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27 April 2003

The Hon John Howard MP  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

### **Call for Protection of Iraq's Cultural Heritage**

On behalf of Australia ICOMOS, I am writing to express our concerns regarding the threats to the rich and irreplaceable cultural heritage of Iraq, and our despair about the looting of cultural institutions which has resulted in the loss of collections which are part of the cultural heritage of humanity.

We urgently call on the Australian Government to help implement protective measures for the cultural heritage of Iraq (ancient Mesopotamia) – including historic places, cultural landscapes, archaeological sites, movable objects, libraries, archives and collections.

Australia ICOMOS is the national committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites - a non-government professional organisation primarily concerned with the philosophy, terminology, methodology and techniques of cultural heritage conservation. Internationally, ICOMOS is closely linked to UNESCO, and acts as UNESCO's principal advisor on cultural matters related to world heritage. Internationally, ICOMOS is working with UNESCO, Blue Shield and relevant ICOMOS International Scientific Committees (such as the International Committee for Archaeological Heritage Management) to facilitate international cooperation for the recovery of the cultural heritage of Iraq.

Australia ICOMOS is a strong and diverse national network of cultural heritage experts involved in numerous disciplines and fields of study – both in Australia and worldwide. ***We offer the assistance and expertise of our membership and national and international networks in implementing the needed measures to recover and protect the cultural heritage of Iraq.***

We are aware of current Australian Government moves to identify a task force of Australians with relevant specialist expertise who could assist with the assessment and management of cultural heritage places and collections in Iraq. We commend the Australian Government for this initiative, and offer our active participation and support in furthering this and other important steps.

We have begun to compile a register of members with expertise or knowledge of relevance to the current needs of Iraq's heritage. We urge the Australian Government to urgently take the following actions:

- As an occupying power, and with the other parties of the Coalition, actively protect the major archaeological sites, heritage buildings and collections in remaining museums and libraries by immediately providing either Coalition military protection or an Iraqi police presence.
- Initiate immediate action to mitigate the risks to Iraq's cultural heritage by looting and through the potential damage which could be caused by the actions taken by occupying forces.
- Ensure that the illegal sale and trade of antiquities is stopped in accordance with the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export

and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970) to which Australia, the USA and the UK are signatories.

- Support an urgent assessment of the lost and damaged items, and put in place a range of measures to recover looted objects, including amnesty arrangements. A strategically targeted program for the conservation of damaged and recovered items will also be needed. The international community should assist with the reassembling of lost records and archives from external sources.
- Ensure that aid given for reconstruction in Iraq is closely linked to the appropriate protection and management of cultural heritage.
- Facilitate, as a high priority, the reinstatement of the operations of Iraq's renowned Antiquities Department (and its strong heritage legislation) with UNESCO support. Work with Iraqi specialists to identify the most needed tasks requiring international support.
- Call on the International Council of the Blue Shield to coordinate international efforts to mitigate damage and present risks to Iraq's cultural heritage.

Internationally, ICOMOS is currently working with UNESCO to develop advice and programs for Iraq. In Australia, Australia ICOMOS can mobilise its network of professionals to assist is very keen to meet with you or officers of relevant government agencies to advise on the most appropriate and helpful actions that can now be undertaken.

Yours sincerely,



**Kristal Buckley**  
**President, Australia ICOMOS**

cc. Senator, the Hon Robert Hill, Minister for Defence, Leader of the Government in the Senate  
The Hon Dr David Kemp, MP, Minister for the Environment and Heritage  
The Hon Alexander Downer, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade  
The Hon Kevin Rudd, MP  
Professor Ken Wiltshire, Chairman, Australian National Commission for UNESCO  
Matthew Peek, Australian delegate to UNESCO