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नेपाली महावाणिज्यदूतावास, न्यूयॉर्क
Consulate General of Nepal
New York

Press Release: Consulate General of Nepal in New York Receives Four Nepali Sculptures

The Consulate General of Nepal in New York received four recovered Nepali sculptures from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office at a special repatriation ceremony held in New York, today.

Acting Consul General Mr. Bishnu Gautam received these sculptures from Manhattan District Attorney Mr. Alvin Bragg, Jr., and other senior officials of the District Attorney's Office and Homeland Security Investigations-New York (HSI) of the US Department of Homeland Security.

The artefacts dating back to 16th and 17th century Nepal include two gilded *Bhairav Masks (Mukhundo)*, a stone image of *Shiva and Parvati (Uma-Maheshwara)*, and *Durga*. They represent various aspects of rich Nepali past cultural heritage and values. Earlier, the Consulate had requested the Manhattan District Attorney's Office for a collaboration in repatriation of these antiquities.

Speaking on the occasion, Acting Consul General Mr. Gautam conveyed deep gratitude from the government and people of Nepal to the District Attorney Mr. Bragg, and his team, the United States Department of Homeland Security Investigations-New York team and other officials for their incredible and thoughtful collaboration in recovery and repatriation of these sculptures. He also expressed his deep gratitude to the museums, investigators, media, art and heritage campaigners and researchers and all others involved in this process.

He underscored that the return of these recovered masterpieces has significantly contributed to Nepal's national initiative of recovery and reinstatement of her lost cultural properties and preservation of historical treasures. "The collaboration is deeply commendable and inspirational in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural artifacts", Mr. Gautam further remarked.

District Attorney Mr. Bragg, remarked, "We will continue to target antiquities trafficking networks no matter how complex. I thank our outstanding team of analysts and attorneys, along with our partners at HSI, for recovering and returning these beautiful pieces to Nepal". He further reassured the Consulate General that his office and HSI would continue to provide full cooperation in repatriating other stolen and lost artifacts from Nepal.

"The Nepalese culture finds its essence in the embrace of rich religious traditions, and the four artifacts being repatriated today hold significance in ceremonious worship. While there is always a threat of traffickers seeking to plunder cultural treasures for financial gain, we are honored to contribute to restoration of this robust heritage," said Special Agent in Charge Ivan J. Arvelo, HSI New York. "HSI New York's Cultural Property, Art, and Antiquities Group, in collaboration with our partners, remains steadfast in reuniting nations with symbols of their cherished history."



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Senior Officials from the Manhattan District Attorney's Office including Chief of Staff Mr. Jordan Stockdale, and Mr. Christopher Lau, Deputy Special Agent in Charge of the Department of Homeland Security Investigations-New York shared their respective views during the ceremony.

Similarly, Col. Matthew Bogdanos, Assistant District Attorney, Chief of the Antiquities Trafficking Unit, and Senior Trial Counsel at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, who supervised and coordinated the recovery and repatriation of these artefacts this time and previous time, affirmed a commitment of continuous collaboration with Nepal in tracing, investigation, recovery, and repatriation of the stolen cultural properties. He emphasized that the successful recovery of the illegally exported artifacts is just one of many examples of this ongoing cooperation from his office.

The Consulate has been actively engaged for collaboration with relevant government agencies and institutions of both the countries for recovery and repatriation of proven stolen/lost artefacts of Nepal and to reunite them with their rightful place in Nepal's rich archaeological heritage.

In addition to these, the Consulate has so far successfully collaborated in repatriation of other sixteen artefacts dating 10th to 17th century to Nepal. Earlier, it collaborated with the Manhattan District Attorney's Office to repatriate bronze *Ganesh*, *Gold-seated Buddha*, wooden beam of *Apsara* in 2021, and a stone image of *Durga* in 2022; and with Museums for the repatriation of stone sculptures of *Uma-Maheshwor*, and *Lord Buddha* in 2018, *Tara/Parvati*, *Lord Buddha*, *Shiva in Himalayan Abode*, *Shreedhar Vishnu with Laxmi and Garuda* and wooden images of Garland-bearing *Apsara*, upper section of *Torana* (Frieze), and four artistic temple struts/*Tundal*, in 2022-23.

Officials from the Consulate General, investigators, analysts, art professors and academia, museum officials, media and Nepali community members were also present at the ceremony.

The Consulate will arrange to send these artefacts received today back to Nepal in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Department of Archaeology of Nepal, and other relevant agencies/stakeholders, soon.

New York
December 4, 2023

