



STATE OF THE
**AFRICAN
DIASPORA**

NEWSLETTER

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NEWSLETTER, N° 10 : RESTITUTION, NOW !



The Treasure of Ahmadou, Mali, Musée de l'Armée, Paris



Treasure of Maqdala, Ethiopia, British Museum, London



Bust of Nefertiti, Egypt, Neues Museum, Berlin

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EDITORIAL

By Kandake Houindokon, Vice Prime Minister of the State of the African Diaspora, and Tassi Aidji, Minister of Historical Legacy of the State of the African Diaspora

Restitution, Now!

Everything has been done to take away our treasures, our goods, our cultures, and even our lives. But no one has ever succeeded in taking away our dignity. For centuries, our predecessors fought to regain their freedom, but also their heritage. It is this fight that we are continuing today.

In this sense, cultural treasures are only a symbol of the fight we are waging for ourselves. Whether it is our land, our subsoil, our tangible or intangible treasures, we must ensure that everything that is ours is finally returned to us.

The State of the African Diaspora has already achieved many victories and has had several laws passed in this regard in France, Belgium and the European Parliament. But all African countries must mobilise and commit themselves to this cause, because what is at stake has a name: sovereignty.



Interview with the Prime Minister of the State of the African Diaspora



Dr Louis-Georges Tin, Prime Minister of the State of the African Diaspora, has been invited to the Africa-France Summit taking place in France from 7 to 9 October 2021, and he will speak on the issue of the restitution of colonial treasures. The aim is to mobilise leaders in the West, but also in Africa, on this essential issue. To fully understand the stakes of this campaign, we propose here an exclusive interview with the Prime Minister of the State of the African Diaspora.

-When you talk about objects to be returned to Africa, what exactly are you talking about?

-These objects are in fact cultural treasures that were looted and stolen during colonisation, particularly during the massacres. They were brought back by the troops as trophies, sold and exhibited in public or private collections where they still remain. They are often royal treasures, objects of worship, works of art or crafts, thrones, jewels, sculptures, masks, manuscripts, etc. We are not talking about a few objects, scattered here and there: in the British Museum, there are 69,000; in the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, 70,000; in the Musée de Tervuren in Brussels, 180,000! Moreover, other countries that did not have colonies in Africa have nevertheless bought or recovered many stolen treasures, thus practising fencing - at the very least, they are ill-gotten goods. This is the case in Switzerland, Austria, the Vatican and the United States, where there are over 100 museums holding African cultural objects that should be returned. In total, more than 95% of Africa's classical heritage is outside Africa! This is why the title of this major campaign is clear: "Restitution, now!"

-Why demand the return of art stolen from Africa decades ago?

-Because it all belongs to us. Quite simply. It's a human rights issue, obviously. It's a cultural identity issue. It's an issue of spiritual integrity, because desecrating objects of worship is sacrilege. It is also an issue of economic development, because these European museums are diverting millions of tourists from Africa, and making profits at our expense. All this is very clear. But I want to go further: there is an absolute security issue here. If Africans do not do everything necessary to recover their most sacred heritage, the message sent to the West is terrible: it means that we accept to be plundered and robbed, not only of these cultural objects, but of all natural resources, mining and others. It means that we don't care about our own sovereignty, it means that we are beaten and happy. It means that we invite the plunderers to quietly continue their evil work. Is this really the message we want to send to the rest of the world?

-What have you achieved so far?

-When I started this battle, many people thought it was a losing battle. That the West would never want to give back treasures won by colonial troops. And yet, we have obtained important victories: following our campaign, a restitution law was voted in France in December 2020, for the benefit of Benin and Senegal. Furthermore, in March 2019, we had legislation passed in Belgium, which is now being implemented for the benefit of Congo.



-And what are the expected prospects?

