

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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THE CONTINENTAL EXPERTS' WORKSHOP ON THE RESTITUTION OF CULTURAL PROPERTY AND HERITAGE HOLDS AT THE MUSEUM OF BLACK CIVILIZATION IN DAKAR, SENEGAL



In line with the implementation of the roadmap of the AU Theme of the Year for 2021: "**Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want**", the African Union Commission -Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social (HHS) in collaboration with the Government of Senegal and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) organized the Continental Experts' Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage at the Museum of Black Civilization in Dakar, Senegal from 30 November to 2nd December 2021. The Continental Experts' Workshop was preceded by a Regional Economics Community (RECs) Consultation on Restitution of Cultural Property which was held on 29th November 2021.

The key objectives of the workshop were to develop a strong Common African Position Paper on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage and to produce a Framework for Action on the Negotiations for the Return/Restitution of Illicitly Trafficked Cultural Property from the Continent. The workshop also afforded an opportunity to reflect on restitution policies for cultural property in Africa and establish networks of African cultural experts, policy makers,

dealers, auctioneers, museum curators among others, working in the area of combating illicit trafficking in cultural property and heritage.

The Continental Experts' Workshop on Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage was officially declared opened by H.E. Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister of Culture and Communication of Senegal. In his address the Honorable Minister highlighted that currently the world is facing significant changes especially with digital developments and the consequences of the spread of COVID-19. He further stressed that at the national level, Senegal is aware of the present and future challenges of restitution of cultural property and heritage. Furthermore, he informed the meeting that a Special Committee for the restoration and restitution of Senegalese Collections held by Western Museums has been recently established with a three-year Action Plan.

"The African Union has rightly addressed the pertinent issue of restitution of cultural property and heritage by organizing the Continental Experts' Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage which will draft a strong African Position on Restitution of Heritage. This decision is consistent with the dedication of the continental organization which places culture more and more at the heart of its priorities"

As a result, we are strongly committed and I am happy to know that ECOWAS, just like the African Union, is following with a great interest, the current developments and initiatives taken by many Western institutions in direction of the restitution of looted cultural properties." H.E. Mr. Abdoulaye Diop, Minister of Culture and Communication of Senegal said.

During the opening, Mrs. Cisse Mariama Mohamed, Director for Social Development, Culture and Sport welcomed participants of the Continental Experts' Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage, and expressed the AU Commission gratitude to the Ministry of Culture and Communication of Senegal, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and the Museum of Black Civilization for their tireless efforts to make the workshop a reality. Mrs. Cisse stressed the role of experts and Member states in advising and setting direction on the possible ways to handle the issues related to the return of illicitly trafficked cultural property back to the continent.

"The African Union has placed culture at the heart of human-centers inclusive and sustainable development and as an essential investment tool towards achieving poverty eradication. The process took into cognizance national, regional, continental and global initiatives in the promotion, protection and restitution of cultural property and heritage. This is enshrined in the African Union Constructive Act, the African Union Agenda 2063, the Charter of the African Cultural Renaissance and the Revised AU Plan of Action on Cultural and Creative Industries." said Ms. Cisse.

Ms. Guiomar Alonso Cano, Regional Adviser for Culture / West Africa - Sahel at UNESCO in her remarks she highlighted that the fight against illicit trafficking and the return and restitution of cultural property in the African region is of utmost importance for UNESCO. She added that illicit trafficking is a global issue for that it needs collaborative work across borders, she also encouraged Member States to ratify the 1970 Convention to ensure sustainability of

the protection of African cultural property and heritage and its transmission to future generations.

“We are facing an alarming scale of looting of cultural property in Africa and growing demands for its return and restitution, it is indeed essential to strengthen regional and international cooperation. For us to succeed, we must enhance the commitment and cooperation of all actors concerned - Member States, multilateral institutions, technical and operational partners, the private sector, civil society, and communities – we have to lay together the foundation for a long-term approach to address these issues.” Said Mrs. Alonso.

The Continental Experts’ Workshop was attended by representatives from AU Member States, OSIWA representatives, Museum of Black Civilizations staff, UNESCO representatives, independent cultural and heritage experts, legal experts, AUCIL representatives, ICRC representatives, ICCROM representatives and staff members from the AU Commission.

The Draft Common African Position Paper on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage once finalized will be presented to the AU policy organs for endorsement and dissemination in the AU Member States.

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