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PRESS RELEASE

The Metropolitan Museum in New York decides to return ancient Khmer statues

Following discussions with the Office of the Council of Ministers of Cambodia, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has recently decided to repatriate to the Kingdom of Cambodia two 10th century stone statues of “Kneeling Pandavas” (sometimes known as “Kneeling Attendants”) illicitly removed from Prasat Chen in Koh Ker at the time of the country’s civil war in the 1970s.

These two statues form part of an ensemble representing the famous duel between Bhima and Duryodhana from the Mahabharata, all of which were brutally severed from their pedestals and found their way to various museums and private collections around the world.

In its press release dated May 3, 2013 the Metropolitan Museum quoted its director Mr. Thomas P. Campbell, as saying: “The Museum is committed to applying rigorous provenance standards not only to new acquisitions, but to the study of works long in its collections in an ongoing effort to learn as much as possible about ownership history. This is a case in which additional information ... has led the Museum to consider facts that were not known at the time of the acquisition and to take the action..... In returning the statues, the Museum is acting to strengthen the good relationship it has long maintained with scholarly institutions and colleagues in Cambodia and to foster and celebrate continued cooperation and dialogue between us.”

Excellency Chan Tani, Secretary of State of the Office of the Council of Ministers was quoted in the *International Herald Tribune* on May 4-5, 2013 as saying: “ The above gesture clearly shows the high ethical standards and professional practices of the Met which they are known for. This also will strengthen the excellent cooperation between the Metropolitan Museum of Art and its Cambodian counterparts in the area of cultural heritage.”

On behalf of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), Deputy Prime Minister Sok An, Minister in charge of the Office of the Council of Ministers and Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee stated from UNESCO Headquarters in Paris today, “We would like to take this solemn occasion to express our sincere thanks and profound gratitude to the Met in New York, which has taken such a laudable decision to return these priceless ancient Khmer artifacts, which represent part of the soul of the nation. We also thank the US Government for its support in this endeavour.

“Furthermore, the RGC appeals to other museums and art collectors around the world to follow this example of returning plundered treasures to their rightful owners as part of the worldwide campaign for the protection of cultural heritage.”

The return of these statues can be attributed to the government’s strenuous efforts and is not only the success of the Royal Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia Samdech Akka Maha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, but also the success and pride of the whole Cambodian nation.

Phnom Penh, 9 May 2013
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