



## No Humboldt21!

Stop the planned construction of the Humboldt Forum  
in the Berlin Palace!

By 2018/19 the City of Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany want the “most important culturally political project in Germany at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” to have been completed: the project “Berlin Palace – Humboldt Forum.” This “project of the century,” which will be located in the city centre, and will cost 590 million Euros. The City of Berlin wants to contribute 32 million Euros to the project.

The president of the “Preußischer Kulturbesitz” (Prussian Cultural Heritage) foundation, Hermann Parzinger, first presented the concept in 2011. The concept’s title is “The Humboldt Forum: 'To be in Touch With as Much of the World as Possible' Berlin’s “non-European collections” are to be moved from current remote location of Berlin-Dahlem to the city centre. Moreover, the building of the central state library as well as the Humboldt University is to be used. The plan is to establish the “Agora”, a “Forum for Science, Culture and Politics” as the “heart of the Humboldt Forum.”

In Parzinger’s concept the project’s plans are being formulated in superlatives. This will not simply be an outstanding “location for the art and culture of Asia, Africa, America, Australia and Oceania.” The Humboldt Forum is also to become a unique “centre for the research of non-European cultures.” A “cultural centre of national and international distinction” is planned, with which Berlin wants to establish itself as “a leading cultural and museum city around the world.”

**We demand that the work on the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace be ceased and that a public debate is held: the current concept violates the dignity and property rights of communities in all parts of the world, it is Eurocentric and restorative. The establishment of the Humboldt Forum is a direct contradiction to the aim promoting equality in a migration society.**

Explanatory Statement:

**The State Museums of Berlin are not the “legitimate owners of their holdings”.**

The majority of the over 500,000 valuable items from all over the world ended up in Berlin through colonial conquests. The Europeans often even resorted to physical violence, in order to gain ownership of central objects belonging to the colonised societies - for example thrones, sceptres and cult objects. By taking the credit for these objects, the city of Berlin receives material benefits as well as intangible advantages up until the present day. We demand the disclosure of the ownership history of all the exhibits as well as adherence to the UN Resolution which is unequivocal regarding the “repatriation of cultural artifacts to countries which have been the victims of expropriation.” The dialogue concerning the future homes of the plundered art and the colonial loot must be sought with the descendants of the artists and the legal owners of the exhibits. This is particularly important regarding the stolen human remains, which are currently to be found in the possession of the “Preußischer Kulturbesitz” foundation.

**Berlin’s colonial past is redeemed**

It is currently planned that the collections from all over the world will be returned to the castle of the Hohenzollerns, where Berlin’s first overseas treasures have already been presented. As it was then, this is about nothing other than representing power and global relevance. For the descendants of the colonised, both national and abroad, it is particularly disrespectful, that this

should take place in the resurrected residence of the Brandenburg-Prussian monarchs. The Hohenzollerns were primarily responsible for the enslavement of thousands of people from Africa as well as genocides and concentration camps in Germany's former colonies. Therefore we roundly reject any presentation of objects in the Berlin Palace which were brought to Berlin during colonial times.

### **The cultures of the world are discriminated against, being marked as “strange” and “other”**

As already was the case during those times when “exotic curiosities” were displayed in the “cabinets of wonders” belonging to the Princes of Brandenburg and the Prussian Kings, the Berlin Palace – Humboldt Forum will apparently serve the purpose of developing a Prussian-German-European identity. This concern is actually directly opposed to the aim of promoting a culture of equality in the migration society and is being pursued to the detriment of others. The supposed “stranger” and “other” will be constructed with the help of the often centuries old objects from all over the world, and the extensive collection of European art on Berlin's museum island will be put to one side. In this way, Europe will be constructed as the superior norm. We reject this degrading form of presentation. We demand that the “Preußischer Kulturbesitz” foundation makes an effort to ensure that experts from the countries of the global south are involved in presenting their own works in a way that promotes equality of opportunity, has an awareness of power dynamics and focusses on portraying similarities between peoples.

