

THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF CULTURAL OBJECTS: A COORDINATED ACTION THROUGH DIPLOMACY, LAW, TECHNOLOGIES, AND THE CARABINIERI'S ROLE

PALAZZO WEGIL, LARGO ASCIANGHI 5, 00153, ROME

1-2 JULY 2025



BOOKLET OF THE CONFERENCE

MISSION & VISION OF HII

THE HERITAGE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE IS AN INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC, CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE. IT GATHERS LEADING GLOBAL EXPERTS ON HERITAGE, FROM ALL REGIONS OF THE WORLD, WITH THE AIM OF DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO HERITAGE THROUGH ON-SITE MISSIONS AND DIRECT DIALOGUE WITH ALL THE RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS.

HII LOOKS IN GREATER DEPTH AT THE VERY NOTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE, PROPOSING TO FOCUS ON DIVERSE ASPECTS OF HERITAGE PROTECTION IN CONFLICT AND PEACE, CONCEPTUALIZE MORE CRITICALLY THE NOTION OF TANGIBILITY AND INTANGIBILITY, ADDRESS ALL KIND OF HERITAGE ISSUES AND PUT FORWARD INNOVATIVE WAYS TO DEAL WITH HERITAGE PRESERVATION AND MANAGEMENT.



The Heritage International Institute (HII) aims at protecting and promoting tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage, all over the world and under every circumstance, including during armed conflicts.

By exploring innovative approaches and promoting policy responses for a more effective protection of heritage, both in time of war and peace, HII will contribute to guarantee peace and international security, human rights and sustainable development.

HII contributes to building cultural bridges between countries and people, celebrating cultural diversity, and sharing knowledge and experiences, leading to a deeper and more enriching understanding of the cultural world around us.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The illicit trade in cultural property poses a growing threat not only to the preservation of cultural heritage but also to international peace and security. Countless artifacts continue to be looted, stolen and illegally exported, destroying parts of our collective memory and depriving humanity of evidence of its history. International law seems insufficient to address this phenomenon.

In contexts of conflict and instability, institutional weakness and the absence of territorial control foster the illicit trade in cultural property, which often serves as a source of funding for criminal and terrorist networks and armed non-state actors, further fueling the unrest.

Diplomacy, in all its forms, assumes a central role, enabling the opening of fruitful channels of dialogue aimed at returning cultural property to its rightful owners. It is also essential to promote effective mediation processes, valuing in particular the role of young people as protagonists in conflict prevention, peace building and the creation of inclusive societies.

Italy has always stood out for its unique action against the illicit trafficking of cultural property.

The skills and methodologies developed by the Comando Carabinieri per la Tutela del Patrimonio Culturale (TPC), the first specialized police unit in the world, today represent an international model for effectively combating illicit trafficking.

Likewise, the Italian “Blue Helmets of Culture” Task Force, which intervenes in areas affected by natural emergencies or conflicts, is an international best practice known worldwide. Building on these practices and with the aim of filling the gaps that currently exist in the international framework, the Heritage International Institute is promoting the international conference “The Fight Against Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects through Diplomacy, Law, Technologies, and the Carabinieri’s Role”.

The event will bring together representatives from academia and diplomacy, civil society, civilian and military institutions to analyze the main challenges related to illicit trafficking and propose new and multidisciplinary approaches to address them.

Through the inclusion of a special session dedicated to Somalia, the conference will offer an analysis of a unique case study, providing an opportunity to reflect on the impact of illicit trafficking in conflict areas.

1 JULY 2025

opening of the exhibition:

RECOVERED TREASURES. CULTURAL HERITAGE BETWEEN CRIME, DIPLOMACY AND JUSTICE

Masterpieces Recovered by the
Carabinieri Command for the Protection
of Cultural Heritage

This exhibition features a collection of artifacts and artworks that were looted, illegally exported, or unlawfully transferred and later returned to the Italian State thanks to the investigative and diplomatic efforts of the Carabinieri for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. These treasures are tangible evidence of a global commitment to memory, legality, and international cooperation in safeguarding cultural identity.

