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Cultural Property Advisory Committee  
Cultural Heritage Center  
SA-5, Fifth Floor  
Department of State  
Washington, DC 20522-0505

May 10, 2014

Dear Madame Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my support for the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the United States and the Arab Republic of Egypt. I have over 20 years of archaeological fieldwork experience in the Middle East (including one season at Memphis, Egypt). My main area of research is on the trade in Middle Eastern antiquities; more specifically, I am interested in the legal market in Israel. Although my work is not focused on Egyptian material, my analysis of the Israeli market and attempts to identify networks of trade bring me into contact with putative Egyptian material. This is what motivates this letter. I wish to address Determination 3, particularly providing “information as to how other nations with a market in antiquities from the requesting nation attempt to control the market in such artifacts is therefore relevant to this determination”.

Under the 1978 Antiquities Law in Israel it is legal to buy and sell artifacts that predate 1978. In the Israeli market there are artifacts legitimately available for sale from all over the Middle East, including Egypt. Unfortunately the legal market also contains illegal material that was recently looted or stolen from museums or other cultural institutions. The Israel Antiquities Authority has a dedicated body (the Anti-Theft unit) charged with monitoring and oversight of the licensed trade. They routinely check licensed shop inventories in order to ensure that all materials are legitimately available for sale (i.e. predating the 1978 law).

In Israel the market for Egyptian material is robust and there are Egyptian antiquities for sale in many of the licensed shops – some legal and some not. In a recent case (September 2013) the Egyptian Ministry of State of Antiquities requested that the Israel

Antiquities Authority (IAA) halt the sale of a collection of ancient Egyptian artifacts from two licensed dealers (Aweidah Gallery and Baidun) in Jerusalem. Egyptian authorities identified the items as stolen and the IAA acted quickly to stop the auction of some 126 artifacts. In November of 2013 most of these items (all but 20) were successfully repatriated to Egypt.

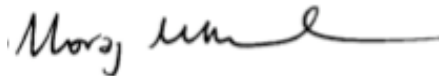
The Anti-Theft Unit of the Israel Antiquities Authority recognizes that Israel is not only a market nation, but it is also a transit nation (a conduit for artifacts coming from places like Egypt and passing through Israel on to markets in London and the United States). There are confirmed reports (2011, 2013) of recently looted Egyptian material being smuggled into the Gaza Strip and then moving into the Israeli market or passing through Israeli ports to destination markets elsewhere.

In acknowledging the destruction of Egyptian cultural heritage due to the demand for Egyptian artifacts in the global marketplace the Israel Antiquities Authority makes many efforts to prevent the movement of illegal material at its borders and from the licensed antiquities shops.

I respectfully ask that the committee recommend approval of the proposed MoU between the United States and the Arab Republic of Egypt concerning the imposition of import restrictions on the archaeological and artistic material for which protection is requested.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information on the legal market in Israel.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Morag M. Kersel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Morag M. Kersel