



AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY PHNOM PENH

MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Government returns ancient artefacts to Cambodia

The Australian Government yesterday returned Iron Age ornaments looted from graves in Southeast Asia in a ceremony at the Cambodian Embassy in Canberra.

The Australian Minister for the Arts, Simon Crean, said these ancient objects would be returned to the Cambodian Ministry for Culture and Fine Arts for safe keeping under a new cultural arrangement.

“Cambodian earrings, wrist and leg bangles of bronze dating from the Iron Age were brought to Australia and were for sale on eBay through an Australian gallery,” Mr Crean said.

“Working collaboratively with Heritage Watch, investigations determined these ancient artefacts had been looted from graves and removed in violation of Cambodian cultural heritage law.”

“Illegally removing human remains and cultural property deprives countries of their ancestry and history.

“The Australian government has tough measures in place to protect against the illicit trafficking of cultural property and has put in place this cultural arrangement with Cambodia which also sends out a strong message,” Mr Crean said.

The artefacts were returned on 10 March 2011 in a ceremony jointly hosted by the Royal Embassy of Cambodia and the Australian Prime Minister & Cabinet Office of the Arts. His Excellency Mr Sounry Chum, the Cambodian Ambassador to Australia, thanked the Office for the Arts and Heritage Watch for their thorough work.

“On behalf of the Cambodian government I would like to thank the Australian government for the recovery of these ancient artefacts,” Mr Chum said.

“The return of these artefacts demonstrates the cooperation and understanding between Cambodia and Australia in protecting cultural heritage and combating the illegal trade of cultural property” said the Cambodian Ambassador,” Mr Chum said.

The items were seized under Australia’s *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*. Under this legislation it is an offence to import an object that is prohibited from export under cultural heritage legislation of its country of origin.

Any cultural property imported into Australia must comply with the cultural laws of the source country. A person removing cultural objects without an export permit faces fines of up to a \$100,000 or a five year jail sentence, or both.

Heritage Watch is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the preservation of Southeast Asia's cultural heritage.

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