UNESCO Sub-regional Symposium
For the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Cultural Heritage in
Southeast Asia
Timor-Leste Country Report

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Implementation of the 1970 UNESCO Convention

Timor-Leste has not yet ratified any of the UNESCO Conventions.

For the past few years, Timor-Leste, together with UNESCO Jakarta, has done specific work regarding the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, and the 2005 Diversity of Cultural Expressions Convention.

All these 3 Conventions were recently approved by Government and sent to National Parliament, to be ratified.
Implementation in the national legal system and in the organisation of services

The two existing national legal frameworks that deal with the 1970 Convention, are:

- Indonesian Law no. 5 concerning items of Cultural Property, from 1992.
According to Government Resolution 25/2011, Cultural Heritage is understood as:

- Archaeological heritage, on land and underwater, including archaeological sites and materials from excavations and archaeological sites.

- Architectural heritage, including several types of buildings from the Portuguese and Dutch colonial periods (including religious heritage), the Japanese occupation period and the Indonesian occupation period.
- Ethnographic and traditional heritage, moveable and immoveable, including traditional architecture, sacred architecture and sites, as well as ethnographic and traditional objects associated with living cultures.

- Intangible heritage, including traditions, oral expressions and languages, social and ritual practices and festivities, knowledge and practices associated with nature and natural resource management, as well as traditional arts and performance, including music, dance and singing.

So far, no specific work with the police or customs has been done. It is expected that awareness raising with both these services will take place in 2015.
In 2014, Government established a Database of Museum Objects and Cultural Property, which will include information on the National Collection of objects, cultural objects existing in Sacred Houses and information on museum objects from collections in museums overseas.

Despite the fact that the Object ID standard is not currently being used, the information on the Database forms covers all the standard information used by that identification system.
There are currently no trained archaeologists in Timor-Leste. Despite this, archaeological investigations led by foreign researchers have been taking place since 2000.

In order to undertake archaeological research in Timor-Leste, researchers have to get written approval from SEAC. In the field, they are usually accompanied by SEAC staff, both from the national and district offices.

A final report is to be provided at the end of fieldwork, which is usually uploaded into SEAC’s website (www.cultura.gov.tl).
There is news of some illicit trade of cultural property in Timor-Leste, usually originating from acquisition of ethnographic objects from remote villages (not from archaeological sites, as there is no illegal archaeological activity known to date).

There is, however, little monitoring of this as SEAC is under resourced in terms of technical staff, and there is also little awareness locally, or from relevant government bodies (e.g. police, customs, district administration).
In 1999, during the civil unrest that followed the public consultation leading to independence, some 1,800 museum objects were taken to Indonesia.

This collection, which was put together during Indonesian times, is of a fundamental importance to the future National Museum of Timor-Leste, currently being developed.

As most of these pieces are unique and cannot be found in the ethnographic record anymore, Timor-Leste has pledged its neighbouring country Indonesia to consider the possibility of offering these objects back, so that one day they can be in display and be shown to the new generations.
One example of such cultural objects that did return to Timor-Leste in the last few years is the Antoulas Collection.

Symeón Antoulas worked with the International Red Cross in Timor until 1999. Before the civil unrest, a collection of more than 60 cultural objects was assembled and taken overseas, for protection.

In 2009, the Government was contacted by Mr Antoulas, who wished to return the objects to Timor-Leste. This finally took place in the same year, and today those objects are part of the country’s National Collection.
There is no formal, organised market of cultural goods in Timor-Leste. Some government departments and NGOs support local trade and selling of cultural goods, and most business is done at a family-base level. The new Cultural Heritage Law, in preparation, shall deal with acquisition and ownership of cultural property.
Bilateral agreements

Within the existing Joint Ministerial Commission between Timor-Leste and Indonesia, there is a Working Group for matters concerning Education, Culture, Youth and Sports.

Amongst the cooperation in the field of culture established between these two countries, the possible returning of cultural objects that were once part of the Provincial Museum of Timor during Indonesian times, is on the table.
Other issues

Code of ethics, awareness raising and education:

In the last few years, some awareness raising activities were conducted by the Department of Cultural Heritage, in schools and within communities.

These are generally used to convey the message that everyone is responsible for the protection of cultural heritage.

SEAC has at least 1 cultural representative per district (13 districts) who support activities at local level.
Cooperation with other international and regional agencies

With the exception of the work carried out in close collaboration with UNESCO, no level of cooperation with international agencies has ever been attempted.

At a regional level, SEAC cooperates with local administration of all 13 districts, as well as with national and international NGOs.
Other legislative, legal and administrative measures

In the process of conducting research to establish its own Cultural Heritage Law, Timor-Leste has used extensively UNESCO’s Database of National Cultural Heritage Laws.

Two of its legal frameworks (National Cultural Policy, from 2009; and Resolution on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, from 2011), are now on line on the website.
Suggestions

Developing a project with UNESCO to raise awareness amongst communities, the youth and local administration on the need to implement the 1970 Convention, based on the premise that Government will soon ratify it.

Request UNESCO to continue its support to the establishment of the National Museum, and to mediate the returning of cultural objects currently in Indonesia.

Organise a regional workshop on the 1970 Convention in Dili, Timor-Leste, in order to raise the profile of the Convention in the country.
Thank you Very Much
For atention