



**THE MINISTRY OF ANTIQUITIES  
OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT  
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Release Date:** 6 February 2011

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

**Subject:**

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Today, I received the “ICOM Preliminary Report on Museums in Egypt.” I believe that this report is mostly based on the statements I made over the past week and are posted here on my website. I very much thank the ICOM organization for seeking a credible source of information regarding the state of Egypt’s archaeological heritage. However, the report includes a statement made by the former director of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Dr. Wafaa el-Saddik, who was already interviewed by the German Newspaper “Die Zeit”. I would like to make it clear here that the information provided by Dr. El-Saddik is untrue and are not based on credible sources. I understand that in the very first hours of this crisis, Dr. el-Saddik immediately left Egypt for Germany. Therefore, she is incapable of knowing the details of the situation. She is also incapable of contacting anyone from the police as she claims. We, the employees of the SCA, now the Ministry of Antiquities, and the Egyptian Army have the correct information. She accused the policemen who were guarding the museum of looting the gift-shop and vandalizing the museum’s galleries. This accusation has no basis and is unjustifiable. I was at the museum while she was sleeping in Germany. I interviewed the nine criminals who looted the gift-shop and broke into the museum’s galleries; they were not from the police. These criminals were arrested by the tourist police at the museum and the Egyptian Army personnel as well as the brave Egyptians who formed a human shield around the museum protecting it from looting. She also has absolutely no basis for her claim that the Memphis open-air museum and magazines were looted; her statements about these sites are untrue.

On another note, I went to the Egyptian museum today with reporters from the Wall Street Journal and newspapers. We reviewed every smashed vitrine. One showcase in the Ahkenaten galleries was smashed; it contained a standing statue of the king carrying an offering tray. While the

showcase is badly damaged, the statue sustained very minor damage and is repairable. Another virtine that was smashed contained one of King Tutankhamun's walking sticks. The gilded stick is broken into two pieces, and can be restored. The other King Tutankhamun object that was damaged was the wooden statue of the king standing on the back of a panther. Both objects were taken out of their showcase and were dropped on the floor after the thieves realized that they were not made of gold.

I would also like to clarify the situation as to the state of the royal mummies in the museum. When the crisis erupted, I took a very quick walk through the museum and thought that the two skulls thrown on the floor of one of the side rooms might belong to some of the royal mummies examined in our DNA research project on the royal mummies (the Egyptian Mummy Project), namely the one found in KV55. However, I examined all of the royal mummies last week and then reexamined them again today; I am happy to report that they all are safe and untouched, including those of Akhenaten's family members. As for these two skulls, they were kept in a storeroom next to the CT scanner lab, and were used for testing the machine.

Also, the thieves were desperately looking for a mummy in order to find what thought to be a magical substance used by the ancient Egyptians in mummification. Therefore, they smashed a showcase of an empty coffin looking for a mummy and gold objects. These incidents show the ignorance of the vandals.

Today, the restoration team began their work and brought all the broken artifacts to a temporary conservation lab set next to the director's room. Restoration work has already started. I will go again when these pieces are restored and back in their original places. I would like to assure everybody that the Egyptian Museum, Cairo is safe.

In my recent interview with the BBC, I made it clear that all Egyptians, with no exception, are for democratic, constitutional, and economic reforms. However, in these very critical moments of Egypt's history, I believe that President Mubarak is capable of insuring a peaceful and democratic transition of power; especially since he has announced that he would not seek re-election. I also would like to remind everybody that Mubarak is a decorated war hero, and should be allowed to leave his office in dignity. I say that as an Egyptian who honors the war heroes of this country, but not as a cabinet member.



The Amarna Galleries at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. (Photo: Sandro Vannini)



Dr. Zahi at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo with a reporter from the Wall Street Journal (Photo: Sandro Vannini)



Dr. Zahi stands behind the broken vitrine containing the damaged New Kingdom coffin. (Photo: Sandro Vannini)