

# Committee Guide

**UNESCO 2024**

**Envision • Engage • Empower**

**2**  **24**

**Navigating a New Age**

***Respecting  
Cultural Heritage:  
Dealing with  
Colonial Looted Art***



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## 1. Personal Introduction

Hello everyone,

We are looking forward to chairing the United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization with you as our Delegates in 2024!

This will be our first time as Chairs at OLMUN, thus we are very excited for the debate this summer and hope that you will be able to prepare yourselves well for this year's topic! But before we get to the serious part to this year's conference, we would like to introduce ourselves to you:

### 1.1. Marie Schwarz

My name is Marie Schwarz and I will be chairing the UNESCO committee at this year's OLMUN with Patricia. At the start of OLMUN 2024 I will be 18 years old and I will have just graduated from German high school.

This will be my third time participating in OLMUN after being a delegate in the UNEP committee for two years. Other than OLMUN, I also participated in MEP (European Parliament) as a Co-Chair.

In my free time I like to do karate and also train kids from the age of 6 to 14.

Furthermore, I enjoy reading and singing.

I am very excited for this year's conference and am looking forward to seeing you all in June!

### 1.2. Sophia Patricia Bieling

My name is Sophia Patricia Bieling but I go by my second name Patricia. I am a student from Oldenburg currently attending 12th grade. By June 2024 I will be 18 years old.

OLMUN 2024 will be my third time participating but the first time chairing a committee. My first OLMUN dates back to 2022 when I participated as a Delegate in SOCHUM followed by OLMUN 2023 in the Special Conference.

My hobbies include reading, playing tennis and going out with friends.

I wish you all the best in your preparation for the conference. If you have any questions, please let me or Marie know.

Looking forward in excitement to meet all of you in June,  
Patricia.

## 2. How to Use this Guide

Welcome to the serious part of the committee guide for UNESCO 2024!

This guide serves as your roadmap to this year's topic and helps you to be well-prepared. While this guide functions as the starting point of your preparatory work, successful participation requires independent research. Please do not just rely on the information and resources given in this guide.

As preparation for the conference, you'll need to write a policy statement and draft resolution. The quality of your research directly impacts the standard of these documents and your effectiveness during debates. Please research well as it will be easier to participate in discussion.

We expect you to study the Handbook 2024 and especially the Rules of Procedure 2024 to familiarize yourself with the OLMUN guidelines and procedures! Those can be found on the OLMUN website in the "Downloads" section.

If you have any questions or need clarification, don't hesitate to reach out to us at [unesco@olmun.org](mailto:unesco@olmun.org). Remember, there's no such thing as asking too many questions!

## 3. About UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) main efforts lay in global cooperation and understanding, by dedicating itself to fostering mutual respect among diverse nations and cultures.

UNESCO is a UN specialized agency meaning it is an autonomous international organization working with the United Nations.

During World War II, European nations facing off against Nazi Germany met in the UK for the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME), planning to rebuild education systems post-war. The idea gained momentum, and the US joined in. This led to the United Nations Conference (ECO/CONF) in London in November 1945, right after the war ended. Delegates from forty-four countries attended, agreeing to create an organization promoting peace through education and culture, aiming to prevent future wars.

Nowadays UNESCO is a key organization of the United Nations, working to promote peace, security, and sustainable development worldwide. The organization seeks to address the world's most pressing challenges and contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by operating across five major areas: education, natural sciences, social/human sciences, culture, and communication/information.

*“UNESCO’s Vision includes the belief that:*

- a) **The equal dignity of all human beings** calls for the wide diffusion and access to culture, education, and the free flow of ideas and knowledge.*
- b) **To achieve lasting peace and security around the world**, we must harness the power of education, science and culture to bring out the best in our shared humanity, foster mutual understanding and respect for human rights.*
- c) **To help people live as global citizens free of hate and intolerance**, every child and adult must be afforded access to quality education, tools and resources, irrespective of gender or origin.*
- d) **To strengthen bonds among all nations**, the preservation and protection of cultural heritage and the equal dignity of all cultures, on all continents, is fundamental.*
- e) **To tackle the gravest social, environmental and ethical challenges facing humanity**, from climate and biodiversity crises to questions raised by digital and scientific progress, we need to support scientific research, innovation and cooperation.”<sup>1</sup>*

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1 Vision of UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/vision>

# 4 Respecting Cultural Heritage

At the heart of UNESCO's mission also lies the belief that cultural heritage is a main component to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals globally and securing a peaceful world. Thus, UNESCO emphasizes the preservation and protection of cultural diversity on all continents.

