



**SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY**  
December 2-3-4, 2025, Ottawa, ON

**Resolution no. 60/2025**

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**TITLE:** Repatriation of First Nations Items and Sacred Artifacts

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**SUBJECT:** Culture and Heritage

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**MOVED BY:** Kúkwpí7 Rosanne Casimir, Tk'emlups te Secwepemc, BC

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**SECONDED BY:** Marletta Kalouckovale, Proxy, Ahousaht First Nation, BC

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**DECISION:** Carried by consensus

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**WHEREAS:**

- A. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration) states:
- i. Article 12(1): 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 the irreligious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains.
  - ii. Article 12(2): States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples concerned.
- B. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (UNDA) Action Plan commits the Department of Canadian Heritage to:
- i. Co-develop with First Nations, Inuit Treaty Organizations or their designates, and the Métis a distinction-based comprehensive approach, which will include legislative, programming and/or service measures, to enable the repatriation/rematriation of Indigenous cultural belongings and ancestral remains.
- C. First Nations-in-Assembly have provided the following mandates with respect to repatriation and cultural heritage, including:
- i. Resolution 01/2015, *Support for the Full Implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action*, calls upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

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- ii. Resolution 31/2016, *Recognizing and Protecting First Nations Sacred Heritage Sites and Ancestral Burial Grounds*, calls upon the federal government to include First Nations as decision-makers in managing First Nations heritage.
  - iii. Resolution 106/2017, *Support for International Repatriation of Sacred Items*, calls upon the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to support First Nations in repatriating objects from international repositories.
  - iv. Resolution 16/2018, *Support for the Indigenous Heritage Circle*, directs the AFN to develop a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration and to ensure that the repatriation of Indigenous cultural property is done with the participation of First Nations and upholds the UN Declaration.
- D. First Nations have the Inherent and sacred right to care for, protect, and govern their cultural heritage, including sacred objects, ceremonial items, ancestral remains, and knowledge systems.
- E. Many sacred and cultural artifacts belonging to First Nations are held in national and international institutions, some of which are in the process of returning these belongings to First Nations.
- F. The Canadian Museums Association (CMA) developed a report on how museums can implement the UN Declaration. Their recommendations include funding the repatriation process and Indigenous cultural centres. The CMA, alongside the Indigenous Heritage Circle, created the Indigenous Cultural Heritage Rights Task Force to advance Indigenous cultural heritage rights and support the return of cultural belongings to their rightful communities.
- G. The continued use, display, and ownership of artifacts belonging to First Nations without their consent violates the rights of First Nations to free, prior and informed consent. To comply with the UN Declaration, museums and institutions must identify and return items and artifacts to the appropriate rights holders.
- H. As the Government of Canada seeks to fast-track major projects across First Nations territories, the protection and conservation of artifacts, cultural items, and burial sites is an increasing priority for First Nations.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the First Nations-in-Assembly:**

1. Affirm that First Nations have the sole and Inherent right to lead and govern the stewardship, care, and interpretation of their sacred and cultural belongings, both repatriated and existing.
2. Direct the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to seek resources to support the creation of a First Nations-led task force, composed of First Nations leaders, knowledge keepers, youth, legal experts, and cultural practitioners, to guide the development, governance, and implementation of a national repatriation strategy.
3. Call upon the Government of Canada to implement the Canadian Museums Association's (CMA) 2022 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* Report recommendations, including providing sustained, long-term funding to support First Nations in repatriation.
4. Call on the AFN—through the First Nations-led task force—to work with First Nations, the Department of Canadian Heritage, provinces where necessary, and the Indigenous Cultural Heritage Rights Task Force

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to establish a draft Cultural Heritage Rights Framework that recognizes First Nations' sovereignty over First Nations' cultural rights, and encompasses restitution, redress, repatriation, and repatriation.

5. Direct the AFN to put forward a Cultural Heritage Rights Framework for endorsement at a subsequent AFN Assembly.
6. Call on the Government of Canada, international museums, provinces, and funding bodies to provide comprehensive ongoing funding to support repatriation activities before, during, and after the process, including community infrastructure and capacity building.
7. Direct the AFN to advocate to the federal government to take legislative measures to strengthen repatriation efforts, repatriating ancestral remains, and ancient artifacts.

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