

January 23, 2013

Cultural Property Advisory Committee  
Cultural Heritage Center  
Department of State, Annex 44  
301 4th Street, SW.  
Washington, DC 20547  
Fax (202) 453- 8803

Dear Colleagues,

As an academic archaeologist who has worked in Cambodia since 1996, I support the extension of the Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia Concerning the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Khmer Archaeological Material ("MOU"). This MOU between the Cambodia and the United States helps protect Cambodia's cultural heritage, and this effort is particularly important for several reasons outlined below.

#### REASONS TO SUPPORT THE RENEWAL OF THE MOU

**1. Looting continues to be a major problem in Cambodia today, and has been exacerbated by the rapid pace of economic development.** Cambodia is a poor country that has undergone extensive economic development in the last 15 years, and this development has exacted a huge toll on Cambodia's archaeological heritage. Looting continues to be a major problem across Cambodia, from its southern provinces (where I worked for 15 years) to the Angkor region. The country currently lacks the full resources to require comprehensive cultural resources management, or to maintain an effective 'heritage police' to prevent looting anywhere outside of the Angkor Archaeological Park (NW Cambodia).

**2. The US remains a major market for Southeast Asian antiquities, and Khmer art is now in vogue.** Wealthy Americans are among the avid collectors whose desire for antiquities damages Cambodia's heritage. Cambodian antiquities are now considered among the more desirable commodities on the illicit art market. Not only do museums occasionally purchase looted antiquities, but Cambodia antiquities are easily available to American collectors online.

**3. These import restrictions do not obstruct access to collections in Cambodia for archaeologists and art historians.** The Cambodian government has been actively involved in making collections available for international exhibits, and foreign archaeologists working in Cambodia have had excellent access to collections for research purposes. Maintaining strict import restrictions does not hinder research; it prevents trafficking in illicit antiquities.

For more than 15 years, Cambodia has welcomed myriad international organizations to the country to engage in architectural conservation (the Angkor area hosts more than 12 international teams at present, and many have been there for more than a decade now); it also welcomes foreign NGO's that focus on heritage (Heritage Watch, Friends of Khmer Culture) and individual efforts by academic researchers like myself to promote training, museum development, and education. I have now worked with Khmer colleagues in all of Cambodia's government heritage organizations on these initiatives for more than 15 years; they remain supportive, they send me their students, and they collaborate with me in every training opportunity.

### **HOW THE UNITED STATES COULD BE A BETTER INTERNATIONAL PARTNER IN CAMBODIAN HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

Supporting Cambodia's historic preservation efforts is an ethical imperative for the United States; it is also a smart political tactic for our country as we look to a future that is oriented toward Asia. Historic preservation is a form of 'soft diplomacy' that helps our country's reputation as well as that of the country in which we work. The United States' contribution to Cambodian heritage management remains modest in contrast with resources and support supplied by Japan, China, and France. If our country decides to make a larger and more sustained commitment to Cambodia, supporting some (or all) of the following activities would substantially strengthen the preservation of Cambodia's archaeological resources.

1. Offer US support for country-wide inventories of archaeological sites. Both the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and the APSARA Authority have developed integrated GIS databases that contain information on archaeological sites across the country. This effort would build on the EFEO programs with the Ministry of Culture/Fine Arts and the CISARK database and APSARA Authority, part of a collaborative program with the University of Sydney. Further collaboration with other partners is needed to develop country-wide archaeological site databases that can be used as management tools.
2. Provide US support for more GIS and database training to use these integrated databases. Junior Khmer professionals working in the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, APSARA Authority, Preah Vihear Authority and the Royal Academy are ready and willing to get the training needed to use these databases. But they need financial support for training and technical advice.
3. Offer US support to complete the country-museum collections inventories (including National Museums in PP and SR and also provincial museums). Previous projects have begun (but not completed) such inventories; all funding for those efforts came from other western countries like Australia. The United States, with its fine national museums, could help.

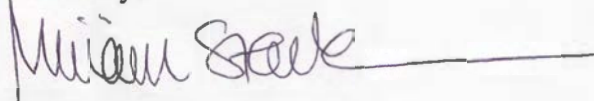
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Department of Anthropology

4. Provide US support for short-term, targeted field- and lab-training programs to build capacity. The US could provide direct funding for this sort of work, which is now done by a group of researchers (including myself) who tap various foundations for small pockets of funding.

On behalf of Cambodia's heritage and its descendant communities, I urge that the committee recommend that the United States extend this Memorandum of Understanding. We seek to protect Cambodia's precious cultural heritage as part of our efforts to protect the global cultural heritage, and laud the US government for taking steps in this direction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Miriam Stark", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Miriam Stark  
Professor  
Co-Investigator, Greater Angkor Project  
Co-Director, Lower Mekong Archaeological Project