

DIGNITY - CONTINUITY - TRANSPARENCY

We, the undersigned participants at the Humboldt Forum opening symposium of Sept. 12 – 14, 2022, aware of the serious challenges of Climate change to ecological stability and humanity, have developed the following Ideas, Proposals and Expectations and call upon

The Humboldt Forum to recognize its role and responsibility in facilitating and fostering international and intercultural collaboration. In doing so the Humboldt Forum is committing itself to continually act as a reliable partner in building trust across different regions and communities. The Humboldt Forum and its constituting stakeholders shall ensure accessibility and transparency also in regards to its structures and resources. International Partners are recognised as key stakeholders of the organisation.

The Humboldt Forum recognizes the value of its collection towards the world community and its source communities. The so called “Objects” or “exhibition items” are not to be reduced to mere things or artefacts, but understood as Cultural Belongings. They convey relationships between people, localities, cultural and artistic practices, relating to the past and the present and the future. The safekeeping of Cultural Belongings implies care and protection of their connected territories and habitats. The Humboldt Forum and their stakeholders recognize their mandate towards their collection, as being constituted and provided by the international community. The leading management of the Humboldt Forum has a key responsibility towards this ethical mandate, in ensuring the necessary capabilities towards its fulfilment.

Respect of ownership, consent, dignity and as well as cultural self-determination are key guiding principles of the Humboldt Forum, a lively place where divers cultural practice, artistic productivity, stories and narratives can develop and evolve in different forms. In order to ensure this in a sustainable way, necessary structures and conditions shall be generated.

The Humboldt Forum recognizes diverse forms of knowledge in which Indigenous, local and biographical experiences and practices are central and visible. This understanding shall determine the operation of the Humboldt Forum in different fields, including provenance research, exhibition making and programming. It also determines its cultural policy, such as use of language and terminology.

Furthermore, the Humboldt Forum shall ensure structural accessibility, spaces and means of participation for cultural practitioners, artists or community representatives to be productive on their own terms. The Humboldt Forum as a public institution takes on its key role to ensures societal relevancy in creating public visibility and advocating for the interest of its international stakeholders.

The international participants at the Humboldt Forum are proposing following fields of action:

1. Indigenous Embassy

The Indigenous Embassy is a physical space in the Humboldt Forum for and in service of Indigenous People and international participants wishing to advance their issues and to increase their visibility based on self-representation in recognition of their current under-representation in the political sphere. The Indigenous Embassy, provided with sufficient resources, provides encounters and dialogue with Peoples instead of “objects” advocating for the knowledge and technologies of Indigenous Communities, for example, on ecology or sustainability, immediate actions / projects should be taken to enforce actions on local mitigation efforts to protect the environment and natural resources in communities. The pre-existing western dichotomy between nature and culture shall be critically reviewed, instead a holistic understanding of habitus and habitat shall be recognized.

Furthermore, the Indigenous Embassy will make current community issues, including disappearing languages or endangered cultural heritage, visible to a broad public working as a point of reference in building lasting networks to other civic organizations. The Indigenous Embassy will be supported to provide legal expertise in a transcultural context to foster legal pluralism in negotiations between cultures and nations.

2. World Conference on issues including Restitution / Repatriation

Before the end of 2024 we will convey a Multi-day conference with the Humboldt Forum and international partners to address topics related to restitution and repatriation. The conference shall provide guiding principles and workable solutions to various set of questions reoccurring in the German-international debates on restitution, such as: Where is the point of contact in a restitution request? What is to be done operationally? What does a dignified restitution/repatriation look like? How does access to depots, archives and databases work? What are the membership criteria? The conference shall set up the ground work in establishing a contact point / consultancy office in the Humboldt Forum, to channel and guide restitution processes ensuring transparency and cultural dignity.

3. Cultures of language

An appropriate and sensitive use of language is central to the work of the Humboldt Forum. Whenever possible, original terms from the native language shall be used. Because all "cultural belongings" have an identity through their names in the language of origin. Language is a carrier of knowledge and conveys information about the objects from the community of origin on a further level. Say their names!

4. The Circulation Principle

The Circulation Principle is a guiding principle for future exhibitions and programme strategies of the Humboldt Forum. It includes circulation of people, ideas and cultural belongings through residencies and transnational cultural projects, exchange programs especially for young people. The principle of circulation is further understood in terms of Transparency, in circulating and sharing data, information, assets and resources. To kick-start this principle, a multiversal and mobile exhibition shall be co-curated, developed collaboratively to share stories of Cultural Belongings from different regions. The exhibition will be shown on all continents - in rural and urban spaces. The exhibition concept shall be based on the idea of a "growing exhibition" enriched by perspectives and perceptions from visitors around the world. A possible theme can be developed through means of comparing topics (example: the art of weaving).

5. Silent Projects

We recognized the need for process-oriented projects without predetermined results or a production outcome. Silent Projects create safe spaces for encounter, experimentation, decolonial practice, trust-building, cultural production as informed by people, collections and Cultural Belongings.

6. New Museum

The international partners recommend decentralization as an organizational and operational principle, long-term and sustainable cooperation amongst communities to recognized immaterial / intangible cultural assets and to make them tangible through contemporary practices (music/sound/performative and visual arts), to develop outreach and inreach programmes for a diverse group of visitors, to strengthen collaborative educational formats and to develop a stronger focus for young audience with accessible and innovative programming.

We, the participants propose that these above concepts once indorsed shall constitute our engagement as international partners.

Berlin 18.09.2022

Signatures