersection of culture, knowledge, and heritage preservation. Ms Marina Schneider, Principal Legal Officer and Treaty Depository, was part of the Scientific Committee.

18. On 21-24 September 2025, UNIDROIT took part in the Fourth Doha Conference on Combating the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property, held by the Qatar National Library, with the theme “Crisis Preparedness and Cultural Heritage Protection – Prevention to Recovery”.

19. UNIDROIT was invited to take part in the “International Conference on Combating Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property”, held in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on 29 and 30 October 2025. The event was organised by the Saudi Heritage Commission, and it brought together international experts, government representatives, and cultural heritage professionals to discuss strategies for protecting cultural property and preventing illicit trafficking.

20. In-person participation at these events afforded excellent opportunities to discuss possible accession to the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention with the relevant authorities, as well as how to enhance the ratification rate in other GCC countries.

### **B. UNIDROIT International Programme for Law and Development**

21. The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention was one of the instruments featured in the fourth edition of the International Programme for Law and Development (IPLD) held in 2025 (“Africa Plus”) in June and July 2025 as well as in the first edition of the IPLD for the Balkans, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia and the Caucasus (BEPCAC), held in Rome in September (which brought together 14 legal professionals from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Montenegro, Serbia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan).

22. With a presentation by the UNIDROIT Secretariat and the Italian Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, this was an opportunity not only discuss the implementation of the Convention with States Parties but also to provide full information on the accession process to representatives from other States. A dedicated meeting was organised for participants who were particularly interested in this area of UNIDROIT’s work, and exchanges have continued since then.

23. The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, as well as other instruments on the international protection of cultural property, will again be presented at the 2026 Africa Plus and BEPCAC editions of the IPLD.

### **C. National and regional capacity-building events**

24. UNIDROIT regularly participates in national and regional capacity-building seminars on combatting illicit trafficking in cultural property, including seminars organised upon specific request by States to improve their understanding of the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, with a view to accession.

To name but a few examples since the previous session of the Governing Council, UNIDROIT took part in the following national or regional seminars:

- On 8 May 2025, then-President Prof. Maria Chiara Malaguti opened the 2025 Arbitration Conference at Bocconi University in Milan, Italy, on “War & Peace and International Arbitration”, featuring a series of panels and roundtables with some of the most influential figures in international arbitration. The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, an important tool in international conflict, was featured in Prof. Malaguti’s introductory remarks as well as the discussions.
- On 18 and 19 May 2025, UNIDROIT was invited by the Algerian Ministry of Culture and Arts and the relevant UNESCO Regional Office to take part in a regional meeting of North African countries on “The preservation and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society”.
- UNIDROIT was invited to speak at the international conference on “The Fight Against Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects: A Coordinated Action through Diplomacy, Law, Technologies, and the Carabinieri’s Role”, organised by the Academic Direction of the Heritage International Institute and the Italian Carabinieri, and held on 1 and 2 July in Rome.
- From 21 to 23 October 2025, UNIDROIT presented at the “International Conference and Capacity Building Workshop on Fighting the Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Properties” in Karachi, Pakistan. Principal Legal Officer Ms Schneider presented the 1995 Convention at the invitation of UNESCO and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Archaeology of Sindh. At the end of the capacity-building workshop, accession to the 1995 Convention was recommended.
- From 18 to 20 November 2025, UNIDROIT took part in a workshop held in Chisinau, Moldova, organised by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe.

25. In 2025 and the early months of 2026, UNIDROIT also participated, in person and online, in several capacity-building activities organised by UNESCO and other institutions for States, among which Albania (judiciary), Costa Rica, Mongolia, East Africa, and Ukraine. UNIDROIT also takes part in training events for African States organised by the Italian Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (co-organised by the African Union and financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation) and for the members of the Command itself.

26. Finally, in 2026 UNIDROIT will also continue to contribute to university courses in Italy and elsewhere (see the 2025 Annual Report) to present the 1995 Convention, the Model Provisions and their synergies with other instruments (for example, the annual lecture at the LUISS University within the Master on Art Law (Rome), UNICATT Master in Advanced Public and Cultural Diplomacy for International Relations (Rome Campus), and the CAS International Cultural Heritage Law and Provenance Studies (University of Geneva) (lecture and Scientific Committee).

## **VII. ACTION TO BE TAKEN**

27. *The Governing Council is invited to take note of the activities to promote the UNIDROIT instruments on the international protection of cultural property.*

## ANNEXE

**UNIDROIT CONVENTION ON STOLEN OR ILLEGALLY EXPORTED CULTURAL OBJECTS  
CONVENTION D'UNIDROIT SUR LES BIENS CULTURELS VOLÉS OU ILLICITEMENT  
EXPORTÉS**

