

Declaration of the International Forum on the Return of Cultural Property (Seoul Declaration) 2011

We, the participants in the expert meeting held in Seoul on 19 July 2011 to discuss the importance of building the international network for the return of cultural properties and to generate strategies to build the network,

Recognizing that cultural heritage is irreplaceable, has symbolic meaning to the people of the country of origin and is fundamental to their cultural rights,

Acknowledging the importance of access to cultural heritage for the full realization and enjoyment of human rights, particularly self-determination and cultural rights, as reflected in the international bill of rights including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and other relevant multilateral instruments including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and regional human rights instruments,

Noting the 2011 report and recommendations made by the UN Independent Expert on Cultural Rights concerning the right to access cultural heritage, prepared pursuant to a mandate granted by the UN Human Rights Council,

Recalling that the return of cultural property to its countries of origin and the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property are universal issues of the international community,

Having in mind that bilateral and multilateral international cooperation for the return of cultural property constitutes a crucial means to restore a people's identity and enhance mutual understanding and respect,

Acknowledging that relevant international laws introduced by UNESCO, such as the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict 1954 and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999), the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), and the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995), the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001), the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), and activities of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation (ICPRCP) as well as the main codes of ethics elaborated by either international organizations or private institutions have contributed to building the foundation for international cooperation and have encouraged the relevant activities,

Noting the value of non-governmental and civil organizations' networks in deepening cooperation and raising awareness of return of cultural property,

Make the following recommendations and invite all relevant stake holders to consider and apply them:

1. To encourage better use of existing databases of stolen works of arts and to actively cooperate with experts, civil society, and nongovernmental organizations when updating

inventories;

2. To reinforce the organization of specialized organs or institutions and systemic support for networks of civil society for the effective and efficient return of cultural property;

3. To make continuous efforts to enhance intergovernmental cooperation to build international network for the return of cultural property;

4. To use the relevant legal frameworks and multilateral cooperation tools more actively, and participate in their international networks to share information on successful returns.

5. To note the International Forum to be held in 2012 in the Republic of Korea to develop strategies to consolidate and utilize the networks for the return of cultural property.