-We are now working to implement the resolution that was adopted in the European Parliament. This is why we are organising this major mobilisation ahead of the Africa-France Summit, so that all African countries and all Western countries are led to make progress on this issue. Furthermore, we hope that the French presidency of the European Union, which begins in January 2021 for six months, will be the opportunity to put this issue on the table. We need to move from a parliamentary resolution to an executive implementation. In addition, Daagbo Hounon, supreme leader of the Voodoo cult and co-chair of the Spiritual Caucus, was recently received at the Vatican to raise the issue of restitution. Indeed, the Vatican and Catholic mission museums are also full of colonial objects, which belong to Africa.



-But most people have never seen these objects...

-That is why, on 1 October, we launched a website, www.restitutionmuseum.com, which will allow people, often for the first time, to see the most precious objects that have been taken from us, with the necessary explanations, their meaning, the place where they are, the place from where they were taken. Knowing is good, but seeing is even better. This is an unprecedented initiative. So we are offering everyone the chance to "adopt a treasure". You are invited to choose a precious object for such and such a reason, because it comes from your country, because you find it particularly strong, because it touches you more than another, and then you can promote it on social networks, by putting it in a profile, for example. It's about creating a personal link between our heritage and ourselves. We have launched the campaign among young people, and the network of Pan-African Diaspora State Schools, which already includes over 700 schools, has decided to join. Around these precious objects, one can develop activities linked to history (to explain Colonisation), linked to geography (to show where they came from and where they are now), to civics or philosophy (to work on the notion of justice), to written or oral argumentation (to express the reasons for one's choice of such or such an object), to drawing (to represent the missing objects), etc.

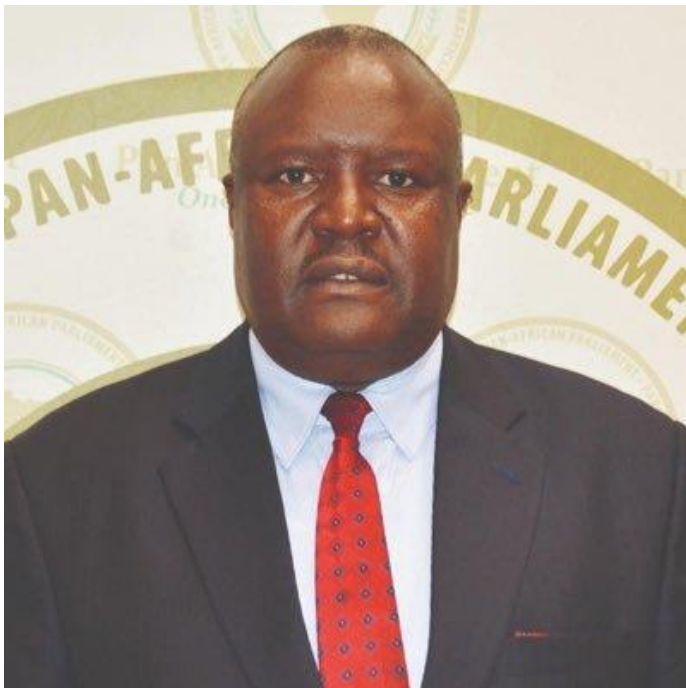
-Moreover, there are not only objects...

-Yes, indeed. Horribly, the colonists also brought back corpses, heads or skulls as trophies, which are still in the West. These remains are sometimes proudly displayed in museums, often in "natural history museums", which are normally devoted to minerals, plants and animals. Eventually, they could have been put in history museums, which are devoted to humans? but no, they are in 'natural history' museums. So apparently Africans are just animals. When they were alive, the natives were put in human zoos, and now that they are dead, they are put in "natural history" museums. Some bodies are on shelves, in cupboards, in formaldehyde, or in cellars. Westerners are too ashamed to show them, but they are too proud to return these trophies. These corpses are also sometimes found in universities. But these institutions are not museums or universities: they are mass graves! They meet

the legal definition of mass graves, as formulated by the United Nations. Therefore, these places are simply macabre areas completely outside the law. Leaders who refuse to return the remains are therefore liable to prosecution...

-Who is supporting your campaign?

