



ArcMUN

Aristoteleio College Model United Nations

**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC & CULTURAL
ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)**

Repatriation of Cultural Artifacts

Study Guide

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1. Welcoming Letter

Honorable Delegates,

As Chairs, we are officially welcoming you to ARCMUN 2024 and the UNESCO committee. It is our privilege and delight to extend our hand in productive debate to each one of you as we embark on this exciting journey of MUN diplomacy.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, is a committee of unique importance. It addresses a diverse range of issues, spanning education, science, social development, and culture. This year, our focus is on a pressing global concern – The Repatriation of Cultural Artifacts, discussions regarding their return and the involved ethical implications. We are confident that this topic will spark engaging and passionate debate sessions, encouraging every delegate to defend their country's best interests.

As you begin your preparations, we encourage you to delve into the topic by thoroughly reviewing the study guide we've prepared. It will serve as an invaluable resource to help you navigate through the several aspects of cultural artifact repatriation.

We eagerly anticipate the opportunity to meet and work with each of you, and together, make UNESCO at ARCMUN 2024 a resounding success, fostering productive discussions and diplomatic solutions.

*Feel free to reach out to us for any clarifications needed;
we are here to support you every step of the way.*

Warm regards,

The Board of UNESCO.

2. Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization –or as it is commonly acknowledged, UNESCO- is an international agency founded by the United Nations (UN) on the 16th of November 1945. Its headquarters are located in France. The countries that are members of this organization are the Member-States of the United Nations. Each one of the 193 members has one vote in UNESCO's General Conference that is held every two years in order to set the organization's budgets and evaluate the contributions of each member to live up to the goals set by the agency.

UNESCO is defined as an organization that “seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015”.

The actions that UNESCO can take in order to ensure the safety of the cultural and natural heritage in danger is to provide funds for its protection, to organize educational programs and to request reports on the state of the heritage and the actions taken by the government of each nation, in order to apply the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972.

3. Definition of Key Terms

Repatriation: The act of returning cultural artifacts or heritage items to their country of origin, often after being acquired or removed during colonization, war, or other historical events.

Cultural Artifacts: Objects, artworks, or items of cultural, historical, or artistic significance that are part of a nation's cultural heritage, including sculptures, manuscripts, artworks, and archaeological finds.

Cultural Heritage: The collective legacy of a society's cultural achievements, which includes traditions, customs, artworks, historical sites, and tangible cultural artifacts.

Colonialism: The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

4. Introduction to the Topic

In the field of cultural affairs, few issues are as important as the repatriation of cultural artifacts. This topic is quite sensitive as it consists matters of history, identity, morality and justice. It is a matter that transcends borders and encompasses a wealth of cultural treasures and historical legacies that have been scattered across the globe through centuries of conquest, colonization, and conflict.

When we dive into the subject of cultural artifact repatriation, we are faced with many questions and challenges that are both sentimental and morally complex. It compels us to confront colonialism, the ethical dilemmas of ownership and stewardship, and the very essence of cultural identity. To shed light on this multifaceted issue, let us explore key examples that define the debate:

1. *The Parthenon Marbles (Elgin Marbles)* : These classical Greek sculptures, originally part of the Parthenon temple in Athens, were removed by Lord Elgin in the early 19th century and are now housed in the British Museum. Greece has long sought their return, emphasizing their significance to their cultural heritage.

2. *Benin Bronzes* : Thousands of intricate bronze sculptures were looted from the Kingdom of Benin, located in present-day Nigeria, by British forces in 1897. These artifacts are now scattered across various museums and collections, with Nigeria underlining the need for repatriation.

3. *Nefertiti Bust* : The Nefertiti Bust, a renowned Egyptian artifact, is currently on display at the Neues Museum in Berlin, Germany. Egypt has requested its return, asserting that the artifact is part of their rich heritage.

4. *Indigenous Artifacts* : Indigenous communities worldwide seek the repatriation of sacred items and artifacts that were taken during periods of colonization, often held in Western museums.

These examples represent just a fraction of the cultural artifacts dispersed around the world, each with its unique story and set of arguments surrounding repatriation. As delegates, your role in this conference is to explore these complexities, weigh the moral and legal implications, and strive to find fair solutions that respect the rights of nations, the principles of cultural heritage, and the imperatives of historical justice.

The debates that unfold in our committee will be both challenging and enlightening, as we seek to weigh up the claims of source countries and the interests of museums and institutions that currently hold these precious items. We urge you to delve into the intricacies of this topic with an open mind and a commitment to finding constructive resolutions that will shape the future of cultural artifact repatriation.

5. Points to be addressed

- *How does your nation consider the historical context and colonial legacy in repatriation discussions?*
- *What is your nation's stance on cultural significance and indigenous rights in repatriation matters?*
- *How does your country view international agreements and legal frameworks in relation to repatriation?*
- *How does your country address the role of museums and custodians holding artifacts in the repatriation debate?*
- *What practical actions and conflict resolution methods does your nation endorse for repatriation?*

6. Actions already taken

In the ongoing dialogue about cultural artifact repatriation, notable actions have been initiated. The 1970 UNESCO Convention provides a significant legal framework, guiding the return of stolen or unlawfully acquired cultural artifacts on the international stage. Additionally, bilateral agreements between nations, such as those between Italy and the United States, have paved the way for successful artifact repatriations, demonstrating diplomatic solutions in practice.

Museums and institutions worldwide have embarked on provenance research and policy revisions to address the origins of artifacts in their collections, as exemplified by the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. These proactive measures aim to ensure ethical custodianship. Public awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts, like the "*Bring Them Back*" campaign, have helped amplify the ethical dimensions of cultural artifact repatriation, making it a widely discussed and compelling issue. These actions collectively underscore the global commitment to address the complexities of cultural artifact repatriation while promoting justice and international cooperation.

7. Conclusion

In closing, the study guide has provided a comprehensive overview of the pressing issue of cultural artifact repatriation. It has illuminated the historical context, ethical considerations, and the legal frameworks that underpin this topic. As we delve into the world of Model United Nations, we encourage delegates to draw inspiration from the actions already taken in the real world, such as international agreements, bilateral negotiations, proactive museum policies, and public advocacy campaigns. These actions reflect a collective commitment to address the complexities of cultural artifact repatriation while promoting justice and international cooperation. The discussions that unfold in your committees are an opportunity to continue the global dialogue and work toward equitable solutions that respect the principles of cultural diversity, historical justice, and ethical custodianship. We wish all delegates productive and insightful deliberations on this vital topic.

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