

**3RD PFPAD: CULTURE AND RECOGNITION SESSION, PALACE OF NATIONS, GENEVA,
THURSDAY 18 APRIL 2024**

**Statement for the 3rd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on People of African
Descent Theme: "Culture and Recognition"**

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My name is Dr Carol Ann Dixon - a cultural geographer and heritage educator speaking on behalf of the School of Arts and Culture, Newcastle University, and the Decolonial Dialogues international research collective for early career scholars (<https://decolonialdialogue.wordpress.com>).

As educators, our pedagogic work is strongly influenced by the scholarship and activism of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who famously said that decolonization is:

"...the search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and other selves in the universe."

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's call to decolonize minds, as well as institutional spaces and curricula, has been adopted by many educators and cultural producers on the African continent and throughout the global African diaspora. We acknowledge decolonization as *"a humanistic struggle and endeavour, with roots that reach back to the liberation movements of yesteryear"* (Mungwini, 2022). However, we also recognise that the promises and aspirations of equity, reparative justice, respect and rights are yet to be fully realized on many fronts.

My recommendation to the Forum is to establish a conference planning sub-group to organise a global conference on Arts, Culture, Heritage and Recognition, which builds alliances with established international arts and heritage partners (such as ICOM: International Council of Museums - <https://icom.museum/en/>) but which is importantly led by African-descended peoples in positions of strategic leadership and governance - with art-political, anti-racist and curative art for 'pro-social' change at its heart.

The most impactful and effective educational approaches that have the power to touch hearts, transform minds and motivate us all to act to advance rights and equity are the pedagogic methods and curricula that foreground the arts as a conduit for creative learning, growth, healing and societal change.

Artists with African heritage and ancestry *must* be seen and celebrated as a vital force for advancing these progressive transformations, to give Africa its rightful place in our global story - sharing visual, literary, oral, musical, dance-based and multi-media narratives expressed through the voices and bodies of African people. Thank you.

ADDITIONAL SPECIFICITIES:

* The Forum should convene an international education conference on Arts, Culture, Heritage and Recognition that features the proposed thematic priorities of the 2nd International Decade for People of African Descent (2nd IDPAD, 2025-2034) as its core modules of work.

* The Forum should also establish an arts, culture and heritage education working group tasked with sourcing, collating and disseminating best practice, creative, digital and multi-media teaching and learning resources, reflective of the rich histories and cultural excellence of African-descended artists and other creative luminaries world-wide with expertise in Black cultural production.

* Regarding the conference's focus on arts education, the poignant sculptures created by Ghanaian (Akan heritage) contemporary fine artist Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, which commemorate - with sensitivity and care - our ancestors' experiences of the Maafa (the 'Middle Passage' of trans-oceanic enslavement) over many centuries; the visual poetry of African American photo installationist Carrie Mae Weems; or indeed the sublime charcoal portraits of Jamaican-born figurative artist Donovan Nelson (from his celebrated "Ibo Landing" series) are just a few examples of the types of artworks and artists' portfolios to foreground within an arts-focused, pro-social conference and future published curricula. This conference should be the catalyst for securing funding that will help with the commissioning of new anti-racist and decolonial educational resources for dissemination to educators working across all the educational phases, from early years through to postgraduate, tertiary-level study.

ARTISTS' PROFILES:

Kwame Akoto-Bamfo – Ghanaian (Akan heritage) fine art sculptor (b. 1983), educator, activist and founder of the Nkyinkyim Installation/Museum, Nuhalenya-Ada, Greater Accra, Ghana: <https://nkyinkyimmuseum.org>

Donovan Nelson – Figurative artist (b. Manchester, Jamaica), based in Brooklyn, NY.

YouTube recording of Donovan Nelson's "Ibo Landing" at the UN:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE_5sGMu7ro

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/donovannelsonstudio/?hl=en>

(@donovannelsonstudio)

Carrie Mae Weems – American lens-based artist and installationist (b. 1953, Portland, Oregon), based in Syracuse, New York: <https://www.carriemaeweems.net/>.

REFERENCES:

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey, p. 4.

Mungwini, Pascah (2022) *African Philosophy*. London: Bloomsbury, p.11-12.