



Kelvin Thomson MP
Federal Member for Wills

Main Committee
CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS
Parthenon Marbles
17/03/2009

Kelvin Thomson (Wills)—I believe we as a parliament should recognise the just claim of the Greek government for the return of the Parthenon marbles from the British Museum. We should encourage the British Museum to accept and abide by the UN General Assembly, which at its 61st session debated the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin. Museums should be prepared to initiate dialogues for the return of important cultural property to its country or community of origin.

The Parthenon is a significant symbol of Greek cultural heritage and western culture in general, and the marbles form an integral part of this most important of buildings. The marbles are not freestanding works of art. They should not be exhibited 2,000 miles away, separate from the actual monument for which they were specifically designed and carved. We should propose to the British government that they return the Parthenon marbles to the new Acropolis Museum, expressly built in order to house all the Parthenon sculptures.

The Parthenon marbles—or, more precisely, the Parthenon sculptures—are integral architectural members of one of the most magnificent and best-known monuments in the world, the Parthenon. The Parthenon is the celebration of the achievements of free, democratic people and for that reason it is an important symbol to the whole world. That is why it is inconceivable that over half of its celebrated sculptural elements should be exhibited 2,000 miles away from the rest. Furthermore, these architectural ads were removed from the monument—actually hacked off—without the consent of the Greek people, who at that time were under occupation.

The Parthenon is the most important symbol of Greek cultural heritage and, according to the declaration of universal human and cultural rights, the Greek state has a duty to preserve its cultural heritage in its totality, both for its citizens and for the international community. The Parthenon sculptures are not properly displayed at the British Museum. Not only do they appear as if they form a whole—which they do not—and there is no indication of where the missing slabs should have been but they are also exhibited on the inside of a wall.

During the 61st session of the UN General Assembly held in November 2006, the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin was debated. This resulted in a new resolution reaffirming previous UN resolutions calling for the protection of cultural property; laws prohibiting illicit import, export

and transfer of ownership of cultural property; and further acknowledgment and recognition of statutes based around cultural heritage.

As I said at the outset, museums should be prepared to initiate dialogues for the return of important cultural property to its country or community of origin. This should be undertaken on ethical, scientific and humanitarian principles. I believe that the cooperation, partnership, goodwill and mutual appreciation between the parties concerned could lead to joint research programs and the exchange of valuable technical expertise.