

**Testimony of Dr. Karen Bruhns and Paul Amaroli
On Behalf of the Society for American Archaeology
Before the Cultural Property Advisory Committee
On the Renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding
Between the United States and El Salvador
November 18, 2004**

The current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the governments of the United States and El Salvador, imposing import restrictions on pre-Hispanic archaeological materials, should be renewed. While these restrictions do not by any means solve the problem of the looting of archaeological sites in El Salvador and the smuggling of artifacts from that country to markets in North America and Europe, they represent a crucial part of the framework in the effort to halt these practices and preserve the cultural heritage of the Salvadoran people in particular and the peoples of Central America in general.

Dr. Karen Olsen Bruhns received her B.A. (1963) and her Ph.D. (1967) in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley. After working in local archaeology as an undergraduate and a season on the Teotihuacán Mapping Project (Mexico, 1993), she did independent fieldwork in Colombia (1966, 1969, 1970, proposal outstanding for 2005), El Salvador (1975-1979, 1996-present), Nicaragua (1974), Belize (1980, 1984), and Ecuador (1985-1995). Currently she is the Director of the Cihuatán/Las Marías Archaeological Project for the Fundación Nacional de Arqueología de El Salvador, of which she is a founding member. She has published two books, three monographs, and over 60 professional papers and has presented well over 100 papers on various aspects of archaeology in both professional and public venues. She also maintains 2 professional WWW sites. Professor of Anthropology at San Francisco State since 1972 (full professor since 1980), she has also been active in cultural property issues since the 1970s, including working with U.S. Customs and, for the past 2 years, as a member of the Ethics Committee of the Society for American Archaeology.

Paul E. Amaroli received his B.A. in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley (1979) and is A.B.D. at Vanderbilt University (1987-present). He worked in California archaeology as an undergraduate and in 1978 began his career in El Salvador with a site survey of the Lake Guija region. Since that time he has participated in many projects in that country, including directing excavations at Cara Sucia (the first site to be protected by an MOU with the United States), Cuscatlán (the historic native capital of El Salvador), El Carmen, Izalco (both survey and rescue work on the colonial church), Madreselva, Los Cerritos, El Congo, Cumbres de Cuscatlán, Sonsonate, Nahuizalco, Morazán (survey), San Andrés, El Imposible, Joya de Cerén, Cihuatán, Las Marías, and at many sites in the Acelhuate and Zapotitán Valleys. He has also worked in Guatemala (Proyecto Mar Azul). Mr. Amaroli has served as advisor to the USIS in documenting the illicit traffic in artifacts (1988) and again in 1994-1995. He served in the same position in Guatemala in 1988 and in Honduras in 199. In 1993-1994 he was the Head of the

Department of Archaeology for the Dirección del Patrimonio Cultural of El Salvador, and was responsible for all archaeological sites and archaeologically related problems and issues at the national level. He has taught at various Salvadoran universities. He is currently working with the Fundación Nacional de Arqueología de El Salvador (FUNDAR) as a full time field archaeologist and is Associate Director of the Cihuatán/Las Marías Archaeological Project with Dr. Bruhns as well as being in charge of the many consultations and salvage projects undertaken by FUNDAR. Mr. Amaroli has extensive experience with problems of looting, antiquities smuggling, repatriation issues, and legal issues in El Salvador and Central America. He has given a large number of papers, especially to the Salvadoran community, and is responsible for the majority of the reports submitted to the Salvadoran government by FUNDAR.

The threat to El Salvador's cultural resources – especially pre-Hispanic archaeological material – remains a significant problem, one that threatens to grow worse in the coming years. El Salvador's heritage has been targeted by US and European antiquities merchants and their clients. The Maya sites of Guatemala and Mexico have been largely denuded of artifacts or are strongly protected from looters working for illicit antiquities dealers. Dealers turned to El Salvador, Honduras, and even to Nicaragua in the search of authentic "Maya" pieces to vend on the black market. Should the MOU not be renewed, the flow of antiquities out of El Salvador and the rate of looting will doubtless increase to meet foreign demands for ancient art.

Moreover, it is crucial to view Central America – as the current MOU does when it encourages El Salvador to work with other nations in the region on the problem of looting – as a single unit, in terms of pre-Colombian culture. Should there be MOUs with Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, and none with El Salvador, El Salvador will surely become the gateway of choice through which the cultural heritage of these other countries will flow.

