



Open Letter to UNESCO

### **Re: Illegal Appropriation of Ethiopian Cultural Properties to Tigray**

We have learned that a letter is dispatched from the "Tigray National Regional State" to all over Ethiopia to appropriate and display movable antiquities of the country in the newly built museum in Tigray at Adi Gezaei. There is no ambiguity that the letter is designed by the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), which rules Ethiopia under the cover of its surrogates - the so called the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic organization (OPDO), the Southern Peoples Democratic Movement (SPDM) and other supplementary organizations from other ethnic groups. The letter commands all "nations, nationalities and peoples" of Ethiopia to collect their antiquities and send to the "National" Museum of Tigray established at Adi Gezaei. The pretext is to demonstrate the antiquities of all "nations, nationalities and peoples" of Ethiopia and build the country's image. Here is our evaluation of the letter.

Even the phrase "National" Museum of Tigray is misleading and can easily be confused with the National Museum of Ethiopia and thus, it is inappropriate to use the former, for a regional institution. Any region or locality has the right to have its own museum. The big question is on the methods of collection and its management.

Each country of the world has its own legal framework and heritage management philosophy to acquire and administer its own heritage resources. The museums of each region or locality in a country tailor their heritage laws complying with the UNESCO Conventions and the heritage law of the country where the regional or local museums are found.

The 1970 and 1972 UNESCO Conventions are very important for the countries that focus to manage their cultural properties. The 1970 UNESCO Convention promotes cultural nationalism - appreciates the origin, history, and traditional setting where government is accountable to control all cultural properties of the country keeping the context and their relationships with the environment and the community that holds the cultural properties. The 1972 UNESCO Convention follows a cosmopolitan approach that perceives cultural property as part of all humankind appreciating the universal value of cultural and natural heritage. Ethiopia has a heritage law, under the name - Ethiopian Heritage Proclamation, which complies with the UNESCO Conventions. According to the Ethiopian Heritage Proclamation, the sole right of acquiring and managing the country's heritage is given to the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH). When regions and localities need to collect their cultural properties to put them in the existing or newly built museums, they are obliged to consult ARCCH. Most importantly, the Ethiopian Heritage Proclamation states that collections are acquired through donation/bequest, purchase, transfer/exchange from another institution and research or fieldwork under the sole authority of ARCCH. In view of this understanding, the commanding letter from "Tigray" to the "Amhara National Region Regional State" and the rest of the country regarding the appropriation of cultural properties across all over the country is an illegal and unethical action that must be reversed soon. The following items may help as a professional advice regarding the appropriation of cultural properties to the "Tigray National Regional State" Museum.

1. Under no circumstances, the "National Regional State" Museum of Tigray acquires the cultural properties of other regions. It should acquire the cultural properties found only in "Tigray", yet any



collection without the permission of ARCCH is illegal and unethical. It is only ARCCH that sets the levels of each object. If an object found in "Tigray" reflects the country's image and ARCCH levels it as a "national" or country heritage, the "Tigray Regional State" has no legal base to collect and display it in the "Tigray Regional State" Museum.

2. Any signed or unsigned document that violates the Ethiopian Heritage Proclamation is unacceptable and will be revocable at some point in the future. For example, any decision based on private conversations with the executive director of ARCCH, Yonas Desta (proven corrupt official who is an affiliate of TPLF) and his management team is illegal and unethical.
3. Appropriating the cultural properties of other regions of Ethiopia to "Tigray" by any collection method will be a source of conflict among the various communities of Ethiopia.
4. We ask the "'Tigray National Regional State' and the 'National Museum of Tigray' to refrain from robbing the cultural heritage of the other regions under the pretext of building a national museum.
5. We would like to remind the 'Amhara regional state', the 'Oromia regional state', 'Southern nations and nationalities regional state' and other regional states of Ethiopia about their responsibility of protecting their cultural heritage and we ask these regional bureaus to disregard the letter from the 'Tigray regional state' that commands them to send their cultural heritage.
6. If the letter from "Tigray" concerning the illegal and unethical appropriation of Ethiopian cultural properties into the new museum of "Tigray" brings any practical action, the Amhara Professionals Union (APU) - Amba will follow the case and will collaborate with both national and international organizations to take the appropriate reciprocal action.

Amba, the Amhara Professionals Union

Washington DC

USA

CC:

- Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), Ethiopia
- Amhara Regional State
- Oromia Regional State
- Southern Nations and Nationalities of Ethiopia Regional State
- Tigray Regional state