As part of the "Restitution Now" campaign, we launched an international appeal that was supported by Chief Charumbira, President of the African Union Parliament, and by the largest associations of chiefs and kings on the African continent: Nigeria, South Africa, Liberia, Cameroon, Togo, Benin, Zambia, Zimbabwe, etc. But we are also supported by great figures in the Diaspora, like Julius Garvey, the son of Marcus Garvey. Now we have made good progress: Benin, Senegal, Congo Kinshasa are starting to recover their national treasures, as the laws have been passed. We are now working with Sierra Leone at the moment. But we call on all other African countries to join us. Victory is on the way!



*Chief Charumbira, President of the African Union Parliament,
Co-Chairman of the Royal House of the African Diaspora State*

-Call for Restitution



95% of Africa's cultural treasures are outside Africa. They are in the Tervuren Museum in Brussels, the Quai Branly Museum in Paris, the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, etc. These goods were stolen during colonisation, often in a context of violence and massacre, and today thousands of objects, and even human remains, are kept and displayed as trophies.

We are not only talking about past crimes committed by armies. We are also talking about contemporary crimes: museums are accomplices, because they are guilty of receiving stolen goods and profiting from these treasures. A taste for fine art cannot be an excuse for such attitudes. The Director-General of UNESCO recalled in May 1977: "Some peoples have lost almost all of the cultural property that constitutes an essential aspect of their collective memory and a message transmitted by their past. These peoples call for an understanding of their loss".

This situation is unacceptable and reprehensible. Intercultural dialogue cannot be based on intercultural looting. Restitution cannot be denied. It is a question of justice and culture, of course; it is also a spiritual question, as many of these objects have a religious significance in the tradition to which they belong. It is also an economic issue: these treasures are a source of foreign currency and tourism development that the countries of origin are deprived of.

When African citizens want to pass on their heritage to their children, they cannot do so, because most of these objects are scattered in Europe and the Americas and in



private collections. They are deprived of their memory. Europe rejects African migrants, but intends to keep African treasures.

The African Diaspora State has already made significant progress in restitution in France, Belgium and the European Parliament, and has already taken concrete steps to preserve the objects once they are returned. But most of these treasures are still outside the continent, while many very modern museums in Africa remain desperately empty. This situation cannot continue: it creates tensions in North-South relations, and is highly detrimental to friendship between peoples and to international diplomacy.

This is why, as kings, concerned with human rights, culture and the requirements of the UN Decade for People of African Descent, we support the "Restitution Now" campaign led by the State of the African Diaspora, and on the eve of the Africa-France Summit that will begin on 7 October 2021, we ask:

-African leaders to actively formulate official demands for restitution in support of the African Union Chairperson, Félix Tshisekedi, who, upon his inauguration, stated that restitution would be one of his priorities, and who will have to put the issue firmly on the table during the Africa-France Summit and beyond;

-EU leaders to implement the European Parliament's resolution, voted on 26 March 2019, which calls on member countries and institutions to take into account "the crimes against humanity suffered by people of African descent", and to implement "reparations in the form of a public apology or the return of stolen objects to their countries of origin";

-other countries such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the Vatican or the United States to do the same, and to set up a restitution process as soon as possible, as these states also have tens of thousands of treasures and cultural goods belonging to Africa in their museums.

Endorsements :

- Chief Fortune Charumbira, President of the African Union Parliament,
- Daagbo Hounon, Supreme Chief of the Voodoo cult,
- Dr Julius Garvey,
- The High Council of Kings of Africa,
- United Kingdoms of Africa,
- His Majesty Tchiffy Zié, Secretary General of the Forum of Traditional Kings and Leaders of Africa,
- His Majesty Pr Dada Awiyan Kopkon Octave Cossi Houdegbe, President of the Pan-African Council of Traditional and Customary Authorities
- Chief Zanzan Karwa, Chairman of the Council of Chiefs of Liberia,
- His Majesty King Francis Nnwaneri, Chairman of the South West and African Forum Federation (SWAF),
- The National Council of Chiefs of Zimbabwe
- The House of Chiefs of Zambia,
- The High Council of Kings of Benin,
- The Union of Traditional Chiefs of Togo,
- The Organisation of Kingdoms of South Africa,
- and many other kings from Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Burkina Faso, Congo, Mali, etc.



