

**EMBARGOED: 00:01 HRS 14/06/2022**

## **EMPIRE, SLAVERY AND SCOTLAND'S MUSEUMS: RECOMMENDATIONS DELIVERED TO SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT**

Today the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group shares its recommendations report with the Scottish Government. The report makes six recommendations on how existing and future museum collections and spaces can better recognise and address Scotland's complex imperial, colonial, and slavery histories, as part of a national commitment to anti-racism.

Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums is a national project, sponsored by the Scottish Government. After decades of campaigning by equalities groups this project was initiated by a motion in Scottish Parliament in June 2020.

The recommendations present a positive step for Scotland in its work to recognise and address the reality that for more than two centuries, its economy was closely tied to imperial trade and conquest, including the enslavement of human beings. People from all over Scotland were participants in and drivers of the British Empire, both at home and overseas, and the profits of these ventures helped to build the cities, towns, villages, homes, and infrastructure that are part of Scotland's society today. These colonial ventures have had profound human consequences, developing and advancing racist and prejudiced views that persist today.

The recommendations were developed through a national consultation of workshops, focus groups, and the biggest public survey of attitudes to museums and racism conducted in Scotland by Diffley Partnership. Evidence for the project includes a report by Intercultural Youth Scotland and youth researchers. This strand of the consultation directly highlights the perspectives of Black people and People of Colour in Scotland and aims to address the underrepresentation of Black People and People of Colour (BPoC) in research and consultation, particularly the exclusion of young BPoC and their views.

The six recommendations by the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group are:

1. Scotland should create a dedicated space to address our role in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery. A new organisation should be created to lead this work.
2. Museums should ensure anti-racism is embedded in their workplaces and public spaces.
3. Museums should involve the people of Scotland in shaping their work through co-production, to promote cultural democracy and participation for all.
4. Museums should commit to research, interpret, and share the histories of Scotland's links to empire, colonialism, and historic slavery.
5. Museums should support efforts to promote and embed race equality and anti-racism in the curricula in a meaningful, effective, and sustainable way.

6. Scottish Government should demonstrate their support for restitution and repatriation of looted or unethically acquired items in Scottish collections.

The recommendations have been made by the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group, an independent group chaired by Sir Geoff Palmer, renowned scientist and human rights activist.

Sir Geoff Palmer said:

"Museums hold a special place in my heart, as they offered a haven for me when I first came to the United Kingdom from Jamaica more than sixty years ago. History and education live in museums, and I believe museums can and should be a haven for all.

The recommendations by the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group mark a milestone in Scotland's tradition as a forward-looking nation. Taking a brave stance, acknowledging the part this country has played in shaping the world of today and being ready to see that glorious and inglorious histories co-exist, support us to move forward in a progressive way.

The work that lies ahead may sometimes feel challenging and uncomfortable but will be worth it to ensure that museums and galleries are for all of Scotland's people."

Abeer Eladany, Curatorial Assistant, University of Aberdeen Museums and Special Collections, and member of the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums Steering Group said:

"I hope that these recommendations promptly guide the decisions to be made by Scotland's museums and galleries, and that full and honest stories about the objects housed within these colonial structures are made available to the public.

I also hope that every person visiting museums and galleries in Scotland would find them to be spaces for truth and healing.

The recommendations highlighted the need for change in the way our collections are managed and presented. I hope that this fundamental change suggested in the recommendations, based on human rights, will gradually become the norm, and guides us in telling some of the most difficult stories related to the objects we care for. Scotland has an opportunity to lead this change by implementing these recommendations."

Culture Minister Neil Gray said:

"I very much welcome the steering group's report and I would like to thank the group, chaired by Sir Geoff Palmer, and administered by Museums Galleries Scotland, for the extensive range of consultation and research they carried out in preparing the conclusions and recommendations.

“The Scottish Government sponsored this independent group as part of our Programme for Government commitment to look at how our existing museums, and those set up in the future, can present a more accurate portrayal of Scotland’s colonial and slavery history.

“We will carefully consider these important recommendations and discuss them with the steering group, before responding to them. We will continue to work closely with Museums Galleries Scotland to raise awareness of the role Scotland played in slavery and empire and to ensure our collections reflect this.”

### **Notes to Editors:**

- **About The Empire, Slavery & Scotland’s Museums Project**

A national project, sponsored by the Scottish Government, to recommend how Scotland’s involvement in empire, colonialism, and historic slavery can be addressed using museum collections and spaces. It builds on existing work from within the equalities sector, to explore the mechanisms of how Scotland can confront challenging histories within museum spaces. It is coordinated by Museums Galleries Scotland and overseen by an independent Steering Group.

Further information can be found at

<https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/projects/empire-slavery-scotlands-museums/>

- **Recommendations Report and Guide On The Consultation Report**

From 14/06/2022 The *Empire, Slavery & Scotland’s Museums Steering Group Recommendations* report can be found at

<https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/media/2804/empire-slavery-and-scotlands-museums-recommendations.pdf>

From 14/06/2022 The *Empire, Slavery & Scotland’s Museums: A Guide on the Consultation* report can be found at

<https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/media/2805/empire-slavery-and-scotlands-museums-guide-on-the-consultation.pdf>

- **Scottish Government - Supported Project**

On 10 June 2020 a motion was passed in the Scottish Parliament showing solidarity with anti-racism, with an amendment that Scotland should ‘establish a slavery museum to address our historic links to the slave trade.’

In September 2020 the Scottish Government published their Programme for Government in which they agreed:

'Partnering with Museums Galleries Scotland, in collaboration with race equality and museums sector stakeholders, we will sponsor an independent expert group to make recommendations on how Scotland's existing and future museum collections we can better recognise and represent a more accurate portrayal of Scotland's colonial and slavery history and what further steps should be taken to ensure people in Scotland are aware of the role Scotland played and how that manifests itself in our society today. This will include how to reflect, interpret and celebrate the wide ranging and positive contributions that ethnic minority communities have made and continue to make to Scotland.'

- **Museums Galleries Scotland**

Museums Galleries Scotland was requested by the Scottish Government to coordinate the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums project.

Museums Galleries Scotland is the National Development Body for museums and galleries in Scotland and offers strategic development support to the sector. For further information visit [www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/about-us/](http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/about-us/)

- **Intercultural Youth Scotland**

Intercultural Youth Scotland were commissioned by Museums Galleries Scotland as part of the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums project research strand.

Intercultural Youth Scotland is a youth-led movement dedicated to improving representation and participation of Black and People of Colour (BPOC) young people in Scotland by bridging the gap in youth services, wider communities and politics. For further information visit <https://www.interculturalyouthscotland.org/>

- **Diffley Partnership**

Diffley Partnership was commissioned by Museums Galleries Scotland to conduct the public research strand of the Empire, Slavery and Scotland's Museums project.

Helping third, public and private sector clients understand public opinion on important topical issues is a specialism of the firm. Diffley Partnership offers a full range of consultancy services including qualitative and quantitative research to the highest standards. For further information visit <https://www.diffleypartnership.co.uk/>