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MEDIA FACT SHEET
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HOPI TRIBE DEMANDS RETURN OF SACRED OBJECTS BEING SOLD ILLEGALLY IN PARIS AUCTION

Kykotsmovi, AZ: [The Hopi Tribe](#) is vigorously asserting its tribal sovereignty and rights in the international arena and in Paris, France, to protect objects sacred to the Hopi people, among them, its sacred “Katsina Friends.”

“We need to bring all our Katsina Friends home to their rightful place on the Hopi lands,” says [Hopi Tribe Chairman](#) Herman G. Honanie. “Hopi is absolute in its stance that these auctions must cease. We call on all local, state and federal agencies to aid our efforts in recovering our sacred Katsina Friends. They belong on Hopi and must be returned.”

All ceremonial and religious entities are under the sole caretaking and responsibility for stewardship by initiated Hopi society members. These members are vested with the caretaking and protection of these sacred entities. As such, they are considered sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony and cannot be transferred, sold, conveyed and removed from the jurisdiction without permission of the Hopi Tribe. These facts are pursuant to Hopi customary law and tradition ([Hopi Ordinance #26](#), [Hopi Cultural Preservation Code](#)), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act ([NAGPRA](#)) that applies to [cultural items from federal lands that are in repositories outside the United States](#).

Hopi Katsina Friends are religious objects necessary for the use and the continuation of the Hopi religion by present day adherent. The Katsina Friends go through a ceremonial process of deification whereby they embody spiritual life. They then become a “Katsina” and serve as a messenger to the spiritual domain for rain and life blessings. Katsina Friends are used during Katsina religious ceremonies.

[Eve](#), the Paris auction house, has scheduled the sixth auction which includes sacred objects which are protected under U.S. statutes. The Hopi Tribe has sought to stop the sale of Hopi ceremonial objects both in the United States and overseas since 2013. The Hopi Tribe attempted to prevent auction sales of religious objects in France through judicial and administrative means in April 2013, December 2013, June 2014 and December 2014. Judicial proceedings were used to attempt to prevent the April 2013, December 2013 and June 2014 auction sales, without success. All three filings before the French civil court were dismissed because of the legal standard required in the French civil court system, which is to establish the bad faith of the current possessor.

In the June and December 2014 attempts to suspend an auction sale in Paris, the Holocaust Art Restitution Project ([HARP](#)), along with the representatives of the Hopi Tribe, initiated an administrative proceeding in France before the *Conseil des Ventes Volontaires* ([CVV](#)), requesting the suspension of a June 27, 2014, auction of sacred objects from both the Hopi and Navajo Tribes of Arizona. (CVV was created in 2000 to control and regulate the conduct of auctioneers and auction houses.)

The CVV denied the Hopi Tribe’s ability to bring a cultural claim, holding that the Hopi Tribe was unable to demonstrate that it had legal existence and therefore the capacity to take legal action under French law. The CVV also declined to invoke Article 1-5-1 of its own professional and ethical code, which allows the CVV to suspend an auction on grounds that sufficient doubt exists on the provenance of these objects to proceed with a sale. The standard defined in Article 1-5-1 is therefore interpreted as being lower than the standard required before French civil courts.

Katsina Friends and associated society or ceremonial items being auctioned and sold fall under NAGPRA's definitions of sacred objects and cultural patrimony.

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Similarly, Katsina Friends fall under NAGPRA's definition of cultural patrimony. Katsina Friends have ongoing historical tradition and cultural importance central to the Hopi Tribe. They are not property owned by an individual. All Hopi initiated into the Katsina society become caretakers. The Katsina priests and Katsina clan leaders hold spiritual stewardship over all the Katsina Friends. The Hopi Tribe considers Katsina objects as inalienable.

NAGPRA has previously been used to successfully prosecute dealers in Native American Art. In *United States v. Corrow*, 119 F.3d 796 (10th Cir. 1997) and *United States v. Tidwell*, 191 F.3d 976 (9th Cir. 1999), art dealers were convicted under the criminal component of NAGPRA, 18 U.S.C. §1170(b).

A sixth auction is scheduled in Paris on June 1, 2015. The Hopi Tribe plans to file another appeal before the CVV shortly before the sale to request the suspension of the auction for all Katsina Friends listed on the catalog, and which are protected by U.S. statutes.

Furthermore, the Hopi Tribe has issued a letter of request to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (**FBI**) at the Department of Justice (**DOJ**), demanding French authorities to halt and return sacred items to the Hopi Tribe.

Though the CVV has held twice that no standing exists either as a tribe or as individual members of a tribal group, the Hopi Tribe is an ancient culture — with more than 14,117 enrolled members today — that has remained steadfast to its culture, language, heritage and spirituality.

None of the sacred objects was created for commercial purposes, despite comments to the contrary. In addition, under U.S. statutes, none of the items would be permitted for sale or exchange in the United States.

For more information:

The Hopi Tribe website
Twitter @TheHopiTribe

<http://www.hopi-nsn.gov>
<https://twitter.com/TheHopiTribe>

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Request for editors, journalists and reporters covering this story:

Please refrain from publishing images of these sacred objects, and please do not refer to these objects as "masks," but rather, as "Hopi Katsina Friends," which embody the spiritual deity most sacred to the Hopi. Thank you for respecting our sacred beliefs and cultural heritage.