

PFPAD5, 14-17 April 2026: Expanding the Human Rights of People of African Descent Under the Second International Decade for People of African Descent

Statement for Panel # 2: Reparatory Justice and Cultural Heritage: Museums and Restitution – Assembly Hall, Palace of Nations, Geneva, Wednesday 15 April 2026

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Organisation: Decolonial Dialogues (Research Collective and Shared Space) – <https://decolonialdialogue.wordpress.com>.

My name is Carol Ann Dixon, co-founder of the research collective Decolonial Dialogues. This statement addresses decolonial and liberatory museum practices.

In the book *Afrotopia*, Senegalese economist and philosopher Felwine Sarr wrote:

“The world of tomorrow is in gestation within the world of today, and its signs are decipherable within the present.” (Sarr, 2019, p. 99)

Our connections to the past are necessary anchors for achieving a positive future. So, it is essential to resolve the ongoing injustice of African material culture – our ancient, sacred and irreplaceable cultural treasures – remaining forcibly exiled elsewhere.

The permanent, legally binding return of contested museum holdings is a vital aspect of reparatory justice. But object restitution in isolation of other decolonial transformations in Western heritage institutions is insufficient and incomplete.

Drawing on Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy's 2018 report on the “*Restitution of African Cultural Heritage*” – I offer three recommendations:

1. **CREATIVE ARTS AND HERITAGE AMBASSADORS**: Establish a working group of heritage partners tasked with inviting globally renowned African artists, filmmakers and other documentarians to be creative “arts and heritage ambassadors” affiliated to this Forum throughout the 2nd International Decade. Commissioned artworks, films and touring exhibitions could then be used to raise awareness about decolonial museum practices, restitution and the need for inclusive leadership within the arts and heritage sectors.
2. **A YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE**: Broker partnerships between international youth leaders’ networks (including UNESCO’s Youth Forum) and heritage scholars from Africa and the diaspora to co-organise a future-focused, global education conference on “African Homecoming Spaces and Communities of Destiny.”
3. **CO-PUBLICATION OF GUIDANCE RESOURCES ON RESTITUTION**: Liaise with international museum bodies (such as ICOM – the International Council of Museums, <https://icom.museum/en/>), legal scholars, heritage experts and other stakeholders to collate and publish best practice know-how that assists African nation-states and reparative justice campaign groups to achieve successful, swift and permanent pathways to restitution for misappropriated cultural treasures *still* exiled in the West.

Additional information:

[1] The creative luminaries invited to serve as ambassadors could be commissioned to create/co-produce art-political, justice-themed installations, touring exhibitions, documentary film projects and published resources to draw attention to issues of restitution, wider aspects of museum decolonisation and the need for diverse leadership. Examples of African and diasporan artists with bodies of work that foreground anti-colonial resistance histories, decoloniality and restitution include:

- **Yinka Shonibare CBE, RA** (b. 1962, UK) – Nigerian-British interdisciplinary artist whose installations explore the legacies of imperialism, decolonisation and cultural identity. Shonibare’s artworks regularly feature the use of Dutch wax print fabrics, globe-headed mannequins in period costumes, historic artefacts, ceramics and *tableaux vivants*. <https://yinkashonibare.com/>
- **Wambui Kamiru** (b. 1982, Kenya) – Contemporary visual artist and gallerist whose video installations, public art projects and works on paper explore decoloniality, womanhood, memory, (dis)identity and history. <https://wambuikamiru.com/>
- **LOOTY REPATRIATION PROJECT (@looty.art)** – A digital arts collective and restitution project, co-founded in 2021 by Nigerian artist Chidi Nwaubani and Somali-Swedish creative consultant Ahmed Abokor. <https://www.looty.art/>
- **Kader Attia** (b. 1970, France) – Algerian-French artist and filmmaker producing thought-provoking installations that critique cultural representation in museums and consider matters of ‘repair’ for historic wounds. <http://kaderattia.de/>

[2] PFPAD Members could work with the following international networks to ensure that every aspect of the conference planning and delivery is youth led: UNESCO Youth Forum; All African Youth Forum (AAYF); AU’s African Youth for Transitional Justice (AY4TJ) platform; International Civil Society Working Group (ICSWG) young leaders’ network.

[3] Sarr and Savoy’s (2018) seminal research on restitution from French museums, and other case histories detailing successful transnational returns could inform the content of future guidance resources for African nation-state representatives and campaign groups navigating claims. PFPAD Members should also liaise with the Council of the EU Cultural Affairs Committee and culture ministers within European nation-states to urge their major universities, museums and other repositories with long-standing African holdings to grant public access to their inventories, formalise research co-operation agreements and publish deaccessioning schedules to accelerate the pace of change.

References:

Sarr, Felwine. 2019. *Afrotopia* [Trans. Drew S. Burk and Sarah Jones-Boardman]. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctv105bb1g>

Sarr, Felwine and Bénédicte Savoy. 2018. *Rapport sur la restitution du patrimoine culturel africain: Vers une nouvelle éthique relationnelle* [Restitution of African cultural heritage: Toward a new relational ethics. Trans. Drew S. Burk]. Paris: Philippe Rey. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/38563-la-restitution-du-patrimoine-culturel-africain>