The Most Beautiful Treasures of Africa, finally revealed...



Theo Chambers, designer of the website

Directed by Theo Chambers, the site arouses admiration for such beauty, but also sadness and anger, and more than that, a desire to mobilise so that justice can finally be done for Africans.



The Treasure of Ahmadou, Mali, Army Museum, Paris

Some of the most beautiful treasures of Africa are now revealed: unfortunately, they are not in Africa. They were stolen during the colonization. It is therefore the aim of the website www.restitutionmuseum.com to present them to the public. Most Africans, whether on the continent or in the Diaspora, will probably see them for the first time.

In 1890, in the context of the French colonial wars, Colonel Louis Archinard took the city of Segou and the treasures of the sovereign Ahmadou, 76 kilos of jewelry, mainly gold: necklaces, bracelets, pendants, etc. They were exhibited in the army museum, in the museum of France overseas, dispersed or stolen. They are part of the cultural heritage of Mali.

This salutary initiative is the work of the State of the African Diaspora. The website is launched as part of the "Restitution Now! » campaign. Indeed, we sometimes hear about these thefts of cultural treasures, but more often than not, we do not know exactly what they are. But we need to know, and better still, we need to see.



The Keys of Algiers, Algeria, Army Museum, Paris

The site, particularly well cared for and elegant, is an invitation to travel. You can travel through many African countries, such as Angola, Benin, Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia and Nigeria, and see what they have been stripped of. One can also travel through Western countries, such as France, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, the Vatican, and see where these cultural treasures are today.

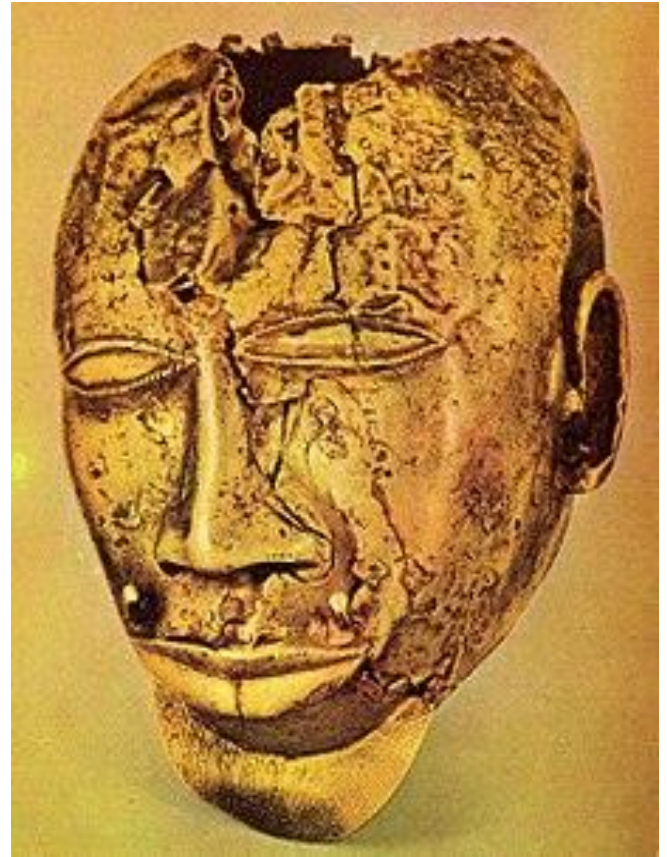


In 1830, France attacked Algiers, and on July 5, the Dey Hussein handed over the keys to the city to General de Bourmont. It was the beginning of 130 years of colonization. These keys remained in the museums of Algiers until the independence, and were then sent to France. They were supposed to be returned in 2012 by the president of the French Republic, François Hollande, but they are still in Paris, in the army museum.



