



S T A T E M E N T

B Y

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OF GUYANA

ON

AGENDA ITEM 21: RETURN OR RESTITUTION
OF CULTURAL PROPERTY TO THE COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

UNITED NATIONS

NOVEMBER 02, 1993.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY.

Mr. President,

The draft resolution before us today on the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin is one of great importance to a large number of countries which have been, through the ages, deprived of the cultural property created and/or owned by earlier civilisations. These, in the main, form the cultural heritage of nations as well as the basis of a nation's history.

The pride and glory of countries all over the globe, to a great extent, is derived from what their artists, architects, artisans and workers produced in different periods of history. To many countries, there is a great sense of loss, as well as humility, that irreplaceable objects of their cultural heritage are to be found in museums, and even private collections in other countries.

The importance of these objects of art and the culture of some of the world's great civilisations is beyond estimation. The removal of the cultural property of these countries constitutes a denial of a thorough understanding and appreciation of their own cultural heritage as well as a denial to their scholars and historians of the right to a careful examination and analysis of their past.

It is to the credit of UNESCO that this subject has been dealt with and put in its proper perspective and has been given priority. So frequently, in this materialistic world in which we live, insufficient attention has been paid to history and culture and the needs of man to feel pride in the knowledge of a rich culture as part of his heritage.

UNESCO's concern on this matter has helped to guide many countries in providing legislation, inventories and methods in recovering treasures of earlier civilisations and in setting the climate for the return of such historical objects.

Also, with the improvement of scientific methods of recovery of cultural property from the seabeds and from excavations conducted with highly technical equipment, there are now greater possibilities of plundering cultural property. Thus, proposals in the text of the draft resolution before us constitute ways and means of dealing with these new challenges.

We are dealing, too, with a moral issue, one that must take into account the responsibilities of countries in possession of the cultural property of - and this is generally the case - smaller and poorer nations.

These monuments, objects of art, pieces of great importance that belong to buildings and historical sites that have lost whole sections, manuscripts and other cultural treasures of indigenous heritage, are important to the study of a nation's history. Moreover, they are important to the young people of these countries, the generations to come, who need the reassurance of their worth and a more complete understanding of what their ancestors created. Such cultural property forms an inspiration and incentive to young people to achieve the greatness of their ancestors, a better understanding of their rich history and a pride of being arising out of such cultural values.

The UNESCO appeal to encourage the mass media along with educational and cultural bodies, to create greater awareness with regard to the return of cultural property to the country of origin, bears serious consideration, as do appeals for bilateral agreements for the restitution of historical treasures.

The injustices of the past can be corrected today when hopefully, the conscience of nations matures. There is a great need to restore the self esteem, conscience, pride and dignity of the nations which have provided the basis for the great advances we have witnessed in this century. UNESCO deserves greater support and needs greater clout to repair the damages of the past. This draft resolution A/48/L 15 must be more than a piece of paper tucked away in a file. We must strive to give it life and meaning.