

# THE DOMINICAN RED LIST

ILLICIT TRAFFICKING IN CULTURAL PROPERTY IS A SIXTY-BILLION-DOLLAR BUSINESS THAT RANKS THIRD AFTER DRUG AND ARMS TRAFFICKING

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Over a decade ago, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) embarked on the Red List Programme for Endangered Cultural Property. In 2000, through a letter of understanding signed with INTERPOL, ICOM officially established its implementation.

Red lists are not lists of stolen items but rather of object types vulnerable to illicit trafficking in cultural property. To date, thousands of objects have been returned to their countries of origin thanks, among other things, to this extraordinary tool.

Between 2000 and 2006, four Red Lists were published, while from 2007 to 2012 there were eight lists published. It is worth recognizing that ICOM management has been significantly improved since 2007, when a global, inclusive policy was developed.

The latest Red List published by ICOM has been the Red List of Dominican Cultural Objects at Risk. In July 2013, after three long years of work and research, it came to light to protect the Dominican heritage and complete the security mechanism of the Hispaniola Island.

The process of developing a Red List starts when an application is submitted to ICOM. Next, the motivation is presented, the need is justified, the proposal is accepted, funds are raised and, finally, specialists are appointed. That is when the actual work begins.

In the Dominican case, the application was made in 2007 but it was declined. In 2010, following the devastating earthquake in Haiti, international agencies and Interpol required a tool to contribute to the prevention of looting of Haitian cultural property. It was in this juncture that the Dominican list was included to complete the protection mechanism on the Island.

Once accepted, the search for and appointment of specialists who would work on it got underway. Among them were architect César Iván Feris Iglesias, architect Esteban Prieto Vicioso, architect Risoris Silvestre, and museologist Luisa De Peña Díaz as coordinator. They were all honorary volunteers. The Dominican Red List was prepared under the auspices of the Federal Office for Culture of the Swiss Confederation.

After the team was established, the existing protection mechanisms, international laws and agreements, and UNESCO conventions to which the country is signatory were identified. All these instruments provided the legal basis for the processes of seizure, retention and return of cultural property.

The experts then addressed the content and the historical periods to be selected as the basis for preparing the list, and identified available inventories. In the Dominican case, the decision was made to focus on three periods: pre-Hispanic, colonial and republican. The materials to be included were classified, sub-classified by category and carefully selected.

Admittedly, the first selection was incredibly broad; the process of elimination was difficult and painful but necessary to achieve a manageable document designed for experts in areas other than heritage, that is, customs agents worldwide, local police and Interpol personnel.

The Dominican Red List was launched at a ceremony held at the Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana in the city of Santo Domingo and, on the next day, a training workshop on the use of Red Lists by national agents was held.

Dominican cultural property has been looted for decades. In 2005, I witnessed the return of 186 pre-Columbian objects from the United States (Miami airport). Since then, first as Director General of Museums of the Dominican Republic and then as chairperson of the National Committee of ICOM, I looked for tools and mechanisms for the protection of our heritage beyond national borders.



Silver gilt chalice decorated with religious motifs, early 19th century. Church of Santo Domingo. © Red List of Dominican Cultural Objects at Risk, 2013

Dominican heritage protection at the international level is a matter of national dignity. A tool was needed to include the country as a party concerned. After becoming aware of the resource of ICOM Red List and its successful results worldwide, we strived to have a Dominican List. Pure chance and tragedy merged with our determination. We can say today that Haiti and the Dominican Republic are part of this global protection device, which will further discourage those who steal our past and, with it, the opportunity to know each other better and build a brighter future on the basis of knowledge and the inalienable right of human beings to the truth.

This commitment to our heritage was shared with other personalities and institutions, namely César Iván Feris Iglesias, Esteban Prieto Vicioso, Risoris

Silvestre, Frances Desmarais and Renata Kaminker, as well as with the García Arévalo Foundation, the Museum of Alcázar de Colón, the Central Bank Numismatic Museum, the Museo Bellapart, the Naval Museum of the Atarazanas (in the former naval yards), the Museo de la Catedral, the Church of Santo Domingo, and the Cultural Property Inventory Centre and Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana. They are all responsible for this Red List.

The Dominican Red List adds to other lists on the American continent, probably the most seriously looted in the world in the last 500 years. The fight against illicit trafficking in cultural property is a war of all to preserve our past and learn from it, and to defend our cultural heritage, which is actually our most precious treasure. It defines us as a people. 