



ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT
MINISTRY OF ANTIQUITIES
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER

PRESS RELEASE

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From: Office of Dr. Zahi Hawass, Minister of Antiquities

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Today is a new day, but there are still marches in the streets of Cairo. I am personally very sad for my country. I cannot believe the devastation that has happened in the streets, and that so much has stopped in the last 11 days. We have lost so much, and I do not understand how this could be. It is like a dream for me. I have come into this new position at a very critical time, but the most important thing about this is that for the first time in history Egypt has a Ministry of Antiquities. The reason that this has never happened before was because archaeology was considered a minor thing. Previously, the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) had fallen under the ministries of education, tourism, and, most recently, culture. Now, I am happy to say that there is a Ministry of Antiquities that is separate from the Ministry of Culture.

When I was appointed as the Secretary General of the SCA in 2002, I could do a lot more than I was able to before. I could bring billions of dollars to my country through archaeology. I had a made plan in my mind in 1969, when I was an antiquities inspector at Tuna Gebel. Throughout the course of my life, I was able to follow most of this plan, but today, and for the last 10 days, I cannot think. I have not written one word on any archaeological topics because looking at what has happened to my country, I feel sad. Egypt is my life. I cannot leave the country and live in any other part of the world. I want to die in the sands of Egypt. The most important aspect of my life is to protect my antiquities, and I was astonished to hear all of the rumors about Egypt's antiquities. I am very concerned that several members of the archaeological community have not called me directly to confirm what the rumors they have heard.

What is strange is that from the very beginning of the trouble, when the Internet was off, I was still able to send a daily report to my website, www.drhawass.com. These reports were sent by fax to Italy to enable them to be posted on my website for everyone read, therefore I cannot understand why the rumors still spread. This makes me very upset because we, the Egyptian people, defended the monuments! The most important thing everyone needs to know is that the people in the streets defended the museums, monuments, and sites. When I came into work today, I had to pass through a checkpoint. When the men in the Popular Committees running the checkpoint saw me, they asked, "Sir, how is the museum?" These men may not know how to read or write, but they are worried about their cultural heritage.

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From the first day of protests, I have had an operation room running 24 hours in my Zamalek office. This operation room is connected by telephone with every museum and site in Egypt: Jewish synagogues, Coptic monasteries, Muslim mosques, and ancient Pharaonic, Greek, and Roman sites. We have been producing detailed reports daily. I hope that people all over the world will read my statements and not listen to rumors.

Many people have been saying that Saqqara was looted and it is not true. If anything had happened there, the operation room in Zamalek would have called me immediately and reported what happened. I hope that you will all read each of the statements I have released on my website that say all our sites are safe. The army, curators, antiquities inspectors, and security guards guarded the important sites. As I have said everyday, the only two incidents that have occurred are the break-in at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, and the break-in at the storage magazine in Qantara East, in the Sinai.

As I have already stated, nothing was stolen from the museum; 70 objects were damaged but can be restored. Unfortunately, we cannot restore them now, as we had hoped, because the museum is closed and surrounded by the commanders of the army. The curators are stationed in the control room, and the cameras in the control room can see outside and inside of the museum. We are thankful for all of the offers of help that we have received, but the conservation lab of the EMC can do this easily and beautifully. Egyptians have completed restoration work before this black week began, and we will continue our work when this time passes.

Yesterday, I received a report from Mohamed Abdel Maksoud, the general director of Lower Egypt, that 288 objects stolen from the storage magazine in Qantara East in the Sinai have been returned. He also confirmed that these objects and statues constitute everything that was taken. Of course, the final word can only come when things are calm, and the storage magazine can be subjected to a full inventory. I am confident, however, based on the report, that the 288 objects do make up the total of all of the stolen ones.

The people who are in Europe and America are concerned about Egypt, but what is import to remember is that rumors can be very damaging. These people do not understand our feelings as Egyptians; when I come to Zamalek everyday and when I go to Saqqara, Giza, or the Egyptian Museum, or when call Luxor, Aswan, or the other sites outside of Cairo, it is very stressful. I have young people working and helping in my office 24 hours a day. I have two brave young ladies working for me: Stephanie from America and Beth from Britain. These ladies have been working, with some of my Egyptian assistants and employees, in the office everyday since the protests started, and they are typing up many reports in Arabic and English for me. Stephanie and Beth have decided not to leave Egypt.

I hope that my reports will help you all to feel calm. Each of of my daily reports have been posted on my website, drhawass.com, and the SCA website, http://www.sca-egypt.org/eng/MR_PR.htm. You all know me, if anything happens I will report it right away. Again, and again, and again I tell you that the monuments of Egypt are safe. Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, called me twice yesterday and I gave her the full report that I wrote today, and sent her all the previous reports that I have written; she was so happy to receive the good news. Francesco Bandarin, the director of the UNESCO World Heritage Center, called and was also happy to hear good news. I would like to thank National Geographic, CIPEG, and Blue Shield, for offering words of support as well.