

## Press release

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# New advisory committee on the restitution and repatriation of cultural heritage

From [Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media](#)

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Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Catherine Martin today announced the establishment of a new expert committee to advise Government on issues relating to the restitution and repatriation of culturally sensitive objects in Ireland.

The committee will undertake research into international best practice within the field of provenance research, restitution and repatriation, as well as engaging with key stakeholders to assess the scope of relevant cultural heritage collections in Ireland. The objective of the committee is to provide policy advice and prepare national guidelines to support Irish cultural institutions in dealing with objects of unknown provenance in their collections.

Internationally, there have been a number of recent high profile cases in which artefacts have been returned by cultural institutions to their places of origin. While there is growing public awareness of these issues, until now, there have been no guidelines for cultural institutions in Ireland regarding how to deal with such objects. The new advisory committee will provide critical support to collection managers regarding professional standards in the management of cultural heritage.

The committee will be chaired by the Rt. Hon. Sir Donnell Deeny, chairman of the U.K. government's Spoliation Advisory Panel and member of the Court of Arbitration for Art in The Hague. Membership of the committee will be drawn from the museum, archives and gallery sector, the civil service, and legal and ethical expertise, as well as

representation from claimant communities. The Heritage Council, the statutory body with responsibility to propose policies relating to heritage objects as well as responsibility for the Museum Standards Programme of Ireland, will serve as the oversight body for the advisory committee and will provide the secretariat.

Speaking today, Minister Martin said:

“The restitution and repatriation of cultural heritage is a complex and sensitive issue, and one that is increasingly coming to the fore for museums worldwide. That makes it all the more important that we provide structures and guidance to support our cultural institutions in navigating this terrain. I am confident that the work of this new Advisory Committee on Restitution and Repatriation will improve our understanding of cultural artefacts whose provenance would otherwise remain unknown and foster greater international dialogue and cooperation on these issues.”

The Chief Executive Officer of the Heritage Council, Virginia Teehan, stated:

“The announcement today marks a significant step forward in ensuring that the utmost care is given when considering the repatriation and restitution of culturally sensitive objects. Along with our departmental colleagues, it is incumbent upon us to support the development of professional standards in consultation with those who have responsibility for the management of our collections, and who may be required to navigate this unfamiliar territory. The establishment of the committee builds on the work the Heritage Council has been doing with the sector since 2006 as part of its Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI), where a programme of accreditation has already helped to propel the standards of its 61 participants to new levels of excellence.”

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## Notes

The Group may have the power to co-opt members, if appropriate.

The Chair of the Advisory Committee on Restitution and Repatriation will be Rt Hon Sir Donnell Deeny. In addition to his long legal career, Sir Donnell Deeny served three terms on the British Government's Spoliation Advisory Panel including as its chairman from 2012 and is currently a member of the Court of Arbitration for Art in The Hague. He has also served as a member and Chair of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the President of the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society.

The balance of membership of the committee will be drawn from the following:

- representatives of the museums, archives, and galleries sector in Ireland
- legal expertise including public and private sector expertise
- representatives of the Heritage Council
- representative with background in ethics
- representation from claimant communities
- representatives from the following government departments: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; Department of Foreign Affairs

The Advisory Committee's draft terms of reference are set out as follows:

- identification of current international policy, best practice and guidelines, which may include engagement and consultation
- research into the legal position within Ireland as it relates to the restitution and repatriation of cultural heritage, identifying gaps and proposing how these may be addressed
- mapping of key stakeholders at the national and international level
- engagement with stakeholders to assess the scope of potentially contested cultural heritage collections and materials within Ireland
- engagement with stakeholders to identify best practice in the area of provenance research, restitution and repatriation
- reference to current and past activity in relation to this area within Ireland
- preparation of policy advice and a set of national guidelines

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