El Salvador has taken notable steps to meet the steps outlined in Article II of the MOU. The government, through the National Council for Culture and Art (CONCULTURA), has made its collections available for scientific research, including through loans of materials to foreign museums. Foreign archaeologists are being granted research permits. In order to improve knowledge of and access to cultural patrimony by the general public, and also decentralize the large numbers of artifacts in the government's collection, site museums have been built at San Andres, El Tazumal, and Joya de Ceren. In addition, the National Museum of Anthropology, destroyed by an earthquake in 1988, was re-opened two years ago, and has recently named a new director, Dr. Gregorio Bello Suazo. Evaluations of the museum's holdings are underway, and the registration of cultural artifacts, required by Salvadoran law, continues.

The government also has made an effort to emphasize the importance of cultural resource protection to the Salvadoran public, including public awareness campaigns about the 1993 Special Law, and with relatively high-profile prosecutions of looters and smugglers. The government also builds public support for the preservation of archaeological sites by highlighting the work that goes on in particular places. The preservation work at Joya de

Ceren, in particular, which has been declared a UNESCO Heritage of Humanity site, is a focus of considerable pride by Salvadoran citizens, as well as by their elected officials.

CONCULTURA itself has a new director and an archaeologist with postgraduate training in the United States (an M.A. from the University of Colorado Boulder), Roberto Gallardo. Mr. Gallardo has been appointed Head of the Archaeology Unit of the Division of Cultural Patrimony. He is closely acquainted with the concepts and issues involved in archaeological protection, preservation, and the problems of looting and dealing in cultural heritage which his country faces on a daily basis.

The people of El Salvador themselves have demonstrated a real commitment to the preservation of their cultural patrimony by the founding of FUNDAR, which is a foundation dedicated to the preservation of the nation's archaeological patrimony. FUNDAR, through contributions from philanthropic Salvadoran citizens, has actively promoted local education, site development, and site protection, and has sponsored an amazingly large number of investigations, such as surveys, registration of sites, and excavations. FUNDAR also works with CONCULTURA to secure funds to purchase sites. Members of FUNDAR have provided expert assistance in identifying smuggled antiquities, as well.

The Salvadoran government has also worked with other Central American nations, including Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala, to address the problems facing the nations' collective cultural heritage. Numerous conferences have been held to evaluate current conditions and to develop ways to improve preservation and interdiction efforts.

Given El Salvador's relatively recent emergence from civil war and the enormous developmental challenges facing that nation, cultural resource preservation continues to be hindered by a shortage of funds, personnel, and infrastructure. In spite of these problems, however, the Salvadoran government continues to demonstrate its seriousness about protecting its cultural heritage. With this in mind, and because the U.S. is a major market for illicit Salvadoran art and artifacts, El Salvador's MOU with the U.S. takes on added importance. With the import restrictions, the U.S. border is an important barrier at which illicit traffic can be interdicted.

We strongly urge the Cultural Property Advisory Committee to recommend the renewal of El Salvador's MOU with the U.S.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF RECENT DEPREDATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN EL SALVADOR

The following is a selection of photographs of recent depredation taken at several archaeological sites in El Salvador.



CHAPERNA LITO SITE (also known as “Asayamba”). Non-saleable ceramics are tossed on a heap.



CHAPERNALITO SITE (also known as “Asayamba”). Detail of some of the Late Classic ceramics left in a heap.



CIHUATAN SITE. This series of pits were dug in the summit of a pyramid under the cover of tall scrub and were revealed after a fire.



EL MONO SITE. Views of two mounds gutted by looters.



LOMA DE RAMOS SITE. A pyramid has been almost entirely destroyed by looting.



LA ESMERALDA SITE. The main pyramid was crisscrossed by looters' trenches.



LAS MARIAS SITE. Karen Bruhns indicates a looters pit in an area of densely crowded platforms.



LAS MARIAS SITE. A looters pit on a terrace in an area concealed by scrub.



LAS TUNAS SITE. This coastal mound was a salt production center in the Preclassic period. The sea has eroded most of the mound, created a literal beach of sherds. Local residents sell the more complete objects and have even sold human skulls from burials.



LAS TUNAS SITE. Karen Bruhns examines the eroding face of the mound.



AZACUALPA SITE. Looters have recently targeted the 80 meter long range structure at this Early Postclassic site. In this view, the structure extends beyond the right edge of the photo.



AZACUALPA SITE. One of several looters pits along the range structure.



PUNIAN SITE. This Late Classic center has been the target of looters for many years. The main pyramid, which appears in this view, was trenched and cored.



PUNIAN SITE. Huge looters pits pockmark an artificial terrace.



PUNIAN SITE. A fresh looters pit is noted by government archaeologists.



CERRO DE ULATA SITE. The main pyramid at this site was trenched by looters. The two individuals in this photograph stand on the tailings of this trench, which extends directly behind them.