



STATE OF THE  
**AFRICAN  
DIASPORA**

# NEWSLETTER

STATE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA  
NEWSLETTER, N° 11

**BENIN : RESTITUTION, OR RATHER, RECONQUEST !**



*Restitution of the royal treasures of Bénin*



*The Restitution. Gift offered to Dr. Tin by CRAN-Benin*



*At the home of the President of Benin, to celebrate the return of the treasures*



## Table of Contents

-Editorial.....	p.01
-Restitution, or rather, Reconquest.....	p.02
-Launch of the campaign (December 2013).....	p.03
-First trip to Benin (August 2015).....	p.04
-Lobbying in France (2015-2016).....	p.05
-President Talon's decision (June 2016).....	p.05
-Second trip to Benin (August 2016).....	p.06
-Decision of President Macron (November 2017).....	p.07
-The Campaign for Reconquest goes international (2018-now).....	p.07
-Third trip. Return of the treasures to Benin (November 10, 2021).....	p.08
-Assessment and Perspectives.....	p.09

## Editorial



This special issue follows on from the previous one, which already dealt with restitution. But while newsletter n° 10 was about restitutions in general, this dossier deals more specifically with the case of Benin. Indeed, although the campaign initiated by Dr. Louis-Georges Tin, concerns all of Africa, of course, he chose from the start to focus his efforts on one country in particular, in this case, Benin, so that the results obtained there could set an example for all the other countries of the continent.

This strategy has not been in vain. Indeed, after a delicate campaign, but conducted energetically, the hoped-for result was obtained: on December 10, 2021, the treasures of the Kingdom of Abomey, which had been looted in 1892 by General Dodds, and then brought back to Paris, were finally repatriated to Cotonou, during a ceremony organized in the gardens of the Presidency. Then, the Prime Minister of the State of the African Diaspora was invited to the private residence of President Patrice Talon, who made a point of "expressing his thanks to Mr Tin, on behalf of the Beninese people".

This historic result was achieved thanks to the active collaboration between the African Diaspora and the Beninese authorities, a cooperation whose major steps can be traced: this is the purpose of this newsletter, which also aims to encourage other countries on the continent to work similarly with the Diaspora.



## Restitution, or rather Reconquest

# THE RECONQUEST

We are talking here about the "restitution" of the treasures of Benin, but the word used here for convenience has its limits and its drawbacks. Indeed, the concept remains a prisoner of the colonial vision. It implies a dissymmetrical relationship: it is the colonist who "restitutes", and it is Africa that "asks" to benefit from the restitution. And if, by chance, a European leader agrees to "return", the African leader is probably expected to "thank" him for accepting the principle. The hand that gives always seems to be above the hand that receives.

However, while diplomacy imposes a certain number of rules, in reality, it is very rare that thieves return their booty spontaneously. It is usually necessary to fight for the restitution to take place. Moreover, when the treasure is finally recovered, it is not the victim's responsibility to thank the thief for returning it, but rather the thief's responsibility to humbly apologize for what he has done and, if truly apologetic, would make a reparatory justice payment for the financial benefits derived over the many many years from the treasures being held in their possession, the benefits of which have been denied from the true owners.

Therefore, a paradigm shift is in order. The word restitution, while challenging the relationship of domination, at the same time confirms it, because those who use it necessarily appear as victims, as despoiled people, and therefore as destitute. This is why, without necessarily renouncing the word restitution, which can have its interest in certain cases, it is more and more appropriate that Africans of the continent and the Diaspora use another word: Reconquest. Indeed, these treasures were taken away by the colonists during the wars of conquest; therefore, when the formerly colonized countries fight to recover their heritage, which is not easy, it is objectively a "reconquest".

To speak of "reconquest" rather than "restitution" is to give or restore to Africans the role that is theirs, an active and positive role. It is to show the Pan-African youth that we have many victories to our credit, past and present, and that they too will have just as many, and even more, in the future. It is to show that the return of treasures to the country is not the favor of Europeans who return it, but the conquest of Africans who succeed. Having taken glory from the theft of the colonies, some European leaders now want to take glory from the fact that they are returning artifacts. This is unacceptable: in this respect, they should observe a certain humility. While African diplomats may choose to avoid the word reconquest, which could unnecessarily complicate matters in the course of negotiations, there is no reason for the general public, and intellectuals in particular, not to call things by their true name. And the fact is: we are not here to "ask" for restitution, but to organize the "reconquest".



