

STATEMENT BY THE WORLD ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONGRESS

The World Archaeological Congress* (WAC) notes with alarm and extreme concern the unfolding situation in Iraq where, alongside the increasingly distressing humanitarian situation, there appears to be a significant increase in damage to and looting of archaeological museums including, apparently, those of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. Damage and loss of material in the museum in Baghdad would be of particular concern given the huge importance of the collections held there for all humanity. WAC urges all in Iraq to use every means possible to protect the irreplaceable cultural heritage of the country held in museums and archaeological sites.

WAC's Statutes acknowledge and endorse the pivotal roles of the UN and UNESCO and emphasis the primacy role of local communities in the control of their cultural heritage. WAC particularly reiterates this latter principle in emphasising the key role that Iraqi archaeologists must play in the protection of the cultural heritage of Iraq. However it is clear that Iraqi professionals cannot at present alone solve all of the problems facing the Iraqi cultural heritage. WAC therefore

- offers the expertise of its members and in particular its ability to act as an independent arbitrator and facilitator in the protection and conservation of the Iraqi cultural heritage
- endorses the pivotal role of the UN and UNESCO and their Conventions in the protection and conservation of the cultural heritage
- calls for the Coalition forces to take a far more proactive stance in the protection of cultural heritage than it appears has happened so far
- urges the Coalition forces to identify, liaise with, and support key Iraqi individuals within the Ministry of Culture and Department of Antiquities.

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*For further information concerning the World Archaeological Congress please see <http://www.wac.uct.ac.za/>