



CONCLUSIONS OF THE ATHENS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE RETURN OF CULTURAL OBJECTS TO THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

Experts on the issue of the return of cultural objects to their countries of origin, who participated in the first International Conference held in Athens, on 17th and 18th March 2008, within the framework of the meeting co-organized by the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation, and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, in the presence of the Member-States of the Committee have reached the following conclusions:

It is important that UNESCO organise international conferences, so that experts intensify their study of the issue of the return of cultural property to its country of origin, in order to produce viable and realistic solutions.

Cultural heritage constitutes an inalienable part of a people's sense of self and of community, functioning as a link between the past, the present and the future.

It is essential to inform and sensitize the public about this issue and especially the younger generation. An information campaign may prove very effective toward that end.

Certain categories of cultural property are irrevocably identified by reference to the cultural context in which they were created (unique and exceptional artworks and monuments, ritual objects, national symbols, ancestral remains, dismembered pieces of outstanding works of art). It is their original context that gives them their authenticity and unique value.

The role of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation must be strengthened through the necessary means, resources and infrastructure. Effort should be made to encourage mediation either through the Committee or by other means of alternative dispute resolution.

Requests and negotiations for the return of cultural goods can work as a vehicle for cooperation, collaboration, sharing, joint research and economic promotion.

In recent years a clear tendency towards the return of cultural objects to their countries of origin has been developed on legal, social and ethical grounds. The return of cultural objects is directly linked to the rights of humanity (preservation of cultural identity and preservation of world heritage).

Museums should abide by codes of ethics. On this basis, museums should be prepared to initiate dialogues for the return of important cultural property to its country or community of origin. This should be undertaken on ethical, scientific, and humanitarian principles. The cooperation, partnership, goodwill and mutual appreciation between the parties concerned could lead to joint research programs and exchange of technical expertise.