Joint Declaration

on the Return of Benin Bronzes and Bilateral Museum Cooperation

between

The Federal Republic of Germany,

represented by

The Federal Foreign Office

and

The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media,

and

The Federal Republic of Nigeria,

represented by

The Federal Ministry of Information and Culture

and

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

hereinafter also individually referred to as “The Side” and collectively as “The Sides”:

Considering that German public museums and institutions hold significant collections of “Benin Bronzes” (including artefacts made from other material), looted from the former Kingdom of Benin after its colonial occupation and acquired in the aftermath mainly through colonial trading networks,

Acknowledging the great artistic, historical and current value of these artefacts for Nigeria, its present and future generations, particularly for the Edo people, as well as their universal importance for humankind,

Recognising the need to achieve not only the return of objects but also a new understanding of cultural cooperation between Nigeria and Germany,

Recalling the Report of the German-Nigerian Bi-National Commission, signed on 3 November 2021, as well as the Bilateral Agreement between both governments on Cultural Cooperation, signed on 17 December 1999,

Mindful of the German Statement on the handling of the Benin Bronzes in German museums and institutions of 29 April 2021,

Whereas Nigerian and German delegates and representatives of German museums met in Berlin in July 2021 as well as in Abuja in October 2021 and reconfirmed their resolve to return Benin Bronzes in German museums to Nigeria as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 13 October 2021,

Considering that German museums and their trustees support this process and are taking the relevant decisions on transfer of ownership,

The Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Federal Republic of Germany conclude the following joint declaration:

1. Both Sides emphasise the common understanding and the aim in returning Benin Bronzes unconditionally to Nigeria. Both Sides underline the significant potential in building further relationships in the areas of preservation and digitalisation of cultural heritage, museum and research cooperation, art exhibitions, and archaeology.
2. Both Sides welcome the progress made by the discussions initiated in 2021 concerning the cooperation on and the return of Benin Bronzes. Both Sides express their political willingness to ensure the transfer of ownership to Nigeria of all Benin Bronzes held in public museums and institutions in Germany.
3. Both Sides express their political willingness for all Benin Bronzes held in German public museums and institutions to be returned. To date, 1130 such artefacts have been identified in German public museums and institutions.
4. Both Sides declare that the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) and the respective German public museums and institutions which currently hold the Benin Bronzes will sign transfer agreements, including transfer of ownership, physical return of objects to Nigeria from 2022, provisions on loan and on traveling exhibitions.
5. Both Sides intend that German public museums and institutions will continue to display Benin Bronzes on loan as set out in the transfer agreements.
6. Both Sides understand the importance of sharing related documentation such as reports, archive material, inventories and historical loan reports.
7. Both Sides declare their mutual willingness to deepen their cooperation, including archaeological exploration work, training and institution building, in collaboration with the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), joint training of museum managers in cooperation with the planned International Museums Agency and German museums, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and other partners.
8. Both Sides jointly undertake to support the establishment of museum facilities in Benin City.
9. Both Sides intend to support the exchange and cooperation in the field of contemporary and future production of art works.
10. Both Sides declare their intention to contribute to the universal role of the Benin Bronzes by cooperating in the field of exhibitions and research and by ensuring their display is accessible to the general public and to research.

11. Both Sides understand that the issue of digitalisation, copyright and associated issues will be considered in the transfer agreements.
12. Both Sides intend to facilitate the circulation of cultural objects, particularly the Benin Bronzes, by collaborating on international travelling and joint exhibitions.

Signed in duplicate,

Berlin, 1 July 2022

For the Federal Republic of Germany

Annalena Baerbock

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

For the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Zubairu Dada

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs

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