PALAZZO WEGIL, REGIONE LAZIO

Largo Ascianghi 5, 00153, Rome



AGENDA OF THE CONFERENCE

FIRST DAY - 1 JULY, 2025

→ 08:30 | Registration

09:00 – 09:45 | Institutional Greetings and Opening of the Conference

- Pr. Francesco Rocca – President of Regione Lazio
- Simona Renata Baldassarre – Regional Councillor for Culture, Lazio Region
- Alfonsina Russo – Capo Dipartimento per la Valorizzazione del Patrimonio Culturale e Direttrice del Parco Archeologico del Colosseo
- On. Edmondo Cirielli – Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
- Gen. D. Pietro Salsano – Commander of the Carabinieri Specialized Units Division
- Prof. Gianluigi Mastandrea Bonaviri – Academic Director Director of Heritage International Institute



PAOLO VERZONE © GIZA, CAIRO, EGYPT. WOOD LAB, CONSERVATION CENTER AT THE GRAND EGYPTIAN MUSEUM (GEM) EGYPT, JUNE 2021

KEYNOTE

→ 09:45 – 10:15 | Opening Keynote Speech

○ **Davide Scalmani** – Directorate General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy of the Italian Ministry of foreign affairs and international cooperation; Heritage International Institute

"Cultural Heritage without Borders: A Call for Cooperation in Combating Illicit Trafficking"

The talk will analyze the role of cultural diplomacy as a mechanism for international cooperation, highlighting best practices and the contribution of Italian institutions in combating the illicit trafficking of cultural property. It will discuss the synergies between diplomacy, law enforcement, and international organizations, as well as the effectiveness of the UNESCO and UNIDROIT conventions within the global regulatory framework.

→ **10:15 – 11:15 | The International Framework Against Illicit Trafficking: Gaps, Challenges, and Perspectives**

This panel explores the current international legal and institutional framework for the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural property. Speakers will examine the effectiveness of existing instruments – such as the UNESCO and UNIDROIT conventions – while addressing persistent gaps in enforcement, jurisdictional limitations, and the need for stronger cross-border cooperation. Special attention will be given to emerging challenges and innovative strategies for improving global protection efforts.

Speakers:

- **Gianluigi Mastandrea Bonaviri** – First Secretary at the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva; Academic Director of Heritage International Institute

“An Evolutionary Interpretation of UNESCO 1970 Convention and UNIDROIT 1995 Convention in the Light of Current Global Challenges”

- **Isabella Salsano** – PhD candidate (University of Salento); HII Department of Heritage and Human Rights

“The Blue Helmets of Culture Task Force, A Fundamental Step Forward along the Path Taken in the Supranational Mission to Protect Civilisation”

- **Marina Schneider** – UNIDROIT Principal Legal Officer & Treaties Depositary

“The 1995 Unidroit Convention – An Indispensable Tool against Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Objects”

- **Cristiana Carletti** – Professor at Public International Law (Roma Tre University); Chief of the HII Department for Heritage and Development Cooperation

“International Heritage: Hard and Soft Legal Standards into Domestic Law under Test to enhance Cultural Heritage Protection”

11:15 – 11:30 | Q&A Session

Moderator: **Serena Epifani?**

→ 11:45 – 12:45 | Law Enforcement and the Fight Against Illicit Trafficking: The Role of Specialized Units

This panel focuses on the crucial role of law enforcement in combating the illicit trafficking of cultural property, with particular emphasis on the experience of the Italian Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. The discussion will highlight successful operational models, international cooperation mechanisms, and the evolving security threats that impact the protection of cultural heritage. The panel will also explore how specialized units contribute to intelligence gathering, recovery operations, and cross-border investigations.

Speakers:

○ **Francesco Gargaro**, Gen. D., Chief of the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage

"The Carabinieri Corp's role in the Recovery and Protection of Cultural Heritage"

○ **Giovanni Conzo** – Deputy prosecutor, Rome Public Prosecutor's Office

"New legislative provisions on crimes against cultural heritage – Law n.22 march 9, 2022"

○ **Luigi Mancuso** – Ten. Col. CC Direttore 1^a Sezione Unità Nazionale Europol SCIP – Direzione Centrale della Polizia Criminale.

"The Europol International investigative activities for the protection of the cultural Heritage"

○ **Tiziano Coiro** – Coordinator Works of Art Unit at INTERPOL

"INTERPOL's Capabilities to Fight Against the Illicit Trafficking in Cultural Property"

12:45 – 13:00 | Q&A Session

Moderator: **Gianpietro Romano**, Ten. Col. CC Specialized Units Division

→ **14:00 – 15:00 | Cultural Diplomacy and International Cooperation: A Multi-Stakeholder Perspective**

This panel brings together voices from academia, healthcare, regional governance, and diplomacy to explore how cultural diplomacy can serve as a powerful tool for international cooperation in protecting cultural heritage. By adopting a multi-stakeholder approach, the discussion will highlight the diverse impacts of illicit trafficking – from cultural loss to psychological trauma – and the shared responsibility of institutions, experts, and policymakers in developing coordinated responses. Emphasis will be placed on interdisciplinary dialogue and the importance of cultural heritage in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts.