### Launch of the campaign (december 2013)



*The President and the Vice-President of CRAN, in front of the Quai Branly Museum*

On December 10, 2013, the CRAN (Representative Council of Black Associations in France) launched a campaign for the restitution of African treasures looted during colonization. President of the organization, at the time, Louis-Georges Tin, publishes with President Soglo, former head of state of Benin, a tribune that appears at the same time in *La Nation*, the major newspaper of Benin, and in *Le Monde*, the daily reference in France. The date chosen marks the International Human Rights Day, but also to the anniversary of the death of King Behanzin, the last King of free Dahomey before the final invasion of the Kingdom by France.

On the same day, Louis-Georges Tin and Guy Samuel Nyoumsi, President and Vice-President of the Federation, organized a guided tour of the Quai Branly Museum for the media, to show journalists France's ill-gotten gains. When the leaders of the association arrived on site, they found that the police had been alerted, whereas normally only journalists were informed of the operation. In other words, the CRAN was bugged. Moreover, the museum's security refused to let the human rights defenders in, and gave no justification for this. The journalists (who happened to be white) could pass, but not the activists (who happened to be black). The President of CRAN then improvised a press conference in front of the closed doors of the museum: "the place where cultures dialogue", as the museum's communication repeats over and over again, has it become "the place where racists dialogue"?

Shocked by the attitude of the museum which, opposed to the visit a refusal at least arbitrary and apparently discriminatory, and which moreover hinders the freedom of circulation and the freedom of the press, the journalists began to express their anger. Overwhelmed, security appealed to the museum's management, who understood that it was impossible to prohibit a visit that was a priori peaceful, except to cause a scandal, and perhaps even a lawsuit. Finally, the visit took place, under high surveillance, and obtained in the press a great repercussion, in spite of the direction of the museum which, wanting to prevent the event, gave, in fact, a bigger impact in all the media. The campaign was launched with force.



*Louis-Georges Tin, presenting the campaign for restitution on TV5 World*



### First trip to Benin (August 2015)



The King of Abomey, Agoli-Agbo. At his side, Louis-Georges Tin and Professor Ahoyo,

The second important step in the campaign about Benin occurred in August 2015. The Africa advisor of the President of the French Republic having indicated to Louis-Georges Tin that the restitution could only be made if the Beninese authorities made an official request, the President of CRAN went to Cotonou to convince his interlocutors. He was accompanied by Laurent Tonegnikes, President of CRAN-Benin, and by Prince Serge Guezo, of the Abomey family, who both guided and accompanied him in his efforts. He met with the Prime Minister, Lionel Zinsou, and also solicited President Yayi Boni, but neither of them committed to the campaign. However, accompanied by Professor Ahoyo, Louis-Georges Tin met with King Agoli Agbo, ruler of the Kingdom of Abomey, who supported the request.

At the end of the stay, just before leaving, the members of CRAN-Benin offered the President of CRAN-France a painting entitled "the restitution". This work was created by an artist they had asked for and perfectly illustrates the topic. In the center of the picture appears the map of Africa, with Benin highlighted. And at the top are emblematic items from the Abomey treasures: a royal recade, the zoo-anthropomorphic statues of the Kings of Abomey, the throne of King Ghezo and the sacred doors of the Abomey Palace. The arrows from these properties point to Benin,

indicating the direction of return. On this occasion, Louis-Georges Tin wanted to express his gratitude to Laurent Tonegnikes and all the other members of the association: "your gift touches me enormously. In my eyes, it represents not only the return of the treasures we are fighting for, but also the ties of heart and brotherhood that exist between CRAN-Benin and CRAN-France, and beyond, between Africa and its Diaspora. This is what makes our strength. Without you, we could not do anything. Really, I am very, very happy about it.



*The President of CRAN-Benin offers a gift to the President of CRAN-France : the restitution.*

### Lobbying in France (2015-2016)



*Discussion between President Hollande and Louis-Georges Tin*

Back in Paris, the President of CRAN continues his lobbying work, and meets with President Hollande and H el ene Le Gall, the Africa advisor, who both oppose any restitution. Mrs. Le Gall does not understand why Louis-Georges Tin is making such a fuss. According to her, he is the only one who cares about this issue. CRAN then takes legal action against the French State, and informs the Elys e. H el ene Le Gall is indignant that France can be attacked in this way, tries to put pressure on her interlocutor, and affirms that the objects in question "have entered the collections in a regular manner". Louis-Georges Tin retorts: were the colonial massacres that allowed these lootings also committed "in a regular manner"? Therefore, despite the intimidations, Louis-Georges Tin persists. Since France refuses to "return", it will be necessary to fight to obtain the "reconquest". The President of CRAN is gathering a team of lawyers, and unless France changes its attitude, the trial will take place.

