

Cultural Property Advisory Committee
Cultural Heritage Center
U.S. Department of State
301 4th Street, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20547

February 5, 2007

Dear Members of the Committee:

SAFE/Saving Antiquities for Everyone supports the request to include coins in the pending renewal of the US-Cyprus bilateral agreement.

SAFE is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving cultural heritage worldwide. Our mission is to raise public awareness about the irreversible damage that results from looting, smuggling, and trading illicit antiquities.

SAFE's membership is predominantly American. We come from a variety of backgrounds, professions and interests. We have no special business, academic or career interests at stake except for our shared cultural heritage. SAFE's concerns are consistent with 96% of the American public which favor laws that protect cultural heritage, as indicated by a Harris poll.*

We agree with individual and institutional experts such as the Archaeological Institute of America and the Lawyers' Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation that ancient coins potentially have important archaeological, cultural and historical significance. Their informative value is irretrievably lost when torn from their original context without proper scientific excavation. We therefore support Cyprus's request to include coins minted and found that are more than 250 years old.

The problem of the illicit trade in antiquities — and the strong incentive for pillage of archaeological sites that it creates — was addressed at the international level by the adoption of the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970. Article 1(e) of the UNESCO Convention specifically defines "cultural property" to include **"antiquities more than one hundred years old, such as ... coins..."**

The current request from Cyprus is in keeping with the definitions and parameters of U.S. efforts to stem the pillage of cultural property. As you know, the United States signed the Convention in 1972, the first major art-purchasing country to do so, and subsequently implemented the treaty with the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act of 1983. The United States has had a bilateral agreement with Cyprus on archaeological material in effect for nearly five years, and the United States should continue to work to further enhance this framework.

SAFE urges the Committee to stand by longstanding, bipartisan U.S. policy and decide in favor of this request from Cyprus. While other buyer countries, in Europe and elsewhere, have recently followed the American lead and ratified the 1970 UNESCO Convention, renewing this agreement will show that the United States remains committed to its leadership position on this issue, and that we will continue to advance the work in cultural property protection achieved over the past decades.

Respectfully,

Cindy Ho
President
SAFE/Saving Antiquities for Everyone, <http://www.savingantiquities.org>

*Poll Finds Public Support of Archaeology <http://www.saa.org/pubrel/publicEd-poll.html>