



TheMuseumsLab

**Joint Declaration of
TheMuseumsLab Partner
Museums Network**

"Restitution cannot be simply a return to the kingdom following exile. It must draw on the wealth of new energies and meanings which the objects in question have produced in the art world and will continue to produce after their return, to emphasise that the time has come to reinvent the museum as a realisation of networks and synergies.

These objects, which in the words of Amadou Mahtar M'Bow have put down new roots everywhere they have been, now have a role to play in building bridges and thus in forging this new kind of museum network."

Souleymane Bachir Diagne

Director of the Institute of African Studies
Columbia University

Preamble

This Declaration is the result of a collaborative process shaped by the insights and contributions of TheMuseumsLab partner museums network in the preparation of a joint workshop held in Berlin on 18.06.2025, which brought together over 70 directors and museum facilitators representing more than 40 museums from over 20 countries across Africa and Europe.

TheMuseumsLab Partner Museums Network offers this Declaration as both a statement of intent and an invitation — to continue the work of building a more just and interconnected museum landscape, together.

Joint Declaration of TheMuseumsLab Partner Museums Network

We, the partner museums of TheMuseumsLab in Africa and Europe, affirm our shared commitment to fostering an equitable, sustainable, and future-oriented museum landscape across continents.

Museums, Heritage and Art Institutions, and Cultural Spaces are more than custodians of objects — they are spaces that connect generations, spark curiosity and imagination, inspire critical reflection, and promote access to the full richness of humanity in its diversity.

We acknowledge the complex histories that have marked the relationship between Africa and Europe, including colonial exploitation and the looting of cultural heritage. We believe that we will only overcome the wounds of the past, heal the injuries, create togetherness and forge a path toward true partnership if we foster trust and enduring cultural ties.

Over the past five years, more than 50 cultural institutions and 250 fellows and alumni have cocreated TheMuseumsLab unique dynamic, transcontinental community of culture, grounded in dialogue, mutual respect for different beliefs, perspectives and forms of expression, professional excellence, and a shared sense of responsibility for the cultural narratives we shape and the humanity expressed in culture.

United by the values of dialogue, mutual learning, and responsibility, we cherish the role of Museums, Heritage and Art Institutions, and Cultural Spaces to foster understanding, inspire change, and reflect the diversity of our societies and we are committed to solidarity and mutual support amongst us on this way.

We commit to long term partnerships between African and European Museums, Heritage and Art Institutions, and Cultural Spaces through collaboration, co-curation and joint research. We want to transform and strengthen these spaces and are committed to reshaping our institutions and practices in ways that are inclusive, innovative, and responsive to the challenges of our time. We recognize the transformative potential — and ethical responsibility — of engaging with emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. We commit to ensuring their use aligns with our shared values of cultural integrity, data sovereignty, and public accountability.

This Declaration reaffirms our shared commitment to fostering sustainable, equitable, and forward-looking museum and museums professionals' cooperation across continents. It aims to consolidate our ongoing efforts and create space for new formats of collaboration and innovation. We call upon institutions and governments to join our efforts, to support these talents and lend their hand for further progress for a joint learning between Africa and Europe over the next 5 years.