### President Talon's decision (June 2016)



In Benin, in April 2016, a new election was held, and the presidential election was won by Patrice Talon. Seized of the subject by local campaign actors, including the King of Abomey, Agoli-Abgo, and the President of CRAN-Benin, Laurent Tonegnikes, the new President of the Republic of Benin accepted the request. The subject is put on the agenda of the Council of Ministers on June 21, 2016. The decision was then ratified. The minutes of the meeting indicate what justifies the decision taken:

- « 1) This request for restitution is the initiative of CRAN (the Representative Council of Black Associations)  
2) It is justified by the 1970 UNESCO Convention (...)  
3) Mr. Louis-Georges Tin, President of the Representative Council of Black Associations (CRAN), and the former President of the Republic of Benin, Mr. Nic ephore Dieudonn e Soglo, have published (...) a tribune which pleads for restitution. »

This step is all the more important because one of the arguments of the French Presidency was that no one in Africa is asking for anything at all. However, when Louis-Georges Tin indicates to the Elys e Palace that



Benin is claiming its treasures, this does not change the official position of France, which is sticking to its neo-colonialist positions. President Hollande refuses to return anything, which shows that the argument put forward was totally in bad faith.

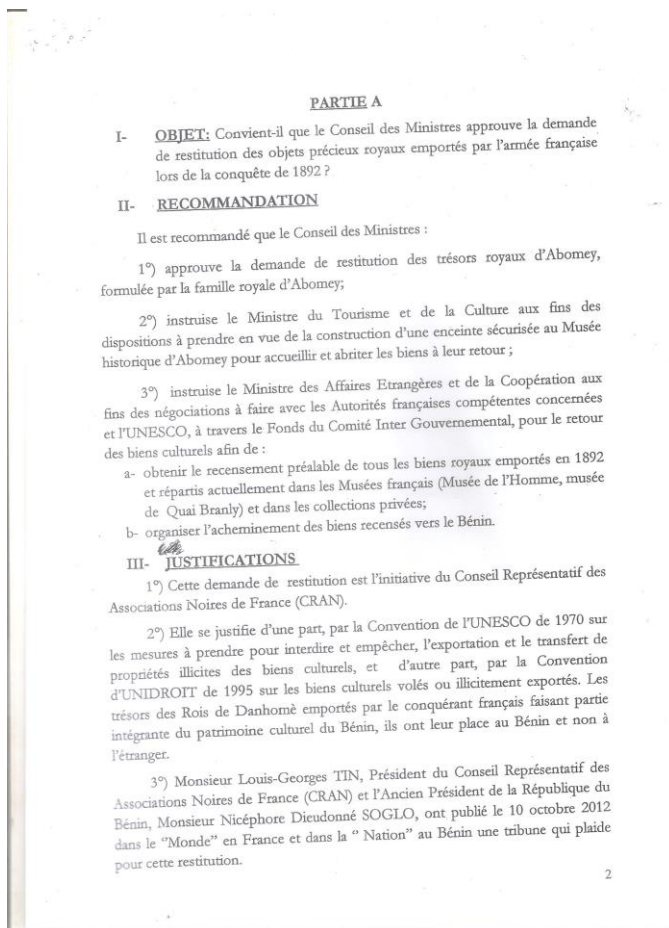
CRAN then published an appeal in *Le Monde*, signed by several French Members of Parliament several Beninese MPs as well, the Pontiff of Vodoun, and many African Kings, including His Majesty Dedjalagni Agoli-Agbo, King of Abomey, His Majesty Kpodegbe Toyi Djigla, King of Allada, His Imperial Highness Sabi Naina III, Emperor of Nikki, His Majesty Adjagnon Honfin II, King of Adjahonmè, His Majesty Gandjegni Awoyo Gbaguidi, King of Savalou, His Majesty Oba Adetutu, King of Savè, His Majesty Chabi Yataou Tamou, King of Bouè, His Majesty Akpaki Gobi Yesse Some, King of Parakou, and His Majesty Athanase, King of Lokossa.

