

**PRESS FILE**

**Makonde Mask**  
**Signing of an agreement for the donation of the**  
**Makonde mask from the Barbier-Mueller Museum**  
**of Geneva to the National Museum of Tanzania**



**Paris, 10 May, 2010**

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## PRESS RELEASE

Paris, 10 May, 2010

### **Makonde Mask**

Signing of an agreement for the donation  
of the Barbier-Mueller Museum of Geneva  
to the National Museum of Tanzania

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Under the auspices of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the United Republic of Tanzania and the Barbier-Mueller Museum of Geneva have signed an agreement for the donation of the Makonde Mask to the National Museum of Tanzania.

The event took place on Monday 10 May in Paris, in the presence of ICOM Director General Mr Julien Anfruns; the Permanent Secretary and the Head of the Legal Unit of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism of Tanzania, Dr Donatius M. K. Kamamba and Mrs Caroline Mchome; co-funder of the Barbier-Mueller Museums, Mrs Monique Barbier-Mueller; and Director General of the Barbier-Mueller Museums, Mrs Laurence Mattet.

The Barbier-Mueller Museum informed first the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in July 1990, that a Makonde Mask purchased in September 1985 in Paris, might have been removed from the Dar Es Salaam Museum, based on information provided by Prof. Enrico Castelli, of the University of Perugia in Italy.

Due to a misunderstanding, the Makonde Mask was one of the three cases reviewed by the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation. The donation of the Makonde Mask is the successful outcome of more than 20 years of negotiations and efforts by the two parties involved as well as ICOM's good offices.

On this occasion, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism of the United Republic of Tanzania would like to express its gratitude to the Barbier-Mueller Museum for its handling of the case from the very beginning.

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## **Historical overview of the Makonde Mask**

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In 1984, a Makonde Mask was stolen together with 16 other artefacts during a break-in at the National Museum of Tanzania, located in Dar Es Salaam. The theft was reported to all relevant authorities at national and international levels, including the Tanzanian police, INTERPOL and the International Council of Museums.

In 1990, an Italian professor of the University of Perugia informed the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva, Switzerland, that a Makonde Mask in its collections might have been removed from the Dar Es Salaam Museum. The Barbier-Mueller Museum immediately transmitted the information to ICOM and reported that the object had been purchased in Paris in September 1985.

The Barbier-Mueller Museum initiated thereafter appropriate steps and proposals to try and facilitate a possible return of the Makonde Mask to Tanzania. In 2002 the Barbier-Mueller Museum formally indicated conditions under which it would be prepared to transfer the ownership of the Makonde Mask to the United Republic of Tanzania. Though the Director General of the National Museums of Tanzania highly appreciated the handling of the case by the Barbier-Mueller Museum, the involved parties could not reach a compromise over the issue of ownership of the object.

In 2006 negotiations stopped after the United Republic of Tanzania filed a request for the return of the Makonde Mask with the Secretariat of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation. In reaction to Tanzania's action, the Barbier-Mueller Museum filed a formal and official complaint against the United Republic of Tanzania with the Federal Office of Culture of Switzerland.

Finally in August 2009 the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism of Tanzania informed the Barbier-Mueller Museum of its intent to accept the conditions proposed by the Swiss Museum in 2002.

A governmental delegation of Tanzania met the representatives of the Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva on 6 November, 2009 to conduct good faith discussions and negotiations which have paved the way for the donation of the Makonde Mask to the United Republic of Tanzania.

## Description of the Makonde Mask

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The item is an example of a “lipiko” mask, the most recent type of Makonde Mask, which is characterised by its realism and caricature features. Until the 1960s this type of helmet mask was worn during male initiation festivals by dancers that looked out through the mouth opening and attached their costume through a hole at the rim of the mask.

This Makonde Mask may represent a caricature of a Black convert to Islam with a strong and arrogant figure (emblematic of the conflicting relationships of the Makonde with the Moslem slave traders along the coast). The figure is depicted wearing a hat and with facial features of prominent lips, a powerful neck, a sharp jaw angle, a moustache and detailed carved nostrils.

The mask is made of soft, lightweight wood, which allowed the inside to be hollowed, wax and pigment. The mask’s hair and moustache are made of human hair and it is 30.5 cm tall.

## **National Museum of Tanzania**

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The National Museum of Tanzania is a body corporate charged with the task of collecting, conserving, displaying and researching on natural and cultural heritage of the country. Currently, there are six museums under the National Museum and several other private museums in the country.

The Museum and House of Culture in Dar Es Salaam, among other things, houses the famous archaeological collection of footprints aging 3.6 million years from Laetoli in the Northern Tanzania, the famous skull (*Zinjanthropus boisei*) aging 1.7 million years. The Museum offers a good collection of ethnographic materials from over 120 ethnic groups found in Tanzania. The history and marine science collection displays offers much to a visitor of this museum.

The Village Museum also in Dar Es Salaam is an Open Air museum with several traditional house of different ethnic groups from various parts of the country. The houses are furnished with objects used by the people who used the houses.

