

Latin American nations slam auction of pre-Hispanic artifacts in France

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This image shows a 1,500-year-old stone mask from the ancient Aztec city of Teotihuacan, located northeast of Mexico City, which was sold for ?437,500 at Christie's in Paris. (File)

Paris, February 10 (RHC)-- Six Latin American countries have denounced an upcoming auction of pre-Hispanic artifacts in France. In a joint statement, the ambassadors to Paris of Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, Peru, and the Dominican Republic protested "in the strongest terms," demanding

that the sale of the artifacts by auction houses in the coming days be halted.

They described the sale of cultural artifacts related to native heritage as an "illicit trade in cultural property, which damage the heritage, history and identity of our native peoples." On January 28, the Millon auction house in Paris sold 30 pre-Hispanic Mexican artifacts, which caused outrage in Mexico.

Mexico has in recent years been trying to recover artifacts held by private collectors around the world. As well as calling for artifacts to be returned, Mexico has accused major European fashion houses such as Zara of cultural appropriation for using traditional patterns of their native people in their designs without any benefit to the indigenous communities they were taken from.

Part of the ongoing argument over cultural artifacts held in former colonial countries is how the artifacts were acquired. A senior Syrian official says the U.S. and France are carrying out illegal excavations in ancient sites in northern Syria with the help of Kurdish militants.

"The dispute is not with France or with the French government, but rather with an act of commercialization that should not happen," said the director of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, Diego Prieto Hernandez. "The Mexican government... will never accept the looting and illegal sale of national heritage," Prieto Hernandez insisted, asking the Mexican Foreign Ministry to recover the ancient artifacts.

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