

Zurich Declaration 2024

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

Museums, the public, politicians and the media have a duty

In May 2019, the Annual Conference of the Directors of Ethnographic and World Cultures Museums and Collections in German-speaking Countries published [The Heidelberg Statement](#), entitled 'Decolonisation requires dialogue, expertise and support'. We welcome the fact that *The Heidelberg Statement* is now being accepted as the voice of our museums.

With this *Zurich Declaration 2024*, we are raising public, political and media awareness of the potential of ethnographic and world cultures museums and collections in the context of growing global nationalism and crises.

- For some time now, ethnographic and world cultures museums are facing up to their history, to urgent questions about their institutional links to colonialism, and to the obligations and challenges that follow therefrom. Together with civil society, ethnographic and world cultures museums are now working through initiatives to support polyphony, international exchange and transparency.
- Ethnographic and world cultures museums uniquely can promote collaboration and exchange and serve as places to develop decolonial practices and perspectives. With new self-confidence, people whose cultural heritage is preserved in museums and collections are now bringing their concerns to us regarding how this heritage is handled. At the same time, ethnographic and world cultures museums and collections are making proactive efforts to reach potential cooperation partners and publicise their collections. Decolonisation must be a joint project in our mutual interest. It entails thinking beyond Europe, listening to each other, and developing constructive solutions together at national, regional and local levels.
- People from our collections' countries of origin rightly expect transparency and openness. They are also entitled to go their own way and make their own decisions concerning their cultural heritage preserved in museums and collections. These do not necessarily have to correspond to European expectations or understandings of the law. Every case of co-determination, participation and restitution raises different questions! Above all: in addition to historical interdependencies, every collection also augurs the future – in the sense of new relationships being forged by engaging with collections and their history. In this, ethnographic and world cultures museums and collections play a central role.
- Today, ethnographic and world cultures museums and collections increasingly are being assigned new and more extensive tasks. They are also making sustainable, highly socially-relevant contributions towards decolonisation. In order to continue fulfilling this mission, ethnographic and world cultures museums and collections require financial planning security and adjustment of budgets. We call upon the responsible political actors to meet these needs.
- A pressing problem is the funding of cooperative projects and projects connected to restitution. Such projects perform crucial relationship work. We call on those responsible in politics to transparently provide the necessary funding to make cooperation and restitution with all its facets endeavors that museums can carry out for the long term.
- Moreover, we urge the foreign offices of the countries in which we are located to facilitate the issuance of visa 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). Trust can only be established through dignified conditions of

cooperation, so that relevant research questions can be developed together, and we can achieve an appropriate understanding of the significance of the cultural heritage preserved here for people in the collections' countries of origin, as well as for post-migrant society as a whole.

The road to a decolonised world is a long one. Ethnographic and world cultures museums and collections and their cooperation partners have important regional and specialist expertise to contribute to decolonisation. We urgently invite media organisations, politicians, migrant communities and the interested public to consider, together with us and our international partners, how ethnographic and world cultures museums and collections can provide informed media communication about the decolonisation of knowledge and about cultural complexity to increasingly polarised civil societies. This is, not least, about achieving a better understanding of the potential and also the challenges of cultural diversity, as a shared responsibility for a shared future.

We, the undersigned

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