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## Vice President Jim on repatriation mission to Paris to retrieve sacred masks



Vice President Rex Lee Jim is traveling to Paris, France for the return of sacred masks used in the Tł'ée'jí Hatáál, or Night Way Chant. Eight masks are on the auction block after being put up for bid by a private collector. He is joined by the Washington Office and Legislative Branch. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.— Navajo Nation Vice President Rex Lee Jim is on a mission. On Dec. 11, he left for Paris, France for the repatriation of Navajo ceremonial masks.

The vice president will attend a meeting with the U.S. Embassy-Paris officials on Dec. 13 at 2 p.m. to discuss strategy for the return of the eight Yei Bi Chei masks on the auction block.

The masks were used in the Tł'ée'jí Hatáál, also known as the Night Way Chant healing ceremony. The nine-day ceremony features the use of Yei Bi Chei masks, which represent the Navajo deities, Talking God and Black God.

A private collector put the items up for auction through the Paris auction house.

According to the Eve Company website, their business is operated by

professionals recognized for their expertise and service in advising collectors on art, collectibles, furniture, jewelry, insurance estimates and mandatory tax returns. The company was founded in 2002.

The 140-page Eve American Indian and Columbian Art catalog features native masks, garments, sculptures, kachinas, jewelry, rugs, pottery, baskets and other items of cultural significance from tribes across the Americas. These items will be auctioned on Dec. 15.

Jared King from the Navajo Nation Washington Office will accompany Vice President Jim, along with Leonard Gorman and Rodney Tahe, from the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission.

The Legislative Branch funded the trip for the NNHRC.

The Navajo Nation Council's Naa'bik'iyati' Committee and its subcommittee, the Sacred Site Task Force, held several meetings with Navajo Historic Preservation Department to plan for the return of the masks.

On Dec. 10, the task force directed the NNHRC to plan a delegation to retrieve the masks before the close of the auction. Bidding for the items will close on Dec. 15. The vice president was selected to join the delegation because

House has agreed to allow Vice President Jim, Leonard Gorman, Rodney Tahe and I to view the items on Dec. 13. The U.S. government has been notified and is aware of our intentions to retrieve these items and return them home."

Upon the successful return of the ceremonial items, the Office of the President and Vice President will host a forum to explain that the sale of sacred tribal items is unacceptable. The need for

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of his knowledge as a Navajo medicine man and ability to authenticate the items.

“The purpose of this trip is to retrieve eight Yei Bi Chei masks that were taken from the Navajo Nation and transported to Paris, France,” Vice President Jim said. “The goal is to outright purchase these items before they go on sale to the public.”

Each mask is valued from \$300 to \$1,000.

The Navajo Nation is working with the U.S. State Department, Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Embassy officials to prepare for the auction.

King said, “Even Auction

this international dialogue has been growing for years and the Navajo Nation will voice its strong opposition to any such future auctions.

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