## 4. Respecting Cultural Heritage: Dealing with Colonial Looted Art

### 4.1. Importance of the Topic

This year's topic will deal with respecting cultural heritage in relation to colonial looted art. It refers to international debates about the colonial context of acquisitions by Western collections as well as the arguments against and in favor of returning Colonial Looted Art.

With this topic we aim to raise awareness for one of the crucial elements of cultural diversity and sustainable development: respecting cultural heritage. Due to the colonialization of multiple African, Asian and American countries by the Europeans, numerous works of art have been displaced. This act not only disrupted the cultural continuity of these places but also resulted in a loss of identity and heritage.

UNESCO is actively engaged in supporting countries in their pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals, especially in Africa, since it is one of the two global priorities UNESCO set for itself. UNESCO is helping 54 African Countries with achieving the SDGs. Preserving culture directly correlates with achieving the SDGs, which is why the debate over cultural heritage and cultural preservation is so important.

"If the SDGs are grouped around the economic, social, and environmental objectives as the three pillars of sustainable development, then culture and creativity contribute to each of these pillars transversally. The economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, in turn, contribute to the safeguarding of cultural heritage and nurturing creativity."<sup>2</sup>

In 2021, the Rome Declaration of G20 Ministers marked culture as an "engine for propelling sustainable socio-economic recovery".<sup>3</sup> Preserving the cultural heritage of once colonized African Countries can help them overcome the consequences Colonialism had for them. Culture and other political areas are strongly interconnected, considering the impact of culture and cultural heritage on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.

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2 <https://www.unesco.org/en/vision>

3 <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/culture/g20?hub=365>

## 4.2. Definitions

This year's topic "Dealing with Colonial Looted Art" implies both the Respect of Cultural Heritage as well as the Confrontation of the Colonial history in context to colonial looted art.

### a) Colonialism

Colonialism, as defined by the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, refers to a historical and socio-political system characterized by the domination, exploitation, and control of one group or nation over another, often involving the establishment of colonies in foreign territories.

It is typically driven by imperialist motives, including the extraction of resources, economic exploitation, cultural assimilation, and the imposition of political authority. Colonialism perpetuates inequalities, erodes indigenous cultures and identities, and often leads to the subjugation and marginalization of colonized peoples.

In addition to this the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples declares that "the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it states that "all armed action or repressive measures of all kinds directed against dependent peoples shall cease in order to enable them to exercise peacefully and freely their right to complete independence" and that "the integrity of their national territory shall be respected".<sup>5</sup>

### b) Culture

"The 1982 Mexico Declaration on Cultural Policies by UNESCO defines culture as the distinct spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features characterizing a society. It encompasses arts, lifestyle, human rights, value systems, traditions, and beliefs. Culture shapes individuals and societies, fostering unity through shared values and traditions.

In the face of global challenges such as conflicts, epidemics, climate change, and technological advances, UNESCO emphasizes the need to preserve culture for both individuals and societies. UNESCO's cultural initiatives include safeguarding historic sites, promoting creativity, supporting artistic innovation, preserving diversity through living and intangible heritage, and addressing the importance of sustaining cultural jobs and livelihoods in the

4 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000051853>

5 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000051853>

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creative economy.”<sup>6</sup>

UNESCO’s cultural action focusses on 4 main challenges:

1. Protecting culture in crisis situations
2. Adapting to contemporary changes
3. Preserving Heritage
4. Developing sustainable, inclusive and creative societies.

## c) Cultural Heritage

The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was passed by UNESCO in 2003, differentiates between heritage that is tangible and heritage that is intangible.

Cultural heritage thus encompasses both tangible and intangible aspects and is a reflection of our collective identity, origins, and values.

Defined by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003 “the “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.”

