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PRESS RELEASE

Forschungscampus Dahlem, Ethnologisches Museum

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Inaugural visit to Berlin by the new Director General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments Nigeria (NCMM) - talks on further physical returns of Benin bronzes

Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Last week, Olugbile Holloway, Director General of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments Nigeria (NCMM), paid his inaugural visit to Berlin at the invitation of the Ethnologisches Museum. Among other things, the talks centred on the physical return of further Benin bronzes from Berlin to Nigeria.

Olugbile Holloway has been Director General of the NCMM since March 2024, succeeding Abba Isa Tijani. As Holloway's predecessor, Tijani played a key role in negotiating the contract signed in August 2022 for the transfer of ownership of the Benin objects from the Ethnologisches Museum's collection to Nigeria.

In addition to the next steps for the physical return of further Benin bronzes from the Ethnologisches Museum's holdings, the talks in Berlin also covered possible future collaborations between the NCMM and the Ethnologisches Museum with the aim of implementing joint exhibition projects. An interview with Holloway was also recorded, which will soon complement the 10-channel video installation in the Benin exhibition at the Humboldt Forum.

Olugbile Holloway says: 'In addition to the Benin exhibition at the Humboldt Forum, I also visited the depots of the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin-Dahlem last week and inspected the Benin artefacts stored there. The discussions with the Ethnologisches Museum were very constructive. I am confident that we will be able to realise the return of further Benin objects in the near future.'

Lars-Christian Koch, Director of the Ethnologisches Museum and the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, adds: 'The visit by and the very fruitful exchange with Olugbile Holloway show that the transfer of ownership should not be seen as the provisional conclusion of the process. On the contrary, it was the starting point for a sustainable, future collaboration that we are very much looking forward to.'

In August 2022, the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK) transferred ownership of 512 Benin objects from the Ethnologisches Museum's collection to Nigeria. All of these objects had come to Berlin as a result of the so-called British 'Strafexpedition' of 1897. This was the largest transfer of

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ownership of collection objects from a colonial context to date. In agreement with Nigeria, around a third of the objects transferred remain in Berlin on loan for an initial period of ten years; they are on display in the Humboldt Forum. The first twelve Benin objects from the Ethnologisches Museum were also physically restituted to Nigeria in July and December 2022.

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