



AAIA

Association on American Indian Affairs

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Statement of Kimberly A. Dutcher, Executive Director, Association on American Indian Affairs

Good afternoon, my name is Kimberly Dutcher. I am an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and Executive Director of the Association on American Indian Affairs (AAIA), a 94-year old Indian advocacy organization. International Repatriation has been a priority issue for the AAIA, who initiated the International Repatriation Project and has committed an office and full time staff to this important human rights issue.

The AAIA supports Indigenous People in their objections to the sale of Indigenous Ancestors, funerary objects, sacred objects and cultural patrimony -- collectively and often referred to as "cultural items". Under Articles 11 and 12 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, International Repatriation is a human rights issue. Cultural items have been taken from Native Americans through inhumane acts of digging up their graves and violating their sacred places. It is an endemic and worldwide human rights abuse that involves, in large part, the private art market.

Too often, collectors and buyers purchase cultural items that have been falsely identified and improperly labeled by those who claim to be experts. Many times, cultural items have been taken from our burial and sacred locations, under suspicious and even illegal circumstances. These so called "experts" may have visited our communities, but are not substitutes for Indigenous Peoples and tribal governments' knowledge.

Abuse of our Indigenous cultures, beliefs, and peoples must end--our Native American Ancestors and cultural items are placed in circumstances of profound disrespect--when they must be home with their Peoples who have a duty of care toward them.

The AAIA urges the following to begin to address this vast human rights problem:

- The AAIA encourages the United States and other nations to have meaningful consultations with Indigenous Peoples and governments. Meaningful consultation provides time for much-needed, in-depth information exchange and action. Our tribal governments, repatriation representatives, and Indigenous spiritual leaders should play key roles in all repatriation discussions.
- The AAIA urges collectors and buyers to consult with Indigenous Peoples and our tribal governments who are the real experts and have the knowledge, as well as the generational experience of their lives and cultures.
- The AAIA supports Direct government-to-government communications at the United Nations among tribal governments, nation-states, and United Nations officials.
- The AAIA requests a nation-wide investigation into the looting industry and the questionable practices of private auction houses and museums that have brought us to this point.
- The AAIA looks forward to facilitating discussion among interested parties at its second Indigenous International Repatriation Conference, *Shifting the Burden*, on September 26-28 in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Be vigilant. And remember: Indigenous Peoples are the Experts of Our Own Cultures.
Thank you.