

## **SAFE ORGANIZES LETTER-WRITING AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IN FAVOR OF THE RENEWAL OF BILATERAL AGREEMENT WITH GUATEMALA**

**New York – March 1, 2007 –** The non-profit organization SAFE/Saving Antiquities for Everyone has organized a letter writing and awareness campaign to encourage the involvement of the public and interested parties to support the extension of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that now exists between the United States and the Republic of Guatemala concerning the imposition of import restrictions on archaeological objects and materials from pre-Hispanic cultures.

On March 15 from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. the US Department of State's Cultural Property Advisory Committee (CPAC) will hold a public hearing in Washington, DC to review the Guatemala request to extend the MOU, which has been in place and is set to expire in September 2007.

“The most direct way of removing the incentive to loot and smuggle cultural artifacts is to sever the chain of supply and demand,” says SAFE president Cindy Ho. “Continuing import restrictions on pre-Columbian artifacts from Guatemala into the US eliminates a huge outlet for these looted treasures. We urge everyone with an interest in preserving the past to participate in SAFE’s letter writing campaign and show their support for Guatemala's request to extend the MOU.”

For details, please visit <http://www.savingantiquities.org/Guatemalamou.php>

According to journalist and SAFE volunteer Chris Heaney, the looting of archaeological sites for saleable artifacts, from Guatemala and other culture-rich nations around the world, continues to expand despite the best efforts of source countries and international agreements such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention. Fueled by international demand, the multi-billion-dollar black market antiquities trade strips known and unknown archaeological sites of their artifacts, architectural elements, and an incalculable amount of scientific and historical context. To help stem the loss of its culture heritage, the Guatemala Ministry of Culture protects the country's most prominent sites with guards. Government-sponsored archaeological programs locate, register and excavate additional sites. Joint America-Guatemalan excavations at sites such as Waka - a key location in the power struggle between Maya superpowers Tikal and Calakmul - also discourage looting.

Guatemala and the US’s collaboration to stop the looting problem began in 1991. Facing a flood of looted and smuggled Guatemalan artifacts, the US took emergency action. In September of 1997, Guatemala and the US took a second important step by signing an MOU that restricted importation of certain types of pre-Columbian archaeological material from Guatemala. In September of 2002, the MOU was extended for another five years.

“It is necessary to renew the bilateral agreement, so that Guatemala's archaeological history will be safeguarded,” says Cindy Ho. “Otherwise, the progress that the US and Guatemala have achieved these past ten years will be for naught. The resulting loss to Guatemala’s history, and to our understanding of pre-Columbian art and culture, would be immeasurable.”

### **About SAFE**

SAFE/Saving Antiquities for Everyone, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, creates educational programs and media campaigns to raise public awareness regarding the importance of preserving cultural heritage worldwide. SAFE is a coalition of professionals in communications, media, and advertising working alongside experts in the academic, legal and law enforcement communities. SAFE has no political affiliations.