### Second trip to Bénin (august 2016)

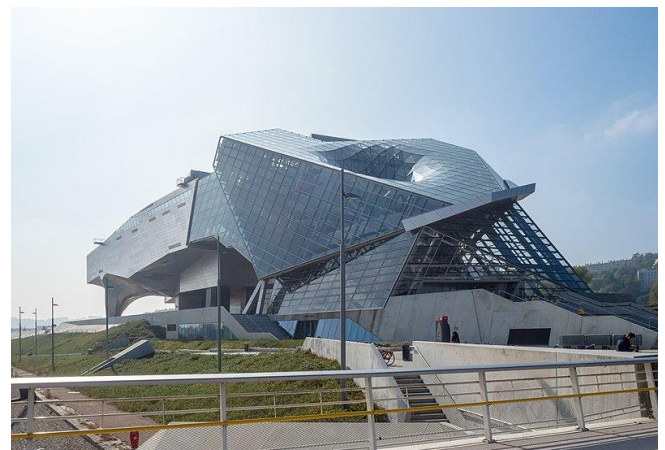


*Meeting at the Ministry of Culture*

Two months after the Beninese government's decision to officially request restitution, the President of CRAN travels again to Cotonou to discuss with the new government the strategies to be put in place. Accompanied by Laurent Tonegnikes, Prince Guezo and Professor Ahoyo, Louis-Georges Tin met in particular with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Culture. They discussed the question of the treasures to be returned, and the Minister of Culture gave a mandate to CRAN to « conduct negotiations with the Fathers of the Society of African Missions in the context of the restitution of Benin's cultural property. » As a matter of fact, beyond the Quai Branly Museum, many of Benin's possessions are in Catholic museums in France and in the Vatican.



*Minutes of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Benin  
(June 21, 2016).*



*Musée des confluences in Lyon, holding collections of Catholic missionaries, including many artifacts "taken" from Africa in general, and from Benin in particular.*



### **President Macron's decision (November 2017)**

On the French side, the new presidential election is won by Emmanuel Macron. Louis Georges Tin is received at the presidency a few weeks later. At first, the Elysée refused to make any progress, but Louis-Georges Tin mentioned the ongoing trial, and explained: either the judge ruled in favor of restitution, and this would be a big problem for the Elysée; or the judge was opposed to it, and this would be even more embarrassing. Indeed, everyone will say that the French justice system is corrupt, that it is a neo-colonial justice system, and this will become a scandal in the international media, in the host country of UNESCO, the so-called country of human rights.

Under the pressure of the trial, which risks tarnishing the image of France on the international scene, and in particular in Africa, the strategy of reconquest succeeds, and the presidency finally agrees to return the property. Louis-Georges Tin was informed of this by Frank Paris, the Africa advisor: President Macron would make the announcement during his speech in Ouagadougou. CRAN therefore suspended its legal action.

Subsequently, two experts, Bénédicte Savoy and Felwin Sarr, were appointed to write a report on the modalities of application of the restitution. They set up a working group and invited Louis-Georges Tin to participate. The report took up most of CRAN's analyses. The French government and the Beninese government then began to cooperate in order to specify the practical details of restitution.

### **The Campaign for Reconquest goes international (2018-now)**



*During the African Union Summit, the Prime Minister, Dr. Tin, discusses the current situation of restitutions with President Macron.*

Meanwhile, after his discussions with Ms. Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Louis-Georges Tin is mandated and invited by President Aziz, during the African Union Summit in Mauritania, to launch the State of the African Diaspora. Once he became Prime Minister, Louis-Georges Tin gave a new dimension to the campaign for the reconquest. He secured the support of numerous royal organizations across the continent, including Chief Fortune Charumbira, President of the Zimbabwean Kings Association and the Chairman of the AU Pan-African Parliament, who also became Co-chairman of the Royal Chamber of the State of the African Diaspora. The State of the African Diaspora also launched the website [www.restitutionmuseum.com](http://www.restitutionmuseum.com), which allows people to see a large number of stolen treasures, based on where they are located and where they were taken from.

Furthermore, as part of this campaign, the State of the African Diaspora secured the vote of a quite historic resolution in the European Parliament on March 26, 2019. As the text states, the European Union:

« 7. Recalls that some Member States have taken strong and effective reparation measures with regard to the injustices and crimes against humanity suffered by people of African descent, while taking into account the lasting effects of these acts on the present;



8. Calls on the EU institutions and the rest of the Member States to follow their example by, for example, offering reparations in the form of a public apology or the return of stolen objects to their countries of origin

9. calls on member states to declassify colonial archives. »

The State of the African Diaspora is now working to ensure that the European Parliament resolution becomes effective in all European countries.

### **Third Trip. Return of the treasures to Benin (November 10, 2021)**



On November 10, 2021, the treasures of Abomey are finally back on the land of Benin. After the colonial conquest, the anti-colonial reconquest has succeeded. It is obviously a national holiday. From the airport to the other end of Cotonou, the posters are visible everywhere. On the avenue that leads to the presidency, for more than a kilometer, citizens are present, on both sides of the street. They dance, they sing, they play drums, some are even on stilts. A day of national pride and popular jubilation.

