

# BENIN MOAT FOUNDATION

## A CLARION CALL

Stakeholders of Human History Wherever You May Be,

Benin Moat Foundation (BMF) salutes you, the future of Edo Land, her great past and the ingenuity of her visionary ancestors!

BMF wants you to know that Federal Government Legal Notice (LN) 79 of 29<sup>th</sup> May 1961 signed by Mallam Isa Koto, listed Benin Moat as a National Monument with effect from June 1, 1961. However, Federal Republic of Nigeria Legal Notice (LN) 59 of 16<sup>th</sup> May 1964 signed by Mr. I A Wemabu revoked the status on the day of that notice.

Reason or reasons for the revocation are not yet known, but it should be said that monuments located on land need total definition through surveys. The extent of the monument and its rights of ways must be clearly known on the ground. Such surveys must have beacons to mark them. This has not been the case with Benin Moat and Walls. That was probably one of the Federal Government's dilemmas, given the extent of the asset and heritage.

Dr. Patrick Darling of African Legacy says that apart from the Moat and Walls we see in Benin City, our ancestors built other Moat Complexes thousands of kilometers long on Edo land. Elsewhere on our website [www.beninmoatfoundation.org](http://www.beninmoatfoundation.org), some of these Moat Complexes are presented.

Whatever reasons the Federal Government of Nigeria had for revoking the status, Benin Moat and Walls has not been a National Monument of Nigeria for 45 years! A co-incidence it probably is, but the period happens to be one of unrelenting devastation of the Moat and Walls complex in Benin City! A priori, Benin Moat Foundation would argue that the revocation is the cause of the monumental ineffectiveness of the National Council for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) as a protector of the complex in the face of a relentless assault on the Edo Heritage.

As we say, “n’ovaranmwun n’okeke’imien obo n’oya tol’egbe (He/She who butchers carrion finds no fingers to scratch an itchy body.”) We were obsessed with other things and did not notice the Federal Government had revoked the status of the Moat and Walls. As if that was not enough, the NCMM continued to flaunt the legal status it did not have over the Heritage, probably for a good reason. If the reason was to protect our ancestor's contribution to human development from those who have no sense of history or those who think they have better use for the land, it did not work.

What are the consequences of the action of the Federal Government (FG)? One serious consequence is, BMF understands, the Moats and Walls cannot be World Heritage Sites if they are not, first, National Monuments. Other consequences are unclear. However, FG predilection seems to be that it does not provide funds for maintenance of monuments. Rather, it looks to individuals and bodies to help out, while it hamstringing the monuments with its burden of

authority. As Dr Patrick Darling says, there are numerous so called National Monuments in Nigeria waiting to go private.

Benin Moat Foundation is trying to find out where the balance might be. What we know now is that current Federal Government legislation on National Monuments must change drastically if the federal state's involvement in these monuments is to help beyond –

- A. National legitimization of monuments and of bodies or institutions associated with them
- B. Licensing of bodies which may go to the world raising funds for the monuments.

Is there any advantage in the action of the FG? Above paragraph hints at sustainability; in this age of creative destruction, no monument can survive without funds. Current estimate is that in 48 years of “FG control,” more than seventy per cent of the moat has been destroyed:

- i. The Moat and Walls sprawls all over Benin City. It and its right of way are not defined by survey. It therefore has no domain in law.
- ii NCMM, the parastatal which looks after the moat, has no inspectorate arm with Police powers to monitor the Moat and Walls and its right of way. The parastatal cannot prosecute offenders and cannot protect the asset, therefore.

A huge advantage is that the moat is back in the hands of its original owners – Edo State and the people. Our ancestors built it. With the authority over the asset in our hands, we can work to rehash what we can as fast as we can. It is a wonderful opportunity to preserve a great heritage. When the time is ripe, we will have something we can flaunt before the rest of the world to assert our civilization. This is the belief of Benin Moat Foundation. DO YOU SHARE THIS BELIEF?

The world has the creativity of our ancestors in the form of artworks of different motifs in their museums and palaces. They are preserved for humanity, but not by us. Today, there is a country called the *Republic of Benin* where people are said to be laying claims to these art works! No one believes them yet; let them sustain their claims long enough and some might start to believe. What higher credibility can we muster if we were able to protect the Moat and Walls we have?

We did not know the Moat and Walls is priceless. Now we know. Experts say it is an important plank of our unwritten anthropology and history. Shouldn't we restore what is possible and make sure we tell the world of tourism that it is in Benin City? Surely, we want the world to know all what our ancestors contributed to human development.

It cannot be easy given the enormous and complex task the restoration entails. BMF exhorts you to reflect deeply; ask yourself the following question and answer it with conviction:

“Do I want my Moat and Wall heritage saved for posterity?”

If the answer is yes, then commit yourself today. Contact Benin Moat Foundation at [info@beninmoatfoundation.org](mailto:info@beninmoatfoundation.org) and be a force for the revival of a great people and their history. Let your ideas on how we go forward be known. The past left marks to show how great we were. GREATNESS IS IN OUR BLOOD; WE CAN BE GREAT AGAIN!