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The Rt Hon Jack Straw MP  
Secretary of State  
The Foreign Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH



1 May 2003

*Dear Secretary of State,*  
IRAQ'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

I promised to follow-up our conversation of yesterday in writing.

Tuesday's seminar at the British Museum went well. It was attended by experts from around the world, and there was an overwhelming sense of unity of purpose. The international museum and archaeological communities stand ready to support the Iraqis in protecting and conserving their rich cultural heritage. Donny George, the Director of Research from the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, gave a powerful account of the scale of loss.

I took three key messages away from Tuesday's meeting. First, that there is real concern that Iraqi treasures are already leaving the country through unprotected borders. I realise that Coalition troops have many pressing priorities, but I would be grateful if you could take this issue up with the US.

Second, there is, as you know, a concern that, when UN sanctions are lifted there should be no diminution of control over the import of Iraqi cultural property. UNESCO, whose Assistant Director-General attended yesterday's meeting, have announced that they will be proposing to the UN a continuing selective embargo on cultural property. This is clearly an option, and we are very supportive of the aim, as, we believe, are the US State Department. However, we need your guidance on how best the international community might achieve this aim.

Finally, there is a major area of sensitivity about the role of ORHA and, specifically, the offer of American help, following the account from Donny George on Tuesday that US troops did not intervene to stop the looting when they were asked. Clearly, the US troops had operational issues to consider, but it appears that the Iraqis would now prefer to work with the BM led, UNESCO sponsored, alliance of Museums looking towards the longer term Interim Iraqi Authority. It is worth

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noting that this alliance includes experts from the Metropolitan and Getty Museums in America, the Hermitage in Russia, the Louvre in France, and Berlin Museum in Germany. My Department, through my officials who will shortly be based within ORHA, can act as a bridge between these organisations. But there is a wider political context and I would, therefore, be grateful for your support in treading this sensitive course.

> I am copying this letter to members of the War Cabinet and to Sir Andrew Turnbull.

Yours



approved by the  
Minister and signed  
in her absence.

TESSA JOWELL

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