### **The “research on non-European cultures” is not problematized**

The exploration of the world and its populations by European “researchers” was a colonial project for many years and still affects the regimentation and exploitation of the global south to this day. One of the two people this project is named after, Alexander von Humboldt, was involved in this project to a great extent. The Spanish royalty and its overseas colonial regime, which was based on genocide and slavery, were particularly interested in the results of his expeditions in South and Middle America, and they supported him to the best of their ability. In this way, the Prussian “who really discovered America” who even stole buried corpses and shipped them to Europe, embodies colonial dominance. Humboldt is not an appropriate person to name an intercultural centre after.

### **The cultural treasures of the world remain exclusively for the good of the people of the north**

In the written concept, the President of the foundation, Hermann Parzinger, invites “visitors from Asia or the descendants of indigenous Indian or African Societies” to the German capital. In an era where people drown daily in the Mediterranean Sea because they have no other means to enter Europe, such an invitation can only be described as cynical. Aminata Traoré, the former Culture and Tourist Minister of Mali, put it in a nutshell: “Our cultural works enjoy civil rights in places, where even our entire community is denied permission to stay.” We demand the “Preußischer Kulturbesitz” foundation to enable access to Berlin's non-European collections to all people of the world. The looted art must be returned – permanently. Moreover, this should take place through the loan the artworks to the countries without any cost to them in order to realize international exhibition projects in all regions of the world where the artworks now located here were created.

Berlin, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2013

## Signatories

AfricAvenir International e.V., Berlin, Douala, Windhoek  
Afrosvenskarnas riksförbund, The National Association of Afro-Swedes, Stockholm  
AFROTAK TV CyberNomads, Berlin  
AHOI artists and events, Berlin  
Alexandertechnik, Berlin  
Antirassistische Initiative Berlin (ARI)  
Arbeitskreis Hamburg Postkolonial  
Arbeitskreis Panafrikanismus München e.V.  
Artefakte // anti-humboldt, Berlin  
Art Labour Archives  
Barnimer Kampagne "Light me Amadeu", Eberswalde  
Berliner Entwicklungspolitische Ratschlag BER e.V.  
Berlin Postkolonial e.V.  
Bildungswerkstatt Migration & Gesellschaft e.V., Berlin  
Bündnis gegen Rassismus, Berlin  
Bundeskoordination Internationalismus (BUKO), Hamburg  
Colonialism Reparation  
Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (CRAN), Paris  
CulturCooperation e.V., Hamburg  
Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk Hessen e.V.  
Eine Welt Netzwerk Hamburg e.V.  
eipcp, europäisches institut für progressive kulturpolitik  
Fairbindung e.V., Berlin  
FDCL - Forschungs- und Dokumentationszentrum Chile-Lateinamerika e.V., Berlin  
Friends of Lake Bosomtwe  
glokal e.V., Berlin  
Informationsbüro Nicaragua e.V., Berlin  
Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland - ISD-Bund e.V.  
Interflugs - Universität der Künste Berlin  
ISD Gießen  
Kampagne "Zusammen handeln! Gegen rassistische Hetze und soziale Ausgrenzung", Berlin  
KorIENTATION e.V., Berlin  
Landesausschuss für Migration, Diversität und Antidiskriminierung der GEW Berlin (LAMA)  
Lateinamerika Nachrichten e.V., Berlin  
México vía Bérlin  
[muc] münchen postkolonial  
Naturfreunde Berlin e.V.  
Partner Südmexikos e.V., Böblingen  
Phoenix e.V., Berlin  
PoLYpeN  
ProNATs - Verein zur Unterstützung arbeitender Kinder und Jugendlicher, Berlin  
Solidaritätsdienst International SODI e.V., Berlin  
tanzania-network.de e.V., Berlin  
Transnational Decolonial Institute  
VENROB - Verbund Entwicklungspolitischer Nichtregierungsorganisationen Brandenburgs e.V.  
Verein schnittpunkt. ausstellungstheorie & praxis, Wien  
Zentralrat der afrikanischen Gemeinde in Deutschland e.V., Berlin  
Zugvögel, interkultureller Nord-Süd-Austausch e.V., Berlin