Speakers:

○ Welcoming remarks by: **H.E. Ambassador Niccolò Fontana** – Ambassador of Italy in Baghdad TBC

○ **H. E. Saywan Sabir Mustafa Barzani** – Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq to the Italian Republic

○ **Lorenzo D’Ascia** – State Attorney in service with the general Office of the State

“The European Court of Human Rights and Cultural Heritage Protection Instruments: Getty v. Italy”

○ **Giuseppina Bonaviri** – Psychiatric physician, PhD in Experimental and Clinical Neuroscience; Chief Executive Officer of Area Vasta Smart

“Neural and cultural convergences: a neuroscientific approach to the fight against trafficking of cultural objects”

○ **Saveria Mobrici** – Criminal Lawyer and President of the Military Criminal Law Chamber

“Crimes Against Cultural Heritage in Theatres of War”

15:00 – 15:15 | Q&A Session

Moderator: **Marxiano Melotti** – Associate Professor in Sociology of Tourism and Territory (Unicusano)

→ **15:15 – 16:15 | Illicit Trafficking, Cultural Identity, and Collective Memory: Human Rights at Stake**

This panel investigates the far-reaching consequences of illicit trafficking beyond the loss of physical objects, focusing on its impact on cultural identity, collective memory, and fundamental human rights. Through interdisciplinary perspectives, the discussion will highlight how the looting and displacement of cultural heritage erode the symbolic and historical fabric of communities, particularly in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Speakers will explore the legal, anthropological, and ethical dimensions of heritage protection, emphasising the role of restitution and memory in restoring justice and dignity to affected populations.

Speakers:

○ **Alexandra Xanthaki** – UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights

TITLE

○ **Andrea Socrati** – Chief of the HII Unit of Accessibility and Inclusion Strategies, Responsible for accessibility and special projects of the State Tactile Museo Omero

“The consequences of illicit trafficking of cultural objects on the rights of persons with disabilities”

○ **Tina Manandhar** – Professor in Traditional Architecture of Nepal, Archival Science, Numismatics (Tribhuvan University), Coordinator for HII in Nepal

“Preserve or Perform? Rethinking Custodianship of Repatriated Objects in Museums and Communities”

○ **Marco Ramazzotti** – TBD

TITLE

16:15 – 16:30 | Q&A Session

Moderator: **Laura Guercio** – Chief of the HII Unit of Human Rights, Secretary General of the Universities Network for Children In Armed Conflicts

AGENDA OF THE CONFERENCE

SECOND DAY - 2 JULY, 2025

→ 09:00 - 09:30 | Opening of the Second Day

○ Dr. Massimo Osanna – General Director of Museums
of the Ministry of Culture

○ Amb. Alessandro De Pedys – General Director for
Public and Cultural Diplomacy (MAECI)



KEYNOTE

→ 9:30 – 10:00 | Opening Keynote Speech

○ **Nora Weller** – Division of Archaeology (University of Cambridge)

“Heritage held hostage: The case of Kosovo’s archaeological artefacts abducted by Serbia during the war in 1998”

In 1998, during the raging war in Kosovo, over 1,200 archaeological and ethnographic artefacts were moved from the National Museum of Kosovo in Pristina to Belgrade. The Serbian army assisted in removing the artefacts, which were taken to Belgrade on a "loan agreement", but the return never happened.

In the aftermath of the war, the peace agreement which determined the status of Kosovo, known as the Ahtisaari Plan, made one single demand of Serbia within Article 6.1 requiring that Serbia return Kosovo's displaced cultural heritage, the return of archaeological and ethnological artefacts removed during the time of active conflict in Kosovo in 1998–99. According to the Ahtisaari Plan, the return of artefacts should have happened within 120 days from when the agreement took effect. The return of displaced cultural heritage is a norm within international law. What needs to be done for Serbia to take a dignified step, follow its moral obligation, and return the artefacts to where they belong in Kosovo?

Since the end of the war, there is only one object returned with the intervention of Michael Steiner, the UN Secretary-General's former special representative, who in 2002 managed to secure the return of a figurine called the 'Goddess on a Throne' which is a 6,000-year-old figurine, the symbol of Kosovo's entire cultural treasure, also featured in the emblem of Kosovo's capital, Pristina.

→ 10:00 – 11:00 | Illicit Trafficking in the Digital Age: Emerging Technologies, Black Markets, and New Frontiers of Protection

This panel explores how the digital revolution is reshaping both the mechanisms of illicit trafficking and the tools available to combat it. From using cryptocurrencies in black market transactions to developing advanced monitoring software and forensic technologies, speakers will examine the double-edged nature of digital innovation. Contributions will include case studies on the use of crypto assets in the illegal trade of cultural property, software for detection and tracking (such as SWOADS), and the role of digital tools in provenance analysis and the fight against forgery.