Up until now UNESCO declared 730 elements as Intangible Heritage.

Tangible cultural heritage can be understood as monuments, town sites, archeological sites, and works of art which carry and transmit the cultural features of a society, which include the spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional element of that society or group.

As opposed to the intangible aspects, tangible cultural heritage consists of purely physical objects.

## d) Looted Art

“Looted art refers to artworks that were stolen in a context of violence, such as during wars (...) or as a result of colonialism. Colonizers (...) often seized valuable art treasures from societies they conquered or dominated, demonstrating their power and asserting control over

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6 <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/about>



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cultural heritage”.<sup>7</sup>

UNESCO recognized theft, looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property as a crime that not only takes people’s history and culture but also weakens social cohesion.

Therefore, UNESCO, driven to ensure a connected, culturally-rich and peaceful global society – works to respond to solve this problem. In relation to colonial looted art the UN urged in 2007 with article 11 of its Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to restore “cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property” taken from indigenous people without their “free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs”.<sup>8</sup>

Besides that, UNESCO “supports its Member States in requests for the return and restitution of cultural property through technical assistance and, as part of the fight against illicit trafficking, capacity-building activities for professionals, support for the development of museums and raising public awareness. Supporting museums and museum professionals with regard to requests for the return and restitution of cultural property is one of the main thrusts of UNESCO’s Global Priority Africa”.<sup>5</sup>

Colonial looted art represents a significant component of tangible cultural heritage, embodying the artistic, historical, and spiritual legacy of nations and indigenous communities. These artifacts serve as tangible links to ancestral traditions, craftsmanship, and the rich tapestry of human creativity. Their return fosters cultural continuity, enabling communities to reclaim their heritage and reinforce their sense of belonging. Beyond physical objects, colonial looted art intersects with intangible cultural heritage, encompassing traditions, rituals, languages, and knowledge systems passed down through generations. The loss of cultural artifacts often parallels the loss of intangible heritage.

Respecting cultural heritage entails recognizing and acknowledging artifacts belonging to other cultures, as well as acknowledging their rightful ownership of once-looted art.

The dialogue between current owners of looted objects and those who were once their owners is essential for fostering understanding, reconciliation, and the promotion of cultural diversity and heritage. Like already mentioned in Point 4.1 “Importance of the Topic” the debate of Culture and Cultural Heritage is essential for reaching the SDGs, improving global relations and, to put it plainly, the world.

## 4.3. Recent Developments Concerning the Return of Looted Art

The effects of Colonialism and the need to restore and respect cultural heritage become

7 <https://www.mauritshuis.nl/en/our-collection/stories/what-is-looted-art/>

8 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/jun/29/should-museums-return-their-colonial-artefacts>

increasingly visible. The Culture Working Group (GWC) under India's G20 Presidency for example set the protection and restitution of cultural property as one main priority.

Apart from that, some European countries and museums have started the process of returning looted art. For instance, France has committed to returning 26 artworks to Benin, including precious artifacts looted during the sacking of the Kingdom of Dahomey in the late 19th century. Similarly, Germany has pledged to return the Benin Bronzes - elaborate brass plaques and sculptures looted from the Kingdom of Benin in present-day Nigeria - to Nigeria.

Furthermore, there has been a growing consensus within the museum community regarding the need to reassess the provenance of their collections and engage in transparent dialogue with source communities. Institutions like the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the National Museum van Wereldculturen in the Netherlands have initiated collaborative projects with countries of origin to facilitate the return of contested artifacts and promote cultural exchange.

However, taking into consideration that 90% of African cultural heritage still remains outside of the continent, it becomes noticeable how slow the process of returning colonial looted art turns out to be.

Furthermore, another problem is determining the place to which the art should be returned to, as the original origins of colonial art are hard to be found.

Looking ahead, the momentum behind the return of colonial looted art shows no signs of abating. As awareness grows and pressure mounts, both within and outside the art world, the conversation surrounding restitution will continue to evolve, with implications reaching far beyond the confines of museum walls. It is a complex journey towards acknowledging historical wrongs and forging a more equitable future for cultural heritage worldwide, but it is being taken on.

