

Press Statement

Benin Dialogue Group Steering Committee 24.3.2021

The Benin Dialogue Group recognizes that the looting of Benin City in 1897 is the main source of objects from the Benin Kingdom now held by museums all over the world. We acknowledge the deep loss this event caused. European member museums of the Benin Dialogue Group are seeking to address the issues of return and restitution within their own governance structures. There are different laws that apply in different countries to the field of culture and the return of cultural objects. Members of the Benin Dialogue Group have, as a condition of being in the group, all agreed to support a major reunion of the Benin works of arts in Benin City. Meanwhile conversations are developing at a differing pace in the various countries for initiating permanent returns.

The concretizing plans for the Edo Museum of West African Arts (EMOWAA) in Benin City and the agreements between the National Commission for Museums and Monuments Nigeria (NCMM), the Royal Court of Benin, the Government of Edo State, and the newly-founded Legacy Restoration Trust (LRT) are crucial steps to prepare the ground for the future reception of returned artworks, their exhibition and safekeeping. The process is being undertaken in partnership with the member museums and is accompanied by provenance and essential archaeological research, curatorial exchange, contributions to museum planning, and fundraising endeavours. The Benin Dialogue Group continues to function as the crucial network for sharing and channeling information, coordinating communication, and advising museums worldwide on how to contribute or retribute works to this unique museum in the making.

The Digital Benin Project, as a further outcome of the Benin Dialogue, is surveying and listing Benin collections and concomitant documentary and photographic archives for a future online platform for research and overview of the worldwide scattered royal treasurers. In the future, it will be hosted by the EMOWAA.