

Zurich Declaration 2024

from the Annual Conference of Directors of Ethnological and World Cultures Museums and Collections in German-speaking Countries

Museums, the Public, Politics, and the Media Have a Duty

On 1 May 2019, the Annual Conference of Directors of Ethnological and World Cultures Museums and Collections in German-speaking Countries published the [Heidelberg Statement](#) titled 'Decolonization Requires Dialogue, Expertise, and Support.' We welcome the fact that the *Heidelberg Statement* is now widely recognized as the voice of our museums.

With this *Zurich Declaration 2024*, we further raise awareness among the public, policymakers, and the media of the potential of ethnological and world cultures museums and collections against the backdrop of globally rising nationalism and crises.

- For some time now, ethnological and world cultures museums and collections have been confronting their history as well as the urgent questions regarding their institutions' ties to colonialism and the resulting obligations and challenges. Through initiatives focused on diversity of voices, international exchange, and transparency, ethnological and world culture museums and collections are working in partnership with society.
- Ethnological and world cultures museums and collections are uniquely positioned to foster collaboration and exchange and to serve as spaces for developing decolonial practices and perspectives. With a newfound sense of self-confidence, people whose cultural heritage is preserved in museums and collections are now bringing their concerns regarding the handling of this heritage to our attention. At the same time, ethnological and world culture museums and collections are proactively making efforts to reach out to potential partners and raise awareness of their collections. Decolonization must be a joint project in the mutual interest of all parties. It is about thinking beyond Europe, listening to one another, and working together constructively to develop solutions at the national, regional, and local levels.
- People from the countries of origin from which our collections originate rightly expect transparency and openness. They are also entitled to chart their own course and make their own decisions regarding their cultural heritage preserved in museums and collections. These do not necessarily have to align with European expectations or the European understanding of the law. Every instance of consultation, participation, and restitution raises different questions! Above all: Every collection contains not only historical connections but also a future – in the sense of new relationships forged through engagement with the collections and their history. Here, ethnological and world cultures museums and collections play a central role.
- Today, ethnological and world cultures museums and collections are being assigned ever-new and more comprehensive tasks. They make sustainable, socially highly relevant contributions to decolonization. In order to continue fulfilling this mission, ethnological and world cultures museums and collections require financial planning security and an adjustment of their budgets. This is where policymakers must step up.
- A pressing issue at present is the funding of cooperative projects as well as restitution projects. Such projects play a vital role in building relationships. We call on policymakers to make the necessary funding available in a transparent manner

to establish mechanisms that will make cooperation and restitution – in all their necessary forms – sustainable in the long term.

- Finally, we urgently call on the foreign ministries of the countries in which we are based to facilitate the issuance of visas for our cooperation partners in accordance with the [2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#) (see Convention text, Art. 16). Only through dignified conditions of cooperation can trust be established, can relevant research questions be developed jointly, and can we arrive at an appropriate understanding of the significance of the cultural heritage preserved here for people in the countries of origin of the collections as well as for post-migrant society as a whole.

The path to a decolonized world is long. Ethnological and world culture museums and collections, along with their partners, possess important regional and subject-specific expertise that contributes to decolonization. We urgently invite media outlets, policymakers, migrant communities, and the interested public to join us and our international partners in considering how ethnological and world culture museums and collections can make informed media communication about the decolonization of knowledge and cultural complexity available to increasingly polarized civil societies. Ultimately, this is about fostering a better understanding of the potential and challenges of cultural diversity, in the spirit of shared responsibility and a shared future.

Signed by

Wiebke Ahrndt, Übersee-Museum Bremen, Bremen

Bianca Baumann, Ethnographic Study Collection, University of Mainz, Mainz,

Annette Bhagwati, Museum Rietberg, Zurich

Inés de Castro, Linden Museum, Stuttgart

Jonathan Fine, Weltmuseum Wien, Vienna

Mareile Flitsch, ISEK Museum of Ethnology, University of Zurich,

Zurich Sarah-Nelly Friedland, Reiss-Engelhorn Museums, Mannheim

Lars Frühsorge, Cultures of the World Collection, Lübeck,

Daniel Furter, Burgdorf Castle, Burgdorf

Peter Fux, St. Gallen Cultural Museum, St. Gallen

Ernst Halbmayr and Dagmar Schweitzer de Palacios, Ethnographic Collection, University of Marburg, Marburg

Peter Joch and Rainer Hatoum, Braunschweig City Museum, Braunschweig

Lars-Christian Koch, Alexis von Poser, and Tina Brüderlin, Ethnological Museum, Berlin

Michael Kraus, Ethnological Collection, University of Göttingen, Göttingen

Nicole Landmann-Burghart, Ethnological Collection, Museum of Nature and Man, Freiburg

Katja Lembke, State Museum of Hanover, Hanover

Heidrun Löb, North American Native Museum NONAM, Zurich

Léontine Meijer-van-Mensch, SKD State Ethnographic Collections of Saxony, Dresden

Lara Weiss and Andrea Nicklisch, Roemer and Pelizaeus Museum, Hildesheim

Karoline Noack, BASA Museum (Bonn American Collection), University of Bonn, Bonn

Thomas Pauli-Gabi, Bern Historical Museum, Bern

Barbara Plankensteiner, Museum am Rothenbaum MARKK, Hamburg

Anna Schmid, Museum of Cultures, Basel

Nanette Snoep, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne

Alban von Stockhausen, Ethnological Museum of the J. & E. von Portheim Foundation,

Heidelberg Mona Suhrbier, Museum of World Cultures, Frankfurt am Main

Uta Werlich, Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich