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Press release

Dialogue meeting: Cameroon and Germany meet to discuss ways to return cultural property and build sustainable cooperation

Eleven German world cultures museums, delegates from the Cameroonian Inter-Ministerial Committee in Charge for the Restitution of Cameroonian Cultural Properties Illegally Exported Abroad, and representatives of the Traditional Royal Houses from Cameroon, will discuss possible ways to return cultural property to Cameroon and build sustainable cooperation at a "Dialogue Meeting: Cameroon and Germany" at the Linden-Museum Stuttgart until 16 January.

Baden-Württemberg's Minister of Science and the Arts, Petra Olschowski, and Rékia Nfunfu Ngeh, the Head of the Cameroonian Delegation, officially opened the museum dialogue initiated by the museums under the leadership of the Linden Museum Stuttgart on 15 January together with the Secretary General of the Cultural Foundation of the Federal States, Markus Hilgert, and representatives of the Federal Government.



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This dialogue with Cameroon is a key component in the reappraisal of German collections from colonial contexts to which German museums are committed. The dialogue comprises officials and the civil society, and intends to broaden opportunities for understanding between Cameroon and Germany. It also invites representatives from museums in Berlin, Bremen, Braunschweig, Frankfurt, Hanover, Hamburg, Cologne, Leipzig, Mannheim, Munich and Stuttgart. The dialogue meeting is sponsored by the Cultural Foundation of the Federal States, Berlin.

Germany holds approximately 40,000 cultural artefacts from Cameroon, many of which were unethically acquired by our museums during German colonial rule. Various traditional communities in Cameroon have already demanded the return of their cultural assets and have begun talks with individual museums. In October, representatives of the newly founded national "Inter-Ministerial Committee in Charge for the Restitution of Cameroonian Cultural Properties Illegally Exported Abroad" visited the museums in Berlin, Bremen, Munich and Stuttgart for the first time.

In order to facilitate an all-German museum approach to this issue, the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart - as the custodian of the largest Cameroonian collection in Germany - has taken over the leadership of a group of museums that actively engages in dialogue. These museums will jointly seek ways to retribute and build a sustainable cooperation with Cameroon.

The participating museums are the Ethnological Museum Berlin, the Grassi Museum of Ethnology in Leipzig, the Landesmuseum Hanover, the Linden-Museum Stuttgart, the MARKK - Museum am Rothenbaum, World Cultures and Arts in Hamburg, the Five Continent Museum in Munich, the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne, the Reiss-



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Engelhorn-Museen in Mannheim, the City Museum Braunschweig, the World Cultures Museum in Frankfurt am Main and the Übersee-Museum Bremen.

On the morning of 15 January 2024, the Minister of Science, Research and the Arts of Baden-Württemberg, Petra Olschowski, as well as representatives of the Federal Foreign Office and the Office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and the Secretary General of the Cultural Foundation of the Federal States, Prof. Dr Markus Hilgert, took part in the dialogue meeting.

The aim of the dialogue meeting in Stuttgart is to initiate a process of transparent dialogue in personal exchange with Cameroonian delegates and to create a basis for trusting cooperation.

Following the dialogue meeting in Stuttgart, the delegation from Cameroon will visit the museums in Frankfurt (17.1.), Cologne (18.1.), Hanover (19.1.), Leipzig (20.1.), Berlin (23.1.) and Hamburg (25.1.).

Statements

Rékia Nnunfu Ngeh, Head of Delegation, Inter-Ministerial Committee in Charge for the Restitution of Cameroonian Cultural Properties Illegally Exported Abroad

“The Stuttgart meeting, which will bring together members of the Inter-ministerial Committee in Charge of the Repatriation of Cameroonian Cultural Properties, the Federal Foreign Office, the Cultural Foundation of the Federal States in cooperation with the State of Baden-Württemberg, to discuss the restitution of Cameroonian cultural property, has several objectives for the Cameroonian side, namely:



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- to participate in the dialogue meeting by reaffirming the central role of the State of Cameroon in the cultural property restitution process;
- to present the roadmap assigned to the Inter-ministerial Committee;
- to present Cameroon's strategy for the repatriation of cultural property."

Petra Olschowski, Minister of Science, Research and the Arts Baden-Württemberg

"The restitution of cultural assets from colonial contexts is a key political concern for the state government of Baden-Württemberg. We deeply regret the injustice that was committed and take responsibility for these historical events. As such, in recent years, Baden-Württemberg has been closely involved in Federal Government, and we have already been able to initiate some restitutions. For this reason, I am very pleased that the official launch of the joint dialogue process with Cameroon is taking place here in Stuttgart today. The meeting is the first, and therefore an all the more important, step towards establishing a formal dialogue between the museums in Germany and the representatives from Cameroon, in particular those from the responsible governmental agencies. I would like to thank the participating museums for their initiative and our guests from Cameroon for their willingness to enter into a dialogue with us. As a state, we will do our utmost to contribute to this process of returning cultural assets to Cameroon and to building future cooperation."

Baden-Württemberg is in charge of topic of colonial heritage within the Conference of Culture Ministers.



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Katja Keul, State Minister, Federal Foreign Office, Federal Republic of Germany

“The restitution of cultural property from German collections is an essential part of the process of coming to terms with Germany's colonial past in Cameroon. The Federal Government is appreciative of the close cooperation with the Cameroonian government on this issue, especially with the Interministerial Committee, who are coordinating the restitution process on the Cameroonian side. Cameroonian perspectives will be key in our decision-making in Germany.

With a third meeting - this time in Stuttgart - within four months, both sides continue the dialogue at a governmental, museum and civil society level. We hope that these meetings will promote understanding about the restitution process and thus also open up avenues for more intensive cultural and socio-political cooperation between the two countries in the future.”

Claudia Roth, State Minister for Culture and the Media, Federal Republic of Germany

“In the view of the Federal Government, an in-depth examination of Germany's colonial history in a partnership-based dialogue with the countries and societies of origin should also contribute to a common future between Europe and Africa. I am, therefore, delighted that the dialogue meeting between Germany and Cameroon is taking place. This is not only an important step towards agreeing on possible ways of returning cultural property to Cameroon. The dialogue can also help to lay the foundations for sustainable cooperation with Cameroon. As such, I wish the participants every success, stimulating discussions, and useful insights for future cooperation.”



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Prof Dr Markus Hilgert, Secretary General, Cultural Foundation of the Federal States

“The restitution of cultural artefacts that were stolen in the course of colonialism is a project of national importance. I am delighted that the museums have taken the initiative for a first major exchange in order to fulfil this responsibility. The Cultural Foundation of the Federal States, as the seat of the contact point for collection items from colonial contexts, sees itself as an important point of contact in matters of restitution for those affected in the countries of origin and as an advisory partner for German museums.”

Joint statement by the eleven museums

“The largest Cameroonian collections outside of the country are housed by German museums. Eleven of these institutions have come together with our Cameroonian partners to initiate a dialogue on restitution and our colonial legacy. We expect this meeting will foment trust and fruitful long-term collaboration.”

Funded by:



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