



DPI/NGO Relations invites you to the  
Briefing  
***"Return and Restitution: The Question of Returning Cultural Property to the  
Countries of Origin"***

**Date:** Thursday, 3 November 2011

**Time:** 10:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

**Location:** Salvation Army Auditorium, 221 East 52<sup>nd</sup> Street

**Background Information**

"Culture is the soul of a nation. The illicit removal or destruction of such property deprives people of their history and tradition. Restitution is the only means that can restore damage and reinstate a sense of dignity."

*-Anastassis Mitsialis, Permanent Representative of the Mission of Greece to the United Nations General Assembly, November, 2009*

Cultural heritage serves as a link between new and old cultural traditions, allowing nations to forge an identity based on their history. Unfortunately, due to their commercial value, cultural objects have often been threatened both by present day illicit trafficking and past colonial plundering. The return of displaced cultural properties is a fundamental means of restoring and reconstructing the heritage and identity of a nation.

The looting and plundering of cultural property has been a widespread practice since ancient times. However, at the beginning of the colonial era theft of cultural property was no longer linked to war or military occupation. Colonization in Africa, Asia and South America displaced cultural heritage to the benefit of Western countries and collections. Today, growing awareness and demand for restitution have shed new light on a once overlooked practice.

Although there is a moral consensus in favour of protecting cultural heritage, the issue of returning property represents an area which puts international cooperation to the test. However, there is room for optimism as more attention and care is being applied to checking the origin and legitimacy of cultural property in the global market. Museums are

increasingly conforming to ethical codes in acquisition policies, new laws are being passed and voices are being raised in favour of the protection of cultural property worldwide.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continues to act as the leading advocate for the return, restitution and improved access to cultural objects. The 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, in which member states agree to protect the cultural property on their territory and fight its illicit import, export and transfer, has been ratified by 120 Member States. Furthermore, in 1978 UNESCO created the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation to act where international conventions cannot be applied. Utilizing awareness-raising, advisory activities and innovative partnerships, UNESCO is the leading body which promotes mediation and exchanges of cultural property.

This week's Briefing looks at what is happening globally and the role that each of us must play in protecting our cultural heritage.

**All Briefings begin promptly at 10:15 a.m. and we ask that our audience be seated by 10:00 a.m. sharp.**

*MODERATOR*

**Maria-Luisa Chavez**, Chief, NGO Relations, Department of Public Information

*SPEAKERS*

**Mr. Dimitris Caramitsos-Tziras**, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations

**Rochelle Roca-Hachem**, Cultural Programme Specialist, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

**Ms. Sharon Levin**, Assistant United States Attorney, Deputy Chief, Asset Forfeiture, Southern District of New York

**Jane Milosch**, Director, Provenance Research Initiative, Office of the Undersecretary for History, Art and Culture, Smithsonian Institute

United Nations-produced videos relevant to the theme of the Briefing are sometimes screened during the session. For Briefing information please call the DPI/NGO Resource Centre at +1-212-963-7232 / 7233 / 7234 or e-mail [dpingo.briefings@un.org](mailto:dpingo.briefings@un.org). To receive the Briefing information electronically, please email [dpingo.briefings@un.org](mailto:dpingo.briefings@un.org). You may also visit the DPI/NGO Relations Cluster website at [www.un.org/dpi/ngosection](http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection), where archived web casts and audio (both, when available) of the Briefing may also be accessed.

Requests for guest passes should be faxed on organization letterhead to the DPI/NGO Resource Centre at +1 212-963-2819 or e-mailed to [dpingo.briefings@un.org](mailto:dpingo.briefings@un.org) AT LEAST TWO DAYS PRIOR to the Briefing. [Please note that pass requests received at any other email address will not be processed.] All guest passes should be picked up at the DPI/NGO Resource Centre, Room GA-37, on the morning of the Briefing. NGOs are reminded that the Briefing starts promptly at 10:15 a.m.