

Policy for the International Repatriation of Human Remains

National Museum of Natural History

Date approved by NMNH Director: July 2015

The National Museum of the American Indian Act of 1989 (as amended in 1996) applies only to the repatriation of Native American remains, funerary objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony to culturally affiliated tribes in the United States. There is no U.S. law that governs the repatriation of indigenous remains and other materials to descendants and groups outside the United States. For that reason, requests for the international repatriation of human remains are evaluated on a case-by-case basis at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH or museum), using the following criteria.

In order for remains to be returned in response to an international repatriation request, the request must fall within one of the three following categories, prompting a formal review of all relevant documents:

1. **Named individuals:** The remains of named individuals are eligible for repatriation, regardless of affiliation or country of origin, when requested by lineal descendants. Lineal descendants are eligible to receive remains of their direct ancestors and these requests have precedence over community interests.
2. **Right of Possession:** NMNH will return remains that are found to have been acquired illegally, or under circumstances which render the museum's claim of title invalid.
3. **National Government Support:** NMNH will consider requests for the return of remains affiliated with an indigenous community if the request is supported by the national government and the request is made by the government on behalf of the indigenous community.

The museum encourages input from indigenous communities on the traditional care of remains housed within its collections. Members of indigenous communities are always welcome to visit the museum, to view collections, and to meet with staff. It is the position of the museum that all remains within its custody be treated with respect and dignity.