Treasure of Maqdala, Ethiopia, British Museum, London

According to the scholars, this crown was created in the 1740 at the request of empress Mentewwab and her son, King Iyyasu. It was offered to a church in Ethiopia. In 1868, led by Robert Napier, the British troops defeated Tewodros II, who then committed suicide. When the colonial soldiers looted the city of Maqdala, no less than fifteen elephants and two hundred mules were necessary to transport all the artefacts. Among them is this golden crown, which is now in the British Museum.



Gold Mask, Ghana, Wallace Collection, London

After the third Anglo-Ashanti war, in 1873-1874, the British colonial troops destroyed the city of Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti. Among the treasures looted by the soldiers is this gold trophy mask, 20 cm in height, weighing 1,36 kg of pure gold. It was a propriety of King Kofi karkari. Today, the mask is in the allace collection, in UK. In 1974, the Ghanaian government asked for restitution, but the British authorities refused.



Bust of Nefertiti, Egypt, Neues Museum, Berlin

Egypt is probably the most famous example of this history of colonial robbery. Many artefacts or mummies taken from the pyramids are in the Louvre and the British Museum, but many are also everywhere in the western countries, as in Berlin, in the Neues Museum, where can be found one of the finest works of art of the Ancient Egypt. This statue represents Nefertiti, the spouse of Akhenaton, pharaoh of the 18th dynasty, and is regarded as the most famous representation of a woman in art after Mona Lisa. Egypt keeps asking restitution of this treasure. Many German conservative people claim that this work of art is the symbol of German national identity ; one might wonder if it is not above all the symbol of Egyptian identity...



Queen Mother Pendant Mask, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, United States

This pendant mask was produced in the early 16th century under the reign of Oba Esigie, head of the kingdom of Benin. It is made out of bone and ivory. It is one of the most famous masterpieces of African art in the world. The mask represents the mother of the King, Idia, who had an important role in the Court, and received the prestigious title of *Iyoba* (Queen Mother). The small faces depicted are Portuguese characters, who are there to represent the wealth and the trade with Portugal that started at this time. Being white and coming from the sea, the Portuguese were connected with Olokun, god of the sea, who is associated with the white color. It is now in the Met of New York ; another one, very similar, is in London.



Statuette of the mythical hero Chibinda Llunga, Angola, Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Switzerland,

Chibida Llunga is a legendary hero, who lived around 1600, had supernatural powers and invented new hunting techniques. He married Lueji, the daughter of the Lunda King. Created around 1850 in the workshops of the Chokwe region, Angola, this statuette represents Chibida Llunga with his huge hands and foot, a symbol of strength and energy. His sophisticated hat and hairstyle show his aristocratic origin. Today the statue is in the Rietberg Museum, in Zurich, Switzerland.



Treasure of Lusinga, Congo, Museum of Tervuren, Brussels

In 1884, led by Emile Storms, the Belgium troops attack several villages in Congo. Their Leader, Lusinga Iwa Ng'ombe, and two other traditional chiefs, Mpampa and Marilou, are beheaded. Their heads and many artefacts are taken back to Brussels, and they are now detained in the Africa Museum of Tervuren and in the University of Brussels. Today, Bamko-CRAN, an NGO, is asking restitution, and in march 2019, after their lobbying efforts with the State of the African Diaspora, the francophone Parliament of Brussels voted a resolution in favour of restitution of all the African goods stolen during Colonisation.



Black Panther and restitution : from fiction to reality !

FAQ



Black Panther, Ryan Coogler, USA, 2018

At the beginning of Black Panther, Killmonger (played by Michael B. Jordan) appears and tells the museum director that he is going to take possession of an iconic object. She protests that the piece is not for sale. He replies, "How do you think your ancestors got them? Do you think they paid a fair price for it? Or did they take it... like they took everything else?" In a way, this scene is the symbol and the essence of the whole film, because through this vibranium object, it is about restoring Africa to its original strength.

