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1ª Reunión Sudamericana de Oficiales Especializados en la Lucha Contra el Tráfico Ilícito de Bienes Culturales

Buenos Aires
Argentina

29-31 de octubre de 2012



Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura



Comisión Interamericana para la Lucha contra el Tráfico Ilícito de Bienes Culturales



Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura

Oficina Regional de Ciencia para América Latina y el Caribe
Buenos Aires

Representación de la
UNESCO en la OEA

1ª Reunión Sudamericana de Oficiales Especializados en la Lucha contra el Tráfico Ilícito de Bienes Culturales

Background:

South American countries have an enormous richness in moveable heritage, which is exposed to looting and illicit traffic. With the exception of Chile, all the countries in the region have ratified the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. However, Chile is already working towards the ratification.

Although significant advances have been made in national legal frameworks and regulations, there is still a need of building capacities in national authorities and specialized bodies, enhancing international cooperation to promote knowledge of databases, inventories, and communication tools as well as action strategies.

This meeting is the first cooperation event between UNESCO HQ, the UNESCO Montevideo office and the INTERPOL Buenos Aires office. After the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the 1970 convention in 2010 and the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Convention (20-21 June 2012), it has become particularly important to promote its ratification and effective implementation by a greater amount of countries. For this reason, UNESCO has been carrying out capacity building and awareness-raising events in several regions. Participants made, through a comprehensive questionnaire, a very positive assessment of the activity.

Aim and objectives:

The meeting aims to create build capacities in the specialized police and INTERPOL officers in the national level of South American countries in fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural property. In order to do this, the following objectives must be reached:

- Training the participants in general aspects of the UNESCO Conventions related to the illicit trafficking issue, as well as the UNIDROIT Convention.
- Training the participants in different kinds of heritage that is subject to illicit trafficking.
- Sharing specialized available techniques and tools for police use, legislation and organizations that work together in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property in different countries of the region.
- Showing the good practices in devolution and restitution of cultural property.

In order to reach these objectives, the event counted with the participation of expert speakers from UNESCO, specialized police as well as other special bodies and authorities.

Abstract and results

This meeting serves as a starting point of a cooperation effort between UNESCO HQ, UNESCO Montevideo and the Regional INTERPOL Office in Buenos Aires in the fight against illicit traffic of cultural property. Between the 29 and 31 of October 2012, experts in illicit traffic and heritage carried out a capacity building meeting for INTERPOL personnel and specialized police from several South American countries in this key aspect.

Culture Specialist from UNESCO Montevideo, Frédéric Vacheron made an introduction by presenting to the audience a video that showed the effort UNESCO has been making for the protection of Culture through seven conventions. Moreover, Edouard Planche, from UNESCO HQ deeply explained the conventions related to protection of moveable heritage from 1954 to 1970 as well as the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention. In that sense, he also explained the implications that such international instruments have for national legal frameworks, structures and efforts to protect cultural property that might be vulnerable to looting and illicit traffic

Professionals in archaeology and anthropology explained general aspects and concepts of these sciences, and showed cases in which objects belonging to either one's heritage had been object of trafficking and lately restitution.

Participants from the different countries shared their experiences in investigation procedures, successful cases, good practices, as well as challenges that they have faced in time. The different inventories, databases, communication tools, protocols and confiscation procedures of stolen or trafficked cultural goods were explained. Relations with museums, merchants, authorities were also a subject in the training process.

The participants were greatly pleased with the activity and pointed out the importance for this kind of programmes to keep being implemented, since there are knowledge gaps in the region that need to be filled in this field.

A compilation of documents and relevant publications was distributed amongst the participants, including UNESCO and UNIDROIT Conventions, protocols and academic papers.

Follow-up

Both UNESCO Montevideo and INTERPOL showed their interest to continue with cooperation efforts regarding this common interest. It is expected that further

workshops will be carried out and it is being considered to publish memories of the event.

It was decided:

- The establishment of a working group UNESCO/Interpol on fight against illegal traffic of Cultural Property in South America. This programme will benefit from funding of the Spanish Cooperation in 2013 and will have three main objectives: 1. Capacity of specialized Heritage Police Units in South America 2. Awareness of the general public through a production of a video about the fight against illicit trafficking in South America. 3. Youth Awareness on the subject (UNESCO Associated Schools Network...).

These activities will be implemented by UNESCO Montevideo and the Cultural Heritage Protection Treaties Section in close cooperation with the INTERPOL Regional Office in Buenos Aires and the Heritage specialized Police Unit in each country involved.