The two museums under the National Museum in Arusha include the Arusha Declaration, this is a social political museum and the other one is the Natural History Museum. The other two museums are Mwalimu J.K. Nyerere Museum in Butiama located on the Eastern shore of Lake Victoria. This museum displays collection of the father of the nation Malimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere. The last one is the Majimaji War Memorial Museum located in the south of Tanzania. The Museum displays pictures and artifacts on the African resistance against German administration.

## **Barbier-Mueller Museum in Geneva**

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### **Geneva: Arts from Antiquity, Africa, Asia and Oceania**

Founded in 1977, the Museum is situated in the heart of the Old Town of Geneva. Its aim is to preserve, study, and publish a collection begun by Josef Mueller in 1907 and carried on to this day by his heirs.

Today the collection contains over 7,000 articles and includes works of art from Tribal and Classical Antiquity as well as sculptures, fabrics and ornaments from "primitive" civilizations around the world. Many of these works are considered to be unqualified masterpieces.

The Barbier-Mueller Museum has gained international acclaim through its itinerant exhibitions, its loans to other museums, and the publication of numerous catalogues and art books.

It has three main points of distinction:

- The collection began after the First World War, which accounts for the great many "historical" artefacts that cannot be found elsewhere.
- This collection is the largest in the world.
- The Museum constantly publishes new material to accompany its exhibitions throughout the world.

### **Fondation culturelle Musée Barbier-Mueller**

*"In Africa, when an old man dies, it's a library burning..."*

Amadou Hampaté Bâ

The Barbier-Mueller Cultural Museum Foundation is devoted to bear witness for forgotten peoples. The major ethnic groups were systematically studied by anthropologists at an early date. On the other hand, smaller peoples comprising only a few villages were neglected. Mankind is thus bereft of information on the lifestyles, material culture, plant skills and the different ways that autochthonous peoples found to survive, while their religious beliefs are often fast disappearing.

The Foundation's objectives are strictly scientific and non-profit-making. It aims to support, at the international level, anthropological observation missions, publications and conferences entirely funded by the Foundation.

## **International Council of Museums (ICOM)**

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Created in 1946, ICOM (International Council of Museums) is an international non-governmental organization maintaining formal relations with UNESCO and having a consultative status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council.

ICOM is the only international organisation representing museums and museum professionals all over the world.

ICOM is:

- A diplomatic forum made up of representatives from 137 countries and territories
- Standards of excellence for museums including ethics (Code of Ethics for Museums)
- An international network composed of 28,000 museum professionals around the world
- A think-tank composed by 31 International Committees which represent ICOM's specialities
- Missions of international public service notably in the fight against illicit traffic and emergency programmes in case of natural disasters or armed conflicts

**For all questions concerning the world museum community and for interview requests with ICOM's Director General, please contact the press office:**

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## The ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums

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Museums are increasingly facing challenges that are closely related to their social, political and ecological environment. The role of today's museum professionals is to protect tangible and intangible heritage. They promise to protect and care for this heritage to high ideals of responsibility, integrity and service to society. Museums are witnesses of the past, motors for democracy and education and guardians of the future. It is therefore no surprise that ethics are a vital component of ICOM's positioning today.

The *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* provides the most up-to-date version of the code of professional conduct for the museums sector worldwide. The Code sets minimum standards of professional practice and performance for museums and their staff. It reflects principles that are generally accepted by the international museum community. In joining ICOM, members undertake to abide by this Code, which means that today almost 28,000 members in 137 countries are bound by the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. The Code of Ethics applies a principle-driven approach to addressing specific problems or issues raised and making recommendations on actions.

The Code contains eight principles as a minimum standard for museums:

- Museums preserve, interpret and promote the natural and cultural inheritance of humanity.
- Museums that maintain collections hold them in trust for the benefit of society and its development.
- Museums hold primary evidence for establishing and furthering knowledge.
- Museums provide opportunities for the appreciation, understanding and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage.
- Museums hold resources that provide opportunities for other public services and benefits.
- Museums work in close collaboration with the communities from which their collections originate as well as those they serve.
- Museums operate in a legal manner.
- Museums operate in a professional manner.

## **The ICOM Mediation Programme**

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ICOM has a long-standing tradition of offering its good offices to its members to reach an amicable settlement on disputes over cultural property ownership.

With the rise of disputes between museums and other parties (museums, associations, representatives of governing bodies, national communities, private citizens...), in particular regarding restitution and return issues, ICOM felt it appropriate to offer the museum community an alternative dispute resolution tool: mediation. Therefore the Mediation Programme was launched by a position paper from ICOM in 2006.

The Mediation Programme is an innovative service intended to provide dispute resolution at a lower cost in terms of financing, time and image to the museum community, with all the professional and ethical guarantees ICOM may offer. The process is based on the goodwill of the parties who agree to find a solution to their dispute based on mutual consent. The mediator chosen by parties amongst a list of highly qualified professionals in cultural property-related fields and mediation proceedings will help parties reach this agreement.

ICOM has conducted thorough comparative studies on the alternative dispute resolution methods, the actors involved and the scope of ICOM Mediation Programme. This resulted in a new impetus given to this project and ICOM is on the verge of launching a Mediation Programme in close collaboration with an international body universally recognised for its expertise in intellectual property and dispute resolution. ICOM expects to offer this service to the heritage and culture community by the end of 2010.