Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Department of State on Continued Efforts to Repatriate Cultural Items to Native American Communities

Media Contact: NewsMedia@bia.gov
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In September, President Trump announced the successful repatriation of ancestral remains and funerary items from Tribes associated with the Mesa Verde region from Finland. Following that effort, the White House has asked the U.S. Departments of the Interior and State to work together to assist other Native American tribes in the repatriation of any additional cultural items abroad.

In response to this mandate, the U.S. Department of State has requested U.S. embassies around the world to send information about Native American collections overseas to the Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior has announced formal government-to-government consultations will take place with Tribes on Wednesday, December 2, 2020. The announcement was issued through a *Dear Tribal Leader* letter dated October 26, 2020.

"The Department of the Interior is a proud partner with the U.S. Department of State in assisting tribes with their efforts to bring home from overseas objects and remains that are part of their cultural patrimony," **said Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Tara *Katuk* Mac Lean Sweeney**. "We take our NAGPRA responsibilities very seriously, including investigating illegally obtained items. We will continue working with our federal, tribal, state and local law enforcement partners to ensure they are safely returned to their rightful homes."

"The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs raises awareness overseas about the damage to tribal communities when sacred items are bought and sold. Protecting Native American cultural property internationally continues to build a safer and more peaceful world for all global citizens," **said Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Marie Royce**.

"Part of President Trump's "Putting America's First American's First" plan is to honor Native American heritage, and this initiative shows further action, in partnership with tribal leaders, to repatriate Native American artifacts important to tribal communities across the Nation," **said Doug Hoelscher, Assistant to the President & Director of White House Intergovernmental Affairs**.

Repatriation of Native American ancestral remains and items of cultural, spiritual and community significance is a priority for the Trump Administration, and the U.S. Departments of the Interior and State are interested in facilitating these repatriation efforts. Both Departments have supported several international repatriations from foreign museums in recent years in response to Native American Tribes' requests for assistance.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA), requires U.S. institutions to consult with Native Americans about their collections and to return certain sensitive cultural items, including ancestral remains. Since its passage approximately 1.9 million such items have been returned to Native American communities that depend on them for their well-being. The Trump Administration is committed to using NAGPRA as a model at the international level to seek the repatriation of Native American items of cultural, spiritual and community significance.

For further information, please contact the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at eca-press@state.gov and the Department of the Interior's Office of Public Affairs at interior_press@ios.doi.gov.

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