**Adoption:** Place / Lieu: Rome / Date: 24-06-1995

**Entry into force / Entrée en vigueur:** Yes / Oui ≈ Date: 01-07-1998  
Conditions: 5 ratifications (Art. 12)

**Contracting States / États contractants:** **56**

**Depositary / Dépositaire:** Italian Government / *Gouvernement italien*

STATE / ETAT	SIGNATURE	RATIFICATION / ACCESS. / ADHES.	ENTRY INTO FORCE / ENTREE EN VIGUEUR	DECLARATIONS
Afghanistan	-	23-09-05	01-03-06	Arts. 16, 17
Algeria / Algérie	-	09-04-15	01-10-15	Arts. 16, 17
Angola	-	19-06-14	01-12-14	Arts. 16, 17
Argentina / Argentine	-	03-08-01	01-02-02	Arts. 16, 17
Azerbaijan / Azerbaïdjan	-	06-06-03	01-12-03	Arts. 16, 17
Benin / Bénin	-	11-01-21	01-09-21	Arts. 16, 17
Bolivia / Bolivie	29-06-96	13-04-99	01-10-99	Arts. 16, 17
Bosnia-Herzegovina / Bosnie-Herzégovine	-	08-05-17	01-11-17	Arts. 16, 17
Botswana	-	28-08-17	01-02-18	Arts. 16, 17
Brazil / Brésil	-	23-03-99	01-09-99	Arts. 16, 17
Burkina Faso	24-06-95	02-10-18	01-04-19	Arts. 16, 17
Cambodia / Cambodge	24-06-95	11-07-02	01-01-03	Arts. 16, 17
China / Chine	-	07-05-97	01-07-98	Arts. 3(5), 16, 17
Colombia / Colombie	-	14-06-12	01-12-12	Arts. 16, 17
Côte d'Ivoire	24-06-95	23-12-20	01-07-21	Arts. 16, 17
Croatia / Croatie	24-06-95	20-09-00	01-03-01	Arts. 16, 17
Cyprus / Chypre	-	02-03-04	01-09-04	Arts. 16, 17
Denmark / Danemark	-	01-01-11	01-07-11	Art. 14, 16, 17
Ecuador / Equateur	-	26-11-97	01-07-98	Arts. 3(5), 16, 17
El Salvador	-	16-07-99	01-01-00	Arts. 16, 17
Finland / Finlande	01-12-95	14-06-99	01-12-99	Arts. 13(3), 16, 17
France	24-06-95	-	-	-
Gabon	-	12-05-04	01-11-04	-
Georgia / Géorgie	27-06-95	-	-	-
Ghana	-	20-09-19	01-03-20	Arts. 16, 17
Greece / Grèce	-	19-07-07	01-01-08	Arts. 13(3), 16, 17
Guinea / Guinée	24-06-95	-	-	-
Guatemala	-	03-09-03	01-03-04	Arts. 3(5), 16, 17

Honduras	-	27-08-13	01-02-14	-
Hungary / <i>Hongrie</i>	24-06-95	08-05-98	01-11-98	Arts. 3(5), 16, 17
Iran (Islamic Rep. of / <i>Rép. islamique d'</i> )	-	22-06-05	01-12-05	Arts. 16, 17
Italy / <i>Italie</i>	24-06-95	11-10-99	01-04-00	Arts. 13(3), 16, 17
Lao People's Democratic Republic / <i>Rép. Dém. Pop. Lao</i>	-	18-05-17	01-11-17	Arts. 16, 17
Latvia / <i>Lettonie</i>	-	08-02-19	01-08-19	Art. 16
Lithuania / <i>Lituanie</i>	24-06-95	04-04-97	01-07-98	Arts. 16, 17
Madagascar	-	06-12-21	01-06-22	Arts. 16, 17
Mexico / <i>Mexique</i>	-	12-05-22	01-11-22	Arts. 16, 17
Montenegro	-	08-07-19	01-01-20	Art. 16
Morocco / <i>Maroc</i>	-	03-08-22	01-02-23	Arts. 16, 17
Myanmar	-	20-06-18	01-12-18	Arts. 3(5), 16, 17
Netherlands / <i>Pays-Bas</i>	28-06-96	-	-	Arts. 3(5), 13(3), 17
New Zealand / <i>Nouvelle-Zélande</i>	-	16-11-06	01-05-07	Arts. 16, 17
Nigeria / <i>Nigéria</i>	-	10-12-05	01-06-06	-
North Macedonia / <i>Macédoine du nord</i>	-	22-08-13	01-02-14	Arts. 16, 17
Norway / <i>Norvège</i>	-	28-08-01	01-03-02	Arts. 13(3), 14, 16, 17
Pakistan	27-06-96	-	-	-
Panama	-	26-06-09	01-12-09	Arts 3(5), 16, 17
Paraguay	13-06-96	27-05-97	01-07-98	Arts. 16, 17
Peru / <i>Pérou</i>	28-06-96	05-03-98	01-09-98	Arts. 16, 17
Portugal	23-04-96	19-07-02	01-01-03	Arts. 16, 17
Romania / <i>Roumanie</i>	27-06-96	21-01-98	01-07-98	Arts. 16, 17
Russian Fed. / <i>Féd. de Russie</i>	29-06-96	-	-	-
Senegal / <i>Sénégal</i>	29-06-96	-	-	-
Slovakia / <i>Slovaquie</i>	-	16-06-03	01-12-03	Arts. 16, 17
Slovenia / <i>Slovénie</i>	-	08-04-04	01-10-04	Arts. 16, 17
South Africa / <i>Afrique du Sud</i>	-	09-01-18	01-07-18	Arts. 16, 17
Spain / <i>Espagne</i>	-	21-05-02	01-11-02	Arts. 3(5), 13(3), 16, 17
Sweden / <i>Suède</i>	-	28-06-11	01-12-11	Arts. 13(3), 16, 17
Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	26-06-96	-	-	-
Syrian Arab Republic / <i>République arabe syrienne</i>	-	27-04-18	01-10-18	Arts. 16, 17, D
Togo	-	03-09-21	01-03-22	Arts. 16, 17
Tunisia / <i>Tunisie</i>	-	02-03-17	01-09-17	Arts. 16, 17
Uruguay	-	30-07-24	01-01-25	Arts. 16, 17
Yemen	-	07-10-24	01-04-25	Arts. 16, 17
Zambia / <i>Zambie</i>	24-06-95	-	-	-