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PARIS, France – U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell met today with French Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira to express the United States' concern about tribal sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony that are sold at French auction houses, and to seek cooperation in working to repatriate objects to Indian tribes in the United States.

In the meeting, Secretary Jewell and Minister Taubira discussed their shared commitment to helping tribes repatriate their sacred cultural objects that, under tribal customary law, are owned by the tribe as a whole and cannot be legally sold by individuals. The Secretary and Minister agreed to explore pathways that might provide greater protections for U.S. tribes seeking to repatriate their cultural property.

Secretary Jewell also met with President Catherine Chadelat of the Conseil des Ventes Volontaires, France's auctioneering association and regulator.

Paris auction houses have recently held a series of auctions that included Native American sacred objects such as ceremonial masks. The next such sale is scheduled for December 7 and includes items of concern to several tribes. In the meeting, Jewell noted U.S. tribes' requests for greater transparency from French auction houses about the origins of objects being sold.

At the request of tribes, the U.S. Department of the Interior has worked closely with the Department of State, including the U.S. Embassy in Paris, to engage French authorities and raise public awareness. Only certain objects are considered "not for sale" by tribes, including objects that are sacred, used for religious or healing purposes, and deeply important to tribal identity.

In the meetings, Secretary Jewell also emphasized the unique legal and political relationship between the federal government and federally recognized tribes in the United States. Federally recognized tribes have their own governments within the U.S. political system, with the power to make contracts, own property, regulate their territory, to sue and be sued in court, and to appear in proceedings of administrative bodies, the same as any other sovereign nation.