

Statement from the Benin Dialogue Group, Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, The Netherlands, 19 October 2018.



The Benin Dialogue Group is a multi-lateral collaborative working group that brings together museum representatives from Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom with key representatives from Nigeria.

A central objective for the Benin Dialogue Group is to work together to establish a museum in Benin City with a rotation of Benin works of art from a consortium of European museums in collaboration with the Edo State Government and the Royal Court of Benin, with the support of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.

On 19 October 2018, at the National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands, the Benin Dialogue Group agreed a number of proposals towards the establishment of a new museum in Benin City (Benin Royal Museum) where a permanent display of Benin art works from European and Nigerian museums will be shown. His Excellency Mr Godwin Obaseki, the Governor of Edo State, presented concrete plans

for the Benin Royal Museum being developed by the Edo State Government and the Royal Court of Benin with the support of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.

The Benin Dialogue Group (2018) discussed the development of the new museum in Benin City to which all the listed European and Nigerian partners will contribute from their collections on a rotating basis. The agreement is that all parties will work to a three year time frame for the delivery of a permanent display of the historic arts of Benin, including some of the most iconic pieces.

The Benin Dialogue Group established a Steering Committee composed of representatives from European museums (Museum am Rothenbaum, Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK); Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin; British Museum London; NWWW), the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Edo State Government and the Royal Court of Benin. This Steering Committee is formed to drive forward the decisions made in Leiden by the Benin Dialogue Group.

These are significant steps forward to realise the goals agreed at the previous Benin Dialogue Group meeting (2017, Cambridge).

The Benin Dialogue Group will meet again in 2019 in Benin City, Nigeria, in 2020 at the British Museum, London, and in 2021 at the Museum am Rothenbaum, Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK) in Hamburg.

As the planning of the Benin Royal Museum moves forward in Benin City, the European partners will provide advice, as requested, in areas including building and exhibition design. European and Nigerian partners will work collaboratively to develop training, funding, and legal frameworks to facilitate the permanent display of Benin works of art in the new museum.

This event occurs within a wider context and does not imply that Nigerian partners have waived claims for the eventual return of works of art removed from the Royal Court of Benin, nor have the European museums excluded the possibility of such returns. However this is not part of the business of the Benin Dialogue Group.

Questions of return are bilateral issues and are best addressed with individual museums within their national systems of governance.

HRH Prince Gregory Akenzua, Enogie of Evbobanosa

“The Benin Dialogue Group meeting in Leiden was very fruitful; all the partners were open and frank in their discussion. I am happy we are making progress in the effort to give our people the opportunity to once more access our heritage that was looted.”

Stijn Schoonderwoerd, Direction, NMVW.

“We were very impressed by the progress made by our Nigerian partners towards the new museum. We are grateful to Governor Obaseki for coming to Leiden to present plans for its development. The European museums are excited to collaborate on this project and have shown their commitment today to making historical Benin works of art available in Nigeria.”

List of participants in the Benin Dialogue Group, Leiden, 2018

The Royal Court of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Edo State Government

National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Abuja, Nigeria

Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

British Museum, London UK

Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford UK

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, UK

Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany

Museum am Rothenbaum, Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK), Hamburg, Germany

Linden Museum, Stuttgart, Germany

Statens museer för världskultur/ National Museums of World Culture, Sweden

Weltmuseum, Vienna, Austria

Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Leiden, the Netherlands