

## **RESTITUTION STUDY GROUP**

PFPAD Session 3, Culture & Acknowledgement , April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests,

It is an honor to join you in the hallowed halls of Geneva, Switzerland, amidst the discourse of the United Nations Human Rights Commission's Permanent Forum on People of African Descent. We thank you for allowing us a pivotal moment this past weekend. On Saturday, April 13, 2024, at 10 am ET, descendants of enslaved Africans, through the Restitution Study Group (RSG), boldly asserted their rightful ownership of the iconic Benin Bronzes.

We unveiled the director's cut of the Cannes Award-winning short film, "They Belong to All of Us: The Benin Bronze Slave Trade Story," depicting the fervent campaign for Afrodescendant rights to these brass cultural relics. With poignant prayers from (yours truly) Queen Mother Dr. Delois Blakely, the soul-stirring essence of our ancestors permeated the space.

Executive Director Deadria Farmer-Paellmann poignantly revealed our DNA connection to the Benin Kingdom, amplifying our claim to these artifacts. These bronzes, cast with brass currency exchanged for our ancestors, stand as silent witnesses to a harrowing history, worth up to \$30 billion today.

Yet, museums perpetuate silence, omitting the slave trade origins from exhibit captions, even gifting these relics to descendants of slave traders. Tylon Washington, the film's director, expressed shock over this history, echoing the sentiment of revelation shared by many.

British reparations leader Esther Xosei, standing outside the Horniman Museum, resonated with a shared sentiment: ignorance of our heritage's ties. Illinois State Representative Carol Ammons added her voice, urging access and narrative change and readiness to introduce legislation to right the wrong of our exclusion from the history. Our ancestors paid for the bronzes with their lives. We pay for them with our suffering today.

Sheila Camarotti of RSG Brazil/Germany shed light on Brazil's ongoing struggle, emphasizing the enduring legacy of slavery. Queen Mother Blakely urged dialogue and reconciliation, advocating for shared heritage.

Farmer-Paellmann envisaged healing through the establishment of the Harlem-based "Benin Kingdom Museum," inviting support and engagement. Legal precedents, including a New York State law, offer pathways to transparency and accountability.

We call on this body to create a protocol ensuring the slave trade era is included in Benin bronze and all African artifact provenance research and our inclusion in repatriation discussions. Let us stand united in this pursuit of justice, ensuring that relics remain where Afrodescendants reside, fostering a deeper connection to our cultural legacy and Honoring our shared heritage with Nigeria and the Benin kingdom.

Thank you.