

Role of Canada's museums and archives in education for reconciliation

Museums and archives, as sites of public memory and national history, have a key role to play in national reconciliation. As publicly funded institutions, museums and archives in settler colonial states such as Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States have interpreted the past in ways that have excluded or marginalized Aboriginal peoples' cultural perspectives and historical experience. Museums have traditionally been thought of as places where a nation's history is presented in neutral, objective terms. Yet, as history that had formerly been silenced was revealed, it became evident that Canada's museums had told only part of the story.¹³⁰ In a similar vein, archives have been part of the "architecture of imperialism"—institutions that held the historical documents of the state.¹³¹ As Canada confronts its settler colonial past, museums and archives have been gradually transforming from institutions of colony and empire into more inclusive institutions that better reflect the full richness of Canadian history.

Political and legal developments on international and national fronts have contributed to this change. Around the globe, the adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* has resulted in the growing recognition that Indigenous peoples have the right to be self-determining peoples and that the state has a duty to protect Indigenous traditional knowledge and cultural rights. The *Declaration* also establishes that actions by the state that affect Indigenous peoples require their free, prior, and informed consent. States have an obligation to take effective measures to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples or to make reparations where traditional knowledge or cultural rights have been violated. This has significant implications for national museums and archives and the public servants who work in them.¹³²

The Commission emphasizes that several articles under the *United Nations Declaration* have particular relevance for national museums and archives in Canada. These include:

- Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature. [Article 11:1]
- States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs. [Article 11:2]
- Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to use and