Speakers:

○ **Gianluca Vitagliano** – Gen. B. Chief of the Carabinieri Cryptovalue Command

“The Transnational Dynamics of Art Trafficking and the Role of Cryptocurrencies in the Illicit Market”

○ **Salvatore Rapicavoli** – Magg. Section Chief of Carabinieri SED (Data Elaboration Section RACIS – Command of Scientific Investigations)

“The Role of Technology in Tackling Illicit Cultural Property Appropriation: S.W.O.A.D.S. (Stolen Works of Art Database)”

○ **Giuliana Calcani** – Professor of Ancient Art History (Roma Tre University)

“True or fake? Authenticity Issues in the Illicit Market of Archaeological Artefacts”

○ **Emanuele Bellini** – Professor of Information Processing Systems (Roma Tre University)

“Cyber Humanities for the Cultural (Digital) Objects Protection: a New Paradigm for Tackling Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects”

○ **Emiliano Degl’innocenti** – National Research Council, DARIAH-IT National Coordinator

“Integrating Social Sciences and Humanities Critical Infrastructures into Global Strategies against Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects”

11:00 – 11:15 | Q&A Session

Moderator: **Valentina Gastaldo** – Professor in Administrative Law (University of Parma); Chief of HII Department of Heritage and Informatics Affairs, New Technologies and Artificial Intelligence

→ **11:30 – 12:30 | Illicit Trafficking in Times of War: Heritage Under Attack and the Struggle for Justice**

This panel focuses on the looting, destruction, and trafficking of cultural property during armed conflicts. Speakers will examine how war creates conditions of extreme vulnerability for heritage, often targeted as a means of erasing identity, financing hostilities, or exerting symbolic violence. Case studies from recent and ongoing conflicts will illustrate the intersection between war crimes and cultural crimes, the challenges of international accountability, and the urgent need for preventive and restorative mechanisms. The discussion will also consider the role of international criminal law and the responsibility of the international community in safeguarding heritage in war zones.

Speakers:

○ **Fausto Pocar** – TBC

title

○ **Rana Kharouf** – Professor at the Sciences Po., Paris School for International Affairs; HII Academic Board

“The role of international organizations in safeguarding heritage in war zones”

○ **Ahmed Al Fatlawi** – Professor of International Law (University of Kufa); HII Academic Board

“International Humanitarian Law and Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Objects: the case of Iraq”

○ **Luca Fratini** – Coordinator for Women, Peace and Security, Youth, Peace and Security and Mediation Policies, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

“The role of youth and mediator networks in building peace and social Cohesion through combating trafficking of cultural objects”

12:30 – 12:45 | Q&A Session

Moderator: **Hani El Debuch** – Academic Board HII

→ **14:00 – 15:00 | Special Session: Illicit Trafficking in Somalia – A Case Study on Fragility, Conflict, and Cultural Loss**

This special session offers an in-depth examination of the Somali context as a critical case study in the fight against illicit trafficking. Against a backdrop of prolonged conflict, institutional fragility, and transnational criminal networks, Somalia has witnessed the widespread looting and illegal export of cultural objects. The session will explore the historical roots of the phenomenon, the challenges of documentation and protection in conflict zones, and the prospects for recovery and international cooperation. Emphasis will be placed on how the Somali case illustrates broader global patterns of heritage vulnerability and the urgent need for targeted, context-sensitive responses.

Speakers:

- Welcoming remarks by: **H.E. Pier Mario Daccò Coppi** – Ambassador of Italy in Mogadishu TBC
- **H.E. Eng. Ibrahim Omar Shegow** – Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Somalia to the Italian Republic
- **H.E. Farah Sheikh Abdulqadir** – Minister of Education, Culture and Higher Education of the Federal Republic of Somalia
- **Sonkor Geyre** – Chairman of Institute Security Analysis and Federalism; Former DG Ministry of Defense Somalia

“Somalia’s Cultural Heritage: Challenges and Opportunities”

- **Gianluca Frinchillucci** – Chief of the HII Department for Heritage and Exploration History and Director of the “Silvio Zavatti” Polar Geographic Institute in Fermo

“Protecting Somali Historical and Archaeological Heritage: The Puntiland Case”

15:00 – 15:15 | Q&A Session

Moderator: Flavia Orsati – Historian of Arts; HII Academic Board

CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

→ 15:15 – 16:00 | Closing Remarks and Future Perspectives

- **Sergio Iovino** – Chief Executive Officer of the Heritage International Institute
- **Gianluigi Mastandrea Bonaviri** – First Secretary at the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva; Academic Director of Heritage International Institute



SPIRAL MINARET OF THE GREAT MOSQUE OF SAMARRA, UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE, SAMARRA, IRAQ, MIDDLE EAST © ALAMY STOCK, IMAGE ID: 2G8GOEH;



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