



Joint Declaration of the Swiss Benin Forum

2nd February 2023

Addressing the Future of the Benin Collections in Swiss Public Museums

We, the participating museums of the Swiss Benin Initiative (BIS), the representatives of His Royal Majesty the Oba of Benin, the Director General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments of Nigeria, the representative of the Nigerian Embassy to Switzerland, along with Nigerian researchers and artists, have wholeheartedly reached the following agreement on the Benin objects currently in Swiss public museums:

1. The ownership of the objects which were looted or likely to have been looted in 1897 should return to the original owner.
2. The participating museums are open to a transfer of ownership of these objects which could involve repatriation, circulation or loans to Swiss museums.
3. The Benin objects are items of social, religious, historical and aesthetic importance with emotional value.
4. The Benin objects carry histories that need to be told and the public should be informed as to how and why the objects came to be in Swiss museums.
5. The Benin objects can be ambassadors that draw admiration and understanding, show beauty and skills and enhance respect.
6. The Benin objects shall serve education for pupils, students, artists and society in general.
7. The BIS can set an important example for dealing with colonial heritage.

The BIS will pursue its collaborations with the values and commitments presented below:

On the Future of our Collaborations

8. The BIS commits to developing new models of exemplary collaboration that foster sincerity, transparency and restore dignity. These relationships are foreseen as long-term, open engagements that respect the plurality of worldviews and adopt a new relational ethics.
9. As a hub, the BIS will seek to enable multi-level initiatives. This network will connect people with one another and engage communities of origin, the Swiss and Nigerian general public and the diaspora.
10. The artists, guilds and artisans of Benin should be encouraged and enabled, in order that the artistic production of Benin remains alive.
11. We will contribute to the interflow of knowledge, developing joint exhibitions, research and exchanges with museums, universities and art schools.
12. We will explore our entangled and shared histories along with the provenance and circulation of objects, shedding light on museum histories in Nigeria and Switzerland.
13. We will collaborate to improve our shared research on care, conservation and display of Benin heritage. This will enliven objects with renewed interpretation and recognise their value and cultural significance in a way that can be of benefit to the people of Nigeria and Switzerland.
14. As we develop our future collaborations, making new history together, we recognise that the objects are an expression of Benin identity and the Benin people's reverence for the Oba of Benin.

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