

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Venue: Nairobi, Kenya

AU Workshop on Community Engagement in the Promotion and Protection of Heritage Resources



In line with the implementation of the [AU theme of the year for 2021](#), the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development of the AU Commission (AUC), in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), organized a Community Engagement Workshop with Community Leaders on the Promotion and Protection of Heritage Resources, in Nairobi, Kenya, from 22- 24 June 2022.

The aim of the workshop was to build capacity of Community Leaders to turn communities into positive stakeholders in the promotion and protection of their heritage. The workshop also aimed at discussing community leaders' initiatives at local level in the promotion and preservation of heritage resources and in combatting illicit trafficking in cultural property and heritage. The workshop also aimed at popularizing the draft Common African Position on Restitution of Heritage Resources and other regional, continental, and international policy instruments.

Mr. Stanvas Ongalo, Acting Director General, National Museum of Kenya, representing H.E. Amb, Dr. Amina Mohamed, Cabinet Secretary for Sports, Heritage and Culture, Republic of Kenya, informed the meeting that Kenya's constitution distinguishes culture as a foundation of the nation, and it is on this premise that they believe that diversity should not divide, but bring people together. He urged Community Leaders to position themselves in sensitizing community members in their respective countries about the plight of the African Heritage, particularly the tangible movable heritage that is often a target for looters. He pledged Kenya's strong support to the draft Common African Position on restitution of Heritage Resources. He concluded by saying that the workshop outcome will contribute to the achievement of aspirations of the AU, Agenda 2063, and the UN Sustainable Developments Goals.

His Majesty Dr. Robinson Tanyi, President of the African Indigenous Governance Council highlighted that as community leaders they are proud to be associated with the workshop and the continent restitution agenda. He expressed gratitude to the AUC, UNECA and OSIWA for the organization of this important Community Leaders Workshop. He further stressed the need for all AU Member States to collectively work together in pursuing the restitution of the plundered heritage resources. He concluded by emphasizing that community leaders are in support of the restitution agenda and called for their continued engagement in the process

On behalf of H.E. Amb Minata Samaté Cessouma, AU, Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, Mrs. Angela Martins, Head of Culture Division of AUC welcomed the community leaders to the workshop and mentioned that

the African continent has lost huge amount of heritage resources plundered during colonialism through on going illicit trade and these resources are still held outside of the continent. She further highlighted initiatives to return looted heritage from the continent and congratulated Member States that are already receiving looted heritage through successful negotiation with countries keeping them. She concluded by mentioning that the workshop is one of the initiatives to provide a foundation to engage key stakeholders involved in the restitution of heritage resources in the continent.

On behalf of Ms. Nita Deerpalsing, Director of Publications, Conferences and Knowledge Management Division of the United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Ms. Irene Onyancha, Chief Knowledge Management Services Section, noted that ECA recognizes the socio-economic importance of the arts, culture, and heritage as a potential powerhouse in creating employment for millions of people, promoting social cohesion, and strengthening national and regional identities as underscored by the UN Secretary General during the 2021 Africa Dialogue Series on the theme, ***“Cultural identity and ownership: reshaping mindsets”***. She noted that, like every dynamic institution, ECA has undertaken the task of revising its strategic programme framework and focus, to align its delivery with the new changing demands of the continent.

Mr. Ibrahima Kane, Head of the Advocacy Programme of the Africa Region Office, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) whilst addressing the opening session expressed gratitude to the AUC and UNECA for the collaboration in the organization of the community leaders’ workshop, which will contribute to the acceleration of the restitution agenda of heritage resources on the continent. He reiterated continued support of OSIWA to the AUC initiatives and advocacy for the restitution of cultural property and heritage.

The opening session also featured a presentation of a poem from Mr. Albert Nyathi, Chairman of Africa Book Organization, who highly praised Africa’s rich and diverse heritage and identity and called for urgent restitution of heritage resources including intangible culture heritage such as music and folklore.

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