

Press Release
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**U.S. Embassy donates digital cataloguing
equipment for Bolivia's cultural patrimony preservation**

On March 31, the United States Embassy donated digital cataloguing equipment to the Viceministry of Culture in an official ceremony at the church of the town of Achocalla. U.S. Ambassador David Greenlee, the Bolivian Viceminister of Culture Isabel Alvarez Plata, and municipal authorities of Achocalla attended the ceremony. The donation was awarded under the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation.

In the ceremony, Viceministry officials demonstrated the work to be undertaken with the new equipment in Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz and Potosi. This effort will digitally catalog more than 4,000 colonial paintings and other valuable objects from Bolivia's cultural patrimony. Using digital cameras, laptop computers, tapelines, and data programs, personnel trained and supervised by the Viceministry will travel to different provinces to identify and register colonial artifacts and architecture, as well as pre-Columbian textiles and other varied ethnographic objects.

The objective of the cataloguing project is to establish a central digital archive, administered by the Viceministry of Culture, which will be easily accessed by customs services in Bolivia, the United States and other countries, as well as by the police, scholars and persons interested in the preservation of Bolivia's cultural patrimony. Currently, only 40% of the Bolivian cultural patrimony has been catalogued in written form in the areas of La Paz, Orure, Sucre, Cochabamba and Tarija. Research has shown that more than 6% of the catalogued cultural objects are illegally smuggled out of the country each year. However, it is impossible to determine the percentage of non-catalogued stolen objects. Unless the digital archive is completed, the identification of objects will not be possible and its legal recovery will be very difficult.

Viceminister Alvarez Plata stated that the U.S. Embassy had already cooperated with the Viceministry in preserving Bolivia's cultural patrimony. She recalled the repatriation of textiles of the town of Coroma that occurred under the framework of an initial understanding agreement between the U.S. and Bolivian governments. This agreement signaled the start of a bilateral policy to protect Bolivia's cultural patrimony.

The Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation allows U.S. Ambassadors in developing countries to present competitive proposals for single or recurrent projects in order to assist other countries to preserve a cultural place, object or a collection of objects in a museum or similar institution, as well as other forms of cultural expression, such as the recording of traditional music or traditional dances, the compilation of a dictionary for a language in danger of extinction, the recording of oral history or traditional poetry, or the preservation of a traditional art form or handicraft.