

Berlin, den 21.02.2022

WE WANT THEM BACK!

Invitation to press conference

by [Decolonize Berlin](#), [European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights \(ECCHR\)](#),
[Berlin Postkolonial](#),

on the occasion of the publication of

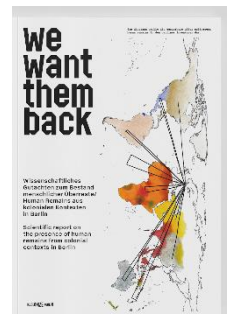
Scientific report on the presence of human remains from colonial contexts in Berlin

and the

CERD-Parallel report

Tuesday, March 1st, 2022 10:00 am (CET)

digital via Zoom-Meeting



Participants:

Mynaka Sururu Mboro, *Berlin Postkolonial e.V.*

Isabelle Reimann, Anthropologist and writer of the report

Sarah Imani, *ECCHR*

Moderated by Tahir Della, *Decolonize Berlin e.V.*

Languages:

The press conference will be conducted in German and translated to English

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To register for the press conference [hier](#).

The crimes of the colonial era and their consequences are visible everywhere in Europe, the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin - especially in public institutions such as museums and universities. Thousands of deceased people are still there to this day: without grave, without commemoration. The repatriation of ancestral human remains play a special role in the context of restitution and reparation claims. For this, reliable information about the presence of human remains is needed. However, to date there is no nationwide publicly accessible inventory of human remains from colonial contexts.

The *coordination office for a city-wide reappraisal concept of Berlin's colonial past*, which was established by the Berlin Senate at Decolonize Berlin e.V., has the task of researching colonial history in the capital and making the public aware of it. On 28.02.2022 it is now publishing "WE WANT THEM BACK! Scientific report on the presence of human remains in Berlin".

The core of the publication is the inventory by anthropologist and provenance researcher **Isabelle Reimann**. It compiles the current number and state of research on human remains from colonial contexts of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte (Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory), the Berliner Charité, the des Naturkundemuseums Berlins (Berlin Museum of Natural History), the Zoological Teaching Collections at the Berlin universities of the HU and FU as well as the Lautarchivs of the HU, the weißensee kunsthochschule berlin and the Deutschen Historischen Museum (German Historical Museum). In addition, the report explains the background of the Berlin collections. The questions it raises about the ethical treatment of the collections are embedded in the German and international discourse of a worldwide repatriation movement that has existed since the 1980s.

(Ancestral) Human Remains in Berlin

Due to Berlin's special position as the capital of the German Empire, a particularly large number of collections were created there during the colonial period. The report shows that a total of more than **5,958 human remains from colonial contexts** are in institutions and museums in the Berlin area. Due to the lack of feedback from the private *Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory* on the entire Rudolf-Virchow-Collection (approx. 3,500 individuals), it can be assumed that there are **9,458 people** whose remains are partially located in Berlin.

Isabelle Reimann states on her research:

"The inquiries alone have initiated new processes at the institutions. For example, for the first time the Museum für Naturkunde has started an internal inventory of human remains in the collection, and at the FU I had to do the markup for the inventory myself. This shows that political will alone is not enough. Specific steps are needed. After the report, the next steps should be the intra-institutional exchange and the creation of an advisory board of repatriation practitioners and descendants."

The publication also includes an artistic exploration and comments by repatriation practitioners such as Edward Halealoha Ayau from Hawai'i (USA), Santi Hitorangi and Evelin Huki from Rapa Nui (Chile), Christian Kopp and Mnyaka Sururu Mboro (Tanzania). The authors make concrete recommendations such as the appointment of an advisory board, the development of transnational, cross-institutional research projects, and the creation of a legal framework to enable the swift repatriation of the remains.

The aim of the publication is to create more transparency for repatriation practitioners and communities of origin and to contribute to quicker repatriations in collaboration with the communities of origin.

Publication of the CERD-Parallel report

The parallel report, published by ECCHR in cooperation with Berlin Postkolonial, Decolonize Berlin, Flinn Works and the ISD, refers to the report and supplements the argumentation with a legal perspective on the issue. Predominantly, it is about the corresponding framework conditions at the federal level. The report emphasizes that the handling of ancestral remains by German institutions and museums constitutes racial discrimination and that the Federal Republic of Germany thus violates its obligations under the *United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)*. The authors refer to fundamental basic and human rights, such as (post-mortem) human dignity and the right to rest for the dead, as well as the right of relatives to mourn and bury their deceased in an appropriate manner.

"Germany violates its human rights obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Repatriation of ancestral human remains is a human and fundamental right of those persons whose human remains are kept in the archives of German institutions in an inhumane manner, and of their descendants."

says **Sarah Imani**, a lawyer and legal advisor at ECCHR, where she is responsible at the Institute for Legal Intervention for dealing with German and European colonial crimes, reparations and restitution issues, and postcolonial critiques of the law.

Like many other representatives of communities of origin, **Mynaka Sururu Mboro**, board member of *Berlin Postkolonial*, has been searching for decades for the bones of his ancestors, especially for the head of the anti-colonial resistance fighter Mangi Meli.

Press contacts of the inviting organizations

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