The film was only a fiction: now it is time to act in the real world!www.restitutionmuseum.com

Q: How many African objects are outside Africa?

A: More than 95% of Africa's classical heritage is outside Africa.

If we take the example of France, according to the official report written by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy for the French presidency, more than 90,000 objects in France come from sub-Saharan countries. Half of them were 'taken' during colonisation. France has 9296 objects from Chad, 7590 from Madagascar, 6910 from Mali, 3951 from Ivory Coast, 3157 from Benin, 2953 from Congo, 2448 from Gabon, 2281 from Senegal, 1997 from Guinea. France also has objects from African countries that were not French colonies, such as Ethiopia (3081), Ghana (1656), Nigeria (1148), DR Congo (1428).

In Belgium, the Tervuren Museum holds 180,000 African objects; in the United Kingdom, the British Museum holds 69,000; in Vienna, the Weltmuseum holds 37,000; in Berlin, the future Humboldt Forum holds 75,000.

To give an idea, in Africa, the collections in national museums rarely exceed 3,000 works, and they are often of little artistic value, the most important treasures having been looted.

Q: How did these objects leave Africa?

A: Most of them were looted during colonisation, in a context of violence, crimes and massacres. They were stolen by colonial troops and brought back to Europe as trophies. Sometimes they were sold and dispersed, sometimes they were presented in exhibitions. They were conceived as symbols of the so-called magnificence of colonisation.

Q: Why should these objects be returned to African countries?

A: Because they belong to Africa and to African countries. It is a question of fundamental rights, cultural identity, spiritual integrity and economic development. It is impossible to build intercultural dialogue on the basis of intercultural theft.

Q: Are African countries safe enough to keep them?

-People should not be ignorant or prejudiced: Africa has many safe and modern museums like the Museum of Black Civilisations in Dakar, the National Museum in Lagos, the National Museum in Bamako, the Museum of the Bamoun Kings in Foumban, the National Museum of Bardo in Tunisia, etc. However, it is true that we need to keep them safe. However, it is true that we must improve and secure the others. But in no case can this be an argument against restitution. The thief who stole your car cannot say to the police: "I will not return the car because my victim's garage is not safe enough. I know that, because I broke the lock. Moreover, contrary to popular belief, many African objects were destroyed by the colonists, or lost in Europe. So it is true that if we are to work on conservation in Africa, the European countries, which have destroyed and lost so many objects, are not in a position to give any lessons, especially in terms of security. They should only work with us and help in a humble way to make amends.

Q: And if some African countries are not yet ready to collect their heritage, what can be done?

There are several solutions. The objects can be circulated for international exhibitions, which will bring in money for the future museum that will house them. And when the museum is ready, the objects can be repatriated. Alternatively, the objects can be left behind in Western museums for a fee. African countries can indeed rent their heritage, while waiting to build museums, if they are not sufficiently equipped for the moment. This is why a distinction must be made between restitution, which is a legal act that must be drawn up and recorded now, and return, which is a physical process that can be deferred.

Q: Why do Western countries want to keep these objects?

-Because it reminds them of their past "magnificence", the "good old days", when they had colonies. This is a nostalgic, racist and colonialist attitude. But it is also a source of income for their present and future. Tourism represents 15% of French GDP, for example. It's the country's number one resource (France is the most visited country in the world), and museums are a big part of that activity. People come to see the Egyptian mummies in the Louvre (the world's leading museum), but in doing so they buy tickets on Air France, with planes built by Airbus (the world's leading aeronautics company), they buy hotel nights in the Accor group (the world's leading hotel company), gifts and shopping on the Champs Elysées in the shops of LVMH (world leader in luxury goods), they eat in French restaurants, take taxis, trains and the metro, all of which are jobs that cannot be relocated. But things are changing. More and more people in Europe understand the need for restitution, and in 2019, after our diplomatic efforts, the European Parliament even passed a resolution for restitution and reparation. We are now working to implement it.