



Press release

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Conference on the handling of the Benin Bronzes / Roth: “Returns are the starting point for future cooperation”

— In a video conference today, Minister of State for Culture Claudia Roth addressed the handling of the Benin Bronzes that are currently in Germany. The conference participants – around 40 representatives of museums and institutions, the Federal Foreign Office, the federal states and national associations of local authorities – discussed the current state of implementation of the “Statement on the handling of the Benin Bronzes in German museums and institutions” of 29 April 2021. They considered next steps in light of the coalition agreement for the new Federal Government. The Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts in Germany organised the discussion.

— Minister of State Roth said, “The crimes of the colonial era are a blind spot in our culture of remembrance. To this day, there is little public awareness of them. But the way we are handling the Benin Bronzes shows our determination to confront and reckon with this colonial legacy. We will move this process forward actively in close coordination with the Federal Foreign Office, the federal states, the national associations of local authorities and above all the museums and institutions. The upcoming returns are not the end of the story; rather, they are a starting point for future cooperation and for greater cultural exchange. This specifically includes joint training for museum managers as part of the Museums Lab, which was developed in collaboration with the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. I am firmly convinced that this represents an important contribution to a shared future for Germany and Nigeria, and also for Europe and Africa. The planned International Museum Cooperation Agency will play an important role in this work.”

In their joint statement of 29 April 2021, the Minister of State for Culture and the Media, the Federal Foreign Office, the museums belonging to the Benin Dialogue Group and the institutions

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supporting them agreed to extensive transparency, returns and future cooperation with the Nigerian side. An understanding is also to be reached on how Benin Bronzes can continue to be shown in Germany. On 13 October 2021, a German delegation signed an agreement with Nigeria on museum cooperation.

When she took office in December 2021, Minister of State Roth visited the Linden Museum in Stuttgart and, during her official visit to Paris, the Musée du quai Branly. Roth spoke with representatives of both museums about the future role of ethnological museums, especially regarding specific questions related to returning holdings from colonial contexts.