A PROPOSAL FOR AN INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR THE SHARING & SAFEGUARDING OF CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

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CULTURE AND IDENTITY

• Cultural and Natural Heritage are important sources of identity for communities and nations throughout the world
• In reference to the famous Parthenon Marbles the Greeks have said “They are our pride. …They are the supreme symbol of nobility…They are the essence of Greekness”.

Nefertiti, Egypt, now in Neues Museum, Berlin, Germany
• The African continent has been the subject of intense looting since pre-colonial times and this has continued unabated throughout the colonial and post-colonial eras.
• Africa, as well as Southeast Asia, China, Latin America and Middle East, is a major source market for the illicit trade due to the abundance in heritage treasures.
• The existence of lucrative markets in the West ensure that the artifacts end up in its museums and private collections.

• Estimates on African cultural material currently out of Africa range from 50-90%.
• Recent articles indicate that there are more Dogon in France than in Mali.
• After the repatriation of a few Vigango back to Kenya, more than 400 have also been identified in American Museums but information on the families of origin is lacking.
CULTURE AND IDENTITY

- The illicit trade in cultural material has the potential to strip entire countries of their heritage material, for example in 2002 alone it was reported that Italy lost almost 19000 objects to the illicit trade.

- Stripping a nation of its cultural material is akin to robbing it of its identity.

- “Without cultural identity, social cohesion gradually dissolves, and human groups lose their necessary reference point to relate with each other, and with other groups.” (Keynote Speech of The Aga Khan at the 2002 Prince Claus Conference on Culture and Development)

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

- In addition to contributing towards a people’s identity cultural material provides economic support for communities through creating employment in museums, archives and sites as well as through exhibitions that attract tourists.

- In view of the above, loss of cultural material may have contributed to the diminished role of museums in the economic development of African societies.

\[Queen-Mother Idia, Benin, Nigeria, now in the British Museum, London, United Kingdom\]
In the last few decades perceptions and attitudes of people towards illicit trafficking and restitution of cultural objects have altered significantly and the many recent restitutions and demands for restitutions usher in a new era for cultural patrimony.

This new era calls for Museums, Universities and Heritage Institutions that are inclusive especially in terms of valuing equality and mutual respect among nations and peoples so as to enable the restitution of looted/stolen artifacts back to the countries of origin.

Many countries recently had their cultural material returned from other countries or are currently making arrangements for the return of their artifacts:

- Britain returned some 25000 pieces to Egypt
- France returned artifacts to Egypt and Nigeria
- The Makonde Mask was returned to Tanzania
- The Obelisk was returned to Ethiopia
- Vigango and man eating lions of Tsavo were returned to Kenya
- The head of King Badu Bonsu II was returned to Ghana from the Netherlands
This month (June 2011) witnessed two important and major events in relation to repatriations:

- More than 20,000 artifacts including bronze eagles, rings, belt buckles, spearheads and bone sewing needles were returned to Bulgaria at a special handover ceremony at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. The treasure trove was presented to the Bulgarian Culture Minister.

- In Iraq the Spanish Ambassador pledged that his government was going to return all Iraq stolen antiques which are currently in his country.

The two cases above delineate a new chapter characterized by wholesale repatriations from one country to another (country of origin).

Despite these positive developments the rate of repatriations back to African countries has been very low especially in view of the fact that Africa has been a major source of looted cultural objects.

In addition there are cases where some African countries have been calling for the return of some of their heritage, the calls have either not been heeded or the responses have been painfully slow.
Below are some of the iconic/important artifacts some African countries would like to have back:

- Egypt: Bust of Nefertiti, Rosetta Stone, and Zodiac of Dendara Temple
- Kenya: Head of Nandi, Vigango
- Nigeria: Benin Bronzes

Golden mask, from Kumasi, Ghana, and now in the Wallace Collection, London

Zahi Hawass, responsible for the return of thousands of artifacts back to Egypt in recent years, is advocating for teamwork among countries seeking to recover lost heritage.

Hawass however, emphasizes that countries are not seeking to have all artifacts returned, but only those illegally taken and/or of great historical value to the original country.

Some countries are also calling for the amendment of the 1970 convention so that it applies to cases that took place prior to this date.
INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP: A PROPOSAL

- The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property focuses on three areas:
  1. State parties are required to adopt preventative measures that include enacting relevant legislation, making inventories, staff capacity building and conducting information campaigns
  2. It facilitates the process of repatriation of illegally imported cultural good between State Parties
  3. It provides a framework of International Cooperation in the fight against illicit trafficking

INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM PARTNERSHIPS: A PROPOSAL

- AFRICOM is an international organization dedicated to promoting the development of museums and museum professions in Africa and the protection of Africa’s cultural heritage. It grew out of an International Council of Museums (ICOM) program to address the needs of Africa’s museums and professionals and is now fully coordinated within Africa. Its headquarters are in Nairobi, Kenya.
AFRICOM’S OBJECTIVES:
1. Promote Development of Museums and Museum Related institutions in Africa in the context of global development;
2. Promote the development of professions on which Museum activities are built;
3. Strengthen the collaboration and co-operation among Museums and Museum Professionals in Africa, and develop exchanges with Museums and Museum Professionals abroad;
4. Promote the participation of all sectors of society in the protection and appreciation of cultural and natural heritage;
5. Fight against the illicit trafficking of African Heritage;

In line with the UNESCO 1970 Convention and its constitutional objectives 3 (Partnerships) and 5 (fighting against illicit trafficking) AFRICOM is calling for an Inclusive International Partnership of Museums and Universities to join hands with AFRICOM, UNESCO and ICOM in the fight against illicit trafficking.
INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP: A PROPOSAL

- Partnership Objectives:
  1. Creation of inclusive inventories of shared heritage between countries
  2. Information sharing on what heritage is where
  3. Preparation of joint travelling exhibitions between museums and/or countries with shared heritage to enable people in countries of origin to get opportunity to see some of the shared heritage

- Conduct workshops and information campaigns on the 1970 Convention and its implementation
- Facilitate repatriation of important/significant artifacts
- Conduct joint programs on documentation, security and conservation

Commemorative head of an Oba, Benin, Nigeria, in Ethnology Museum, Vienna, Austria.
Partnership Realization

A major step towards concretization of this Partnership would be the establishment of a Special Inclusive Shared Heritage AFRICOM Fund

Major Contributors to the Fund
- Holders of Shared Heritage (Countries/Institutions)
- Foundations/Individuals (Old/Emerging millionaires/billionaires)

Benefits of the Partnership

1. Transform the repatriation issue into an inclusive shared heritage matter
2. Reduce risks to collections including shared and repatriated heritage as a result of capacity building programs
INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP: A PROPOSAL

- Benefits of the Partnership

3. Safeguarding cultural heritage for posterity through shared responsibility
4. Improved understanding of shared heritage as well as between peoples from different parts of the world thus contributing to social harmony and world peace

THANK YOU

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