In your draft resolution you can reference the problems of restitution, efforts some European countries made to return colonial looted art and already existing cooperations. Possible solutions could include but are not limited to more transparent dialogue and further cooperation.

### 5. General Advice

To participate effectively in UNESCO 2024, it is essential to be well prepared. Thus, begin your research and preparations as soon as possible. The better you familiarize yourself with this year's topic and your country's position the better you'll be able to join the discussion (this goes for both first-time delegates and experienced ones). Find out about possible partners for your resolution early on and don't forget that you do not represent your personal

# 6 Helpful Links

opinion and ideas! You are the delegate of your assigned country and thus have to behave accordingly.

Please also refrain from using AI-generated Policy Statements and Draft Resolutions. You'll learn more if you write them yourself. Besides, by putting in the effort yourself you are immersing in the topic much more thoroughly.

Like already mentioned in "How to use this committee guide", take a look at the Handbook 2024 and the Rules of Procedure 2024 (<https://www.olmun.org/uploads/2024/Downloads/RulesOfProcedure2024.pdf>).

Don't be afraid to speak up during the conference. Take advantage of speaking opportunities to voice your state's position, propose solutions, and actively contribute to discussions.

Remember: OLMUN is the most fun when you are actively participating. So don't be afraid and just do the best as you can. We understand that especially for new delegates it might seem intimidating to participate actively so please contact us if you have any worries or questions.

However, besides the committee meeting, talk a lot with others to make new friends and attend the evening events. OLMUN will be what you make it!

We are excited to meet all of you this June,  
Marie & Patricia.

## 6. Helpful Links

### 6.1. About UNESCO and the UN

- UNESCO : Building Peace through Education, Science and Culture, communication and information: <https://www.unesco.org/en>
- United Nations | Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet: <https://www.un.org/en>
- UN Charter | United Nations: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>
- United Nations - Organs, Security Council, General Assembly | Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations/Principal-organs>
- 17 Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

### 6.2. Your Country in General



# 6 Helpful Links

- Countries - The World Factbook (cia.gov): <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/>
- BBC NEWS | Country Profiles: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country\\_profiles/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm)

## 6.3. This Year's Topic

- UNESCO promotes an open and inclusive dialogue on the return and restitution of cultural property | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-promotes-open-and-inclusive-dialogue-return-and-restitution-cultural-property>
- “Return & Restitution” Intergovernmental Committee (unesco.org): <https://www.unesco.org/en/fight-illicit-trafficking/return-and-restitution?hub=416>
- Should museums return their colonial artefacts? | Museums | The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/jun/29/should-museums-return-their-colonial-artefacts>
- Colonial Looting of African Art | DailyArt Magazine: <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/colonial-looting-african-art/>

Please check out the **Rules of Procedure** and the **OLMUN Handbook** as well.

Sources used for this Committee Guide:

- Priority Africa | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/africa>
- #SharingHumanity | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sharing-humanity>
- UNESCO in brief | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/brief>
- About the Culture Sector | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/culture/about>
- Culture: at the heart of Sustainable Development Goals | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/culture-heart-sustainable-development-goals?hub=365>
- Fight Illicit Trafficking (1970 Convention) | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/fight-illicit-trafficking?hub=365>
- UN System | United Nations: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-system>: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-system>
- Culture in the G20 | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-develop->

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[ment/culture/g20?hub=365](#)

- African World Heritage Day | UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/days/african-world-heritage?hub=365>
- UNESCO's action to promote new forms of agreement and cooperation for the return and restitution of cultural property: <https://www.unesco.org/en/fight-illicit-trafficking/agreement-and-cooperation-return-and-restitution>
- What is Cultural Heritage? | Whose Culture? (harvard.edu): <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/whoseculture/what-world-heritage>
- <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000051853>
- <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/declaration-race-and-racial-prejudice>
- <https://leiden.wereldmuseum.nl/sites/default/files/2019-05/Claims%20for%20Return%20of%20Cultural%20Objects%20NMVW%20Principles%20and%20Process.pdf>
- <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>
- <https://www.euractiv.com/section/languages-culture/news/experts-ask-the-eu-to-step-in-to-return-art-looted-during-colonialism/>



**OLMUN 2024**

**23<sup>rd</sup> International  
Session**