President Talon has invited the Prime Minister of the State of the African Diaspora, Dr. Louis-Georges Tin to the return ceremony, which takes place in the gardens of the presidency. The Kings are present, the Ministers, the national guard, the dignitaries and the public authorities. The national ballet, the women of Abomey and other groups of artists performed in the splendor of their traditional costumes. The President of Benin gave a solemn and emotional speech.

In the evening, President Talon invited Dr. Tin and several key players of the campaign to his private residence to thank him for his contribution to this historic event. The President said, "I must confess, Dr. Tin, that when you first told us about restitution, I did not believe it for a moment. But I found you so motivated, so determined, that I said to myself: 'Why not? After all, let's do it. And now it's a reality. That is why, Mr. Tin, I want to express my deep gratitude to you, on behalf of all the people of Benin.'"

Afterwards, the Prime Minister was received by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Agbenonci, and by the Minister of Culture, Mr. Abimbola, to discuss an agreement that could be signed between the Republic of Benin and the State of the African Diaspora, in order to strengthen the cooperation that already exists, and that has been the key to success.



*Louis-Georges Tin, November 10, 2021, in front of the vehicle bringing the treasures of Abomey to the Palace of the President of the Republic of Benin.*

## Assessment and Perspectives



*Statue dedicated to the God Gou, Louvre Museum*

The campaign about Benin is far from over. 26 treasures have been returned. From a symbolic point of view, the result is of course considerable. Indeed, these treasures that the French armies had stolen in 1892 are now back on African soil. This reconquest thus breaks the colonial logic which prevailed in this field for almost 130 years. To measure its significance, one must understand that this event constitutes in a sense the second chapter of decolonial history. First, the colonists, the invaders, had to be chased out of the territory: this has been done since the 1960s; and then, it was necessary to go to their homes, to Europe, to bring back home to Africa the treasures they had stolen, and this is now done.

However, from a quantitative point of view, only 26 items have been returned, while the Quai Branly Museum holds 3157, according to official figures given by France, not to mention all the other public museums (Nantes, Bordeaux, etc.), private museums (Musée Dapper, Musée des Confluences), or personal collections which, by definition, are very poorly known. Thus, the percentage of artifacts actually returned is less than 1%. However, this apparently derisory figure must be qualified, because the returned



goods are among the most important in Benin. Thus, from a qualitative point of view, the results are still remarkable.

However, many other treasures, just as important, are still in France. President Talon himself told President Macron: "How do you expect me to be so enthusiastic when I leave here with the 26 works of art, when the God GOU, the FÂ tablet, a mythical work of divination by the famous diviner Guèdègbé, continue to be held here in France to the great displeasure of their rightful owners? "

The sculpture that President Talon is talking about, for example, is in the Louvre Museum. It was forged in the 19th century to celebrate the memory of King Glélé. It is one of the few statues of the time to be human-sized (178 cm), and it weighs between 100 and 150 kg. It is dedicated to Gou, the god of war, iron and forging, who is the equivalent of Ogun among the Yoruba. As for the Fa tablet, it is a sacred object, which is used in the magical rites of divination, as President Talon rightly said. These and all other cultural goods are the property of the Beninese people and must be recognized as such. If Benin does not have all the necessary infrastructure to accommodate these treasures at this time, the return may be postponed. But restitution, that is to say the legal act of transferring the title of ownership, restitution has to be now .

In addition, many other treasures belonging to Benin are outside of France, notably in the Vatican. This is why, in September 2021, Daagbo Hounon, Pontiff of Voodoo, President of the Spiritual Caucus of the State of the African Diaspora, was received at the Vatican to draw the attention of Pope Francis to the issue of spoliations. On this occasion, he handed over to the Vatican authorities a letter that he had written with the Prime Minister of SOAD. Discussions are now underway.

Finally, beyond Benin, the State of the African Diaspora is working with several other countries, such as Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, Liberia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which now seem interested in the subject. And of course, if other countries show interest, the State of the African Diaspora is at their disposal so that they also can benefit from their fundamental rights concerning heritage.

And beyond individual countries, in March 2019, the State of the Diaspora secured a vote in the European Parliament for a resolution in favor of restitution and reparations, as discussed in the previous issue of the newsletter. At the same time, the State of the Diaspora received the support of Chief Fortune Charumbira, President of the Pan-African Parliament of the African Union, and Co-chair of the Royal Chamber of the State of the Diaspora on this issue. Further, from December 1 to 6, 2021, the Prime Minister of the State of the Diaspora was invited by President Tshisekedi to participate in the African Union Summit in Kinshasa on restitution. Therefore, the battle for restitution continues, or rather, as we have seen, the Reconquest continues!



*Photo of the Daagbo Hounon*