



INTERPOL

The background of the entire page is a photograph of an ancient stone temple, likely the Temple of Bel in Palmyra. The temple is in a state of significant ruin, with many columns and sections of the facade missing or heavily damaged. The stone is pockmarked with numerous bullet holes. The sky is overcast and grey. A white chevron symbol is positioned above the main title.

PROTECTING
CULTURAL HERITAGE

Future-oriented policing projects



In keeping with its consistent support of international organisations to strengthen the global community, the United Arab Emirates – through the Interpol Foundation for a Safer World – is funding seven INTERPOL projects within seven crime areas, including Counter Terrorism, Cybercrime, Illicit Drug Trade, Illicit Goods and Global Health, Vehicle Crime, Vulnerable Communities and Protecting Cultural Heritage.



The INTERPOL Foundation for a Safer World is the rallying point for likeminded organizations to unite with INTERPOL to respond to today's crime challenges. It encourages an international commitment and partnership with the private sector to protect citizens, infrastructures, businesses and investments from the threats of terrorism, cybercrime and organized crime.



PROTECTING
CULTURAL HERITAGE



THE ISSUE



Cultural property forms an integral part of a country's heritage and the history of civilization. However, during the last decade, the world has witnessed a considerable increase in the destruction of cultural heritage due to armed conflict, as well as the organized looting, illicit trafficking and sale of cultural objects. These objects may generate considerable income for terrorist and organized crime groups to support their recruitment efforts and strengthen their operational capability. **Looting of cultural heritage is said to be, together with oil trafficking and kidnapping for ransom, the most common and profitable source of income for terrorist groups.**

The Middle East in particular has been affected by this phenomenon, although it touches other regions including North and West Africa and Central Asia. The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria have provided fertile ground for the destruction, looting and trafficking of cultural objects.

While it is impossible to know the exact number of objects targeted or the exact cost of trafficking in cultural property, it is estimated that several hundred thousand artefacts have already been excavated and removed by criminal organizations and terrorist groups. In Europe, while several thousand items have been seized, mostly at the Turkish borders, many items continue to pass undetected.

In addition, valuable works of art are also targeted by thieves to fund their criminal enterprises. The illicit trade in works of art is sustained by the demand from the arts market, the opening of borders, the improvement in transport systems and the political instability of certain countries.

A further concern is the inability for private buyers, including museums and foundations, to instantly check against INTERPOL's global database of stolen works of art, using a mobile device to verify if the object they wish to purchase has been stolen.


INTERPOL'S ROLE

› A UNIQUE DATABASE

To help tackle the theft and trafficking of cultural heritage and works of art, INTERPOL maintains a global database of stolen works of art and supports member countries in their international investigations that help identify and disrupt the criminals behind the destruction of cultural heritage sites.

The stolen works of art database currently contains 50,000 records, provided by INTERPOL's National Central Bureaus around the world. However, information from certain countries is limited and does not fully reflect the total number of stolen works of art worldwide.

The value of INTERPOL's Stolen Works of Art database has been recognized by the United Nations, most recently by the UN Security Council team monitoring sanctions against the Islamic State, Al-Qaida and the Taliban: "Given the growing risk of terrorism financing through the illicit trade of cultural property, the Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee writes to Member States and encourages them to systematically update INTERPOL's Stolen Works of Art database with detailed information of stolen and seized objects from Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Libya."



25
categories of
objects are
itemized



133
Countries
contribute to the database



50,000
Works of art are recorded in
the database



Museums Universities
Police Auction houses
Art dealers Journalists

have access
to the database



34,000
Number of
searches in 2016



CONNECT, EXCHANGE AND DEVELOP

INTERPOL organizes international conferences and training courses which bring together police, customs officials and stakeholders from the arts world to exchange information, intelligence and best practices.

INTERPOL has signed agreements with UNESCO, the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) to enhance the global fight against the theft and trafficking of works of art. In addition, we maintain close working relationships with other relevant international organizations in the fight to protect cultural property including the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Europol, the Organization for Security and

Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

We are always looking to increase our support to member countries and develop new tools to assist in the prevention and investigation of stolen or trafficked cultural property, and continue to encourage countries to create specialized police units and national databases of stolen and missing objects of art to tackle cultural heritage crimes.



LOOKING AHEAD



➤ **UPDATING THE FUNCTIONALITIES OF THE DATABASE**

INTERPOL's Stolen Works of Art database is a powerful tool, but proposed enhancements in development will further boost its utility and global reach.

Improving the capacity to upload, store and process images within the database is imperative for the protection of cultural heritage. To this end, we are working to update the database to recognize, process and store photos in 3D, as numerous inventories of archeological sites are carried out using 3D technology. The use of such images could also reduce the need for accompanying written texts from Arabic-speaking countries, saving the time required for translations and making the results more easily accessible to all users.

To address the issue of the lack of inventories kept by private collectors, INTERPOL is developing the technology which will allow art collectors to complete online the International Standard Form, referred to as 'Object ID'. This standard document includes all relevant information about the object and could be provided to law enforcement in case of theft, thereby greatly enhancing the chances of recovery of the item.

The background of the entire page is a sepia-toned mosaic depicting several figures in traditional, possibly religious, attire. In the foreground, a person's hands are visible, holding a tablet computer. The tablet screen shows a close-up of a mosaic figure, likely the same one as the central figure in the background, which is being scanned or compared against the application. The overall aesthetic is historical and cultural.

› DEVELOPING A MOBILE APPLICATION

In the event of a theft, police can only add the stolen artwork to INTERPOL's database if they have the necessary details to accurately describe the object: size, artist, date, material, and so on. However, many museums and private collectors do not keep up to date or precise inventories of their existing collections, making it difficult to provide sufficiently detailed descriptions if an item is stolen.

INTERPOL is developing a mobile application which will enable museums and owners of large art collections to create a catalogue of their inventory – including photographs – that can quickly and easily be added to INTERPOL's database in case of theft.

Implementation of the mobile application will first target countries that do not currently have cultural heritage inventories, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. INTERPOL will help collection owners use the application to build their inventories.

Additionally, the application will allow police, customs, private collectors and art dealers to instantly check, using a mobile device, if an object is registered as stolen or unclaimed in the INTERPOL database.



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