



May 22, 2015

The Honorable Eliot Engel
U.S. House of Representatives
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Engel:

On behalf of the American Alliance of Museums and its more than 28,000 members across the nation, we are writing to endorse your bipartisan bill, H.R. 1493, the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act. We thank you for your leadership on this issue, and we applaud the House Foreign Affairs Committee for approving the legislation on April 23.

Our nation has a long history of safeguarding cultural resources, particularly in nations experiencing political turmoil and armed conflict. The destruction and theft of antiquities in Syria has created a crisis that requires immediate attention, and your bill includes several important provisions to help protect our global treasures including: coordinating U.S. government-wide efforts to protect international cultural property; blocking the importation of Syrian artifacts to stem, and de-incentivize, the looting; and fully leveraging the expertise of the Smithsonian Institution in addressing cultural property protection.

Imposing an import restriction would put the U.S. in good company, joining the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and the European Union in taking steps to protect cultural materials in Syria. We also appreciate that the interagency Coordinating Committee is not intended to usurp or interfere with the important work of the Cultural Property Advisory Committee, and we recognize the value of coordinating the international cultural property protection activities currently being undertaken by numerous private and governmental entities.

We are pleased to join the Society for American Archaeology, American Anthropological Association, American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works, Archaeological Institute of America, Preservation Action, Society for Historical Archaeology, United States Committee of the Blue Shield, and U.S. National Committee of the International Council of Museums in endorsing this bill.

Museums play a critical role in society, preserving our cultural heritage and serving as witness to history. It is abhorrent that thousands of years of history have already been destroyed or remain at risk. We urge the U.S. Senate to pass this bill without delay.

Thank you again for your leadership on this issue. Please let us know if we can provide any additional support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ford W. Bell".

Ford W. Bell, DVM
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura L. Lott".

Laura L. Lott
Incoming President and
Chief Executive Officer