



## U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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### News Releases

APRIL 7, 2010 WASHINGTON, DC

#### ICE returns to Peru 12 human skulls dating to A.D. 640-890 A cracked crate in Cleveland warehouse reveals human skulls hidden in ceramic masks

In January 2004 two warehouse employees accidentally dropped a crate, which led to the discovery of human skulls hidden inside ceramic masks. These employees notified [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#), and a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) investigation ensued. ICE returned to Peru the 12 human skulls that date back to A.D. 640-890 in a [repatriation ceremony at the Peruvian Embassy in Washington, D.C., on April 7, 2010 \(http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1004/100407washingtondc.htm\)](#).

In May 2003, the shipment of ceramic masks had traveled by plane from Lima, Peru, to Miami, Fla., to a customer. When the box went unclaimed, it was auctioned off. A discount retail store owner bought the crated goods for \$1,300 and shipped them by rail to his warehouse in Cleveland, where the human remains were then found.

"Clearly this was a smuggling event that went awry," said ICE Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of Detroit Brian Moskowitz, who credited the cooperative efforts between the SAC Miami office and the Assistant SAC Cleveland office for their outstanding case work.

At Wednesday's ceremony, Peruvian Ambassador Lois Miguel Baldvieso Montano expressed his gratitude that these priceless cultural valuables were recovered and returned. He said these objects "require special protection and defense so they can be enjoyed, valued and properly used by all citizens and passed on for our future generations."

Gina Holland, acting deputy assistant director of the ICE Office of International Affairs, returned the skulls to Peru on behalf of ICE, saying, "The repatriation of the 12 pre-Columbian human skulls continues a long and valued tradition between our countries of locating, investigating and returning items that are part of the history of Peru."



In its seven-year history as the largest law enforcement agency within the Department of Homeland Security, ICE has a long-standing tradition of seizing cultural treasures, rare antiquities and priceless artifacts, conducting investigations in their illegal trade and [returning them to their countries of origin \(http://www.ice.gov/news/library/factsheets/cultural-artifacts.htm\)](#). In March, ICE [returned an ancient sarcophagus to Egypt \(http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1003/100310washingtondc2.htm\)](#), and in February the agency [returned heirlooms to Iraq \(http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1003/100302washingtondc.htm\)](#).

On returning the historic and cultural items to Iraq, ICE Assistant Secretary John Morton said, "We have a tremendous responsibility that transcends us as people or even as institutions or countries" in returning ancient artifacts.

Morton said the best way to continue repatriation efforts is for people to "pick up the phone and call us" with leads. "I can promise you, we'll follow up and hunt people down. If we can return artifacts to the countries where they belong, we'll do it."

To read a news release on the repatriation ceremony, [visit the ICE news page \(http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1004/100407washingtondc.htm\)](#). To view photos of the repatriated artifacts, [visit the ICE media gallery \(http://www.ice.gov/news/galleries/\)](#).

For additional information on ICE repatriations, check out the [Cultural Heritage Investigations page \(http://www.ice.gov/news/library/factsheets/cultural-artifacts.htm\)](#).

For the most up-to-date ICE information, [sign up \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=https://service.govdelivery.com/service/multi\\_subscribe.html?code=USDHSICE\)](http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=https://service.govdelivery.com/service/multi_subscribe.html?code=USDHSICE) for ICE e-mail alerts. You may also visit us on [Twitter \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://twitter.com/wwwicegov\)](#) and [YouTube \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.youtube.com/wwwicegov\)](#).

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

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