



KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

NATION RELIGION KING



MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND FINE ARTS

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Phnom Penh, ...15.. December....., 2023..

PRESS RELEASE

**Recovery of Cambodia's National Treasures:
14 Cambodian Cultural Property Objects to be returned to Cambodia from
the Metropolitan Museum (the "MET"), New York, New York**

The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts is delighted to inform the public that, after several years of negotiations between the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York (SDNY), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and our Cambodian restitution team and representatives of the MET, the MET has agreed to return 14 Cambodian cultural treasures in its possession.

The negotiations and information shared between Cambodia and the United States has led to a formal promise by the MET to send these 14 national treasures back to Cambodia, to open their records for their Cambodian collection, and to allow the Ministry's experts to examine the remaining Cambodian objects in the MET's possession. We appreciate this first step in the right direction. We look forward to further returns and acknowledgements of the truth regarding our lost national treasures, taken from Cambodia in the time of war and genocide.

The repatriation includes several masterpieces such as the breath-taking sculpture of a 10th century female goddess (Uma) from the ancient royal capital of Koh Ker; a 10th century bronze head of avalokiteshvara which has a matching torso now at the National Museum of Cambodia; and a 10th - 11th century Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara sculpture. As to the goddess statue from Koh Ker, in 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts successfully located her foot and collected testimony from former looters and determined it had been looted in 1997. The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara "Seated in Royal Ease" is a masterpiece made of copper alloy with silver inlay. It was sold to the MET by Douglas A.J. Latchford in 1992, who was described by the MET itself as a nefarious dealer.

Dr. Phoeurng Sackona, Minister of Culture and Fine Arts, stated: "This return of our national treasures, held by the Metropolitan Museum is of utmost importance not only for Cambodia, but for humankind. The enormous importance to the Cambodian people, of these returns is difficult to overstate. The act of return is an act of healing for our nation. We have many more treasures at the MET we also hope will be returned to Cambodia. We ask for other museums and private collectors to contact us to discuss their collections of Cambodian antiquities."

Dr. Phoeurng Sackona remarked: "This repatriation shows once again Cambodia's continuing commitment to finding and bringing back our ancestors' souls that departed from their motherland. I would like to express my utmost gratitude to our former Prime Minister **Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN** for his wise leadership and peace with the win-win policy and welcome the chance to celebrate this return of our ancestor souls as a blessing to our new Prime Minister, **Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei HUN MANET.**"



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