



## **PETITION**

For

**REPATRIATION OF HUMAN REMAINS OF ZIMBABWE'S FIRST CHIMURENGA  
HEROES AND HEROINES, AND CULTURAL ARTEFACTS**

**4 November, 2021**

Submitted by Co-Conveners of the #BringBackOurBones Campaign:

**Zimbabwe Chapter:**

1. Yeukai Chirunga
2. Vusumuzi Nyamazana

**South Africa Chapter:**

3. Brian Muziringa
4. Vincent Chikwari
5. Ishmael Kauzani
6. Paradzai Nyahwedegwe

**UK Chapter:**

7. Kuda Mdyara
8. Boswell Gurajena

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### Australia Chapter:

#### 9. Jaison Midzi

We, the above mentioned Co-Conveners and cultural descendants of the beheaded Zimbabwean Chiefs and colonial resistance leaders, have directed the development of this Petition, have reviewed its contents, this 4th day of November, 2021, now authorize this documented Petition to be submitted to HM Queen Elizabeth II, British Government, the House of Lords and the House of Commons, British Museums, and other governmental bodies through the British High Commission in Pretoria, South Africa.

This document, including an historical narrative and biographies of the beheaded Chiefs and colonial resistance leaders, constitutes the Documented Petition submitted for expeditious repatriation of bones of our First Chimurenga ancestors, including artefacts, held in the British Museums in London.

The heroes who among others include:

1. Mbuya Charwe Nehanda Nyakasikana
2. Chief Chingaira Makoni
3. Chief Mutekedza Chiwashira
4. Chief Chinengundu Mashayamombe
5. Chief Kadungure Mapondera
6. Mashonganyika

To aid the effort and maximize the effectiveness of our Petition, Mr Vusumuzi Nyamazana was named as the contact for the Campaign. He may be reached at:

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Respectfully submitted,

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Yeukai Chirunga

Co-Convener

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Vusumuzi Nyamazana

Co-Convener

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**THE PETITION: DEMAND FOR REPATRIATION OF HUMAN REMAINS OF ZIMBABWE'S FIRST CHIMURENGA HEROES AND HEROINE, AND CULTURAL ARTEFACTS**

The British Natural Museum is a repository of our ancestor's bones acquired through atrocious and ethically challenged means. The collection of the mortal remains followed the decapitation of our leaders of anti-colonial resistance in the 19th century.

The bones were dispatched to England, to signify British victory over, and subjugation of the local population. In addition to the bones appearing in your museums in the explicit context of historical conquest, they became raw materials for racial scientific studies to justify a false and pernicious ideology of racial superiority.

These injustices were perpetrated by a trading company, British South African Company, who were afforded law-making abilities under British government, and it eventually became a colonial government.

Our ancestors remained outside the protection of these laws of citizens, even though British laws were extended over them in efforts to take their lands, resources, and possessions.

Going by the aforesaid, human, legal and ethical norms were violated during this process of court trials, sentencing, decapitation and body parts exportation. The people of Zimbabwe are facing a human rights violation whereby bones of our ancestors were taken without our knowledge or consent and under situations of extreme duress. These human rights violations remain today with the continued possession, display and study of, or profit from our ancestral remains.

It is afflictive on us as a nation that the bones of revered traditional leaders have become artefacts. The holding of culturally sensitive human remains is inhuman considering that living relatives desire to accord decent burials of the beheaded so that their spirits can rest. Retaining them leaves the injustices of the past uncorrected and unsolved. Repatriation is the right thing for you to do in that it responds to an historical episode that, in our opinion, should not have occurred.

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We perceive the need to repossess those human remains as particularly urgent in cases of our ancestors 'bad deaths' that occurred violently, unnaturally, unexpectedly, and suddenly. The circumstances in which our ancestors died did not permit the performance of the required death rituals. This situation of abandoned and desecrated human remains is 'unbearable' to the living, and is an affront to the moral order. The spectres of the dead roam around their untreated remains demanding proper funerary rites.

Mbuya Nehanda before execution demanded that her body be taken to Mazowe and be buried among her people. Chief Chingaira Makoni made a similar call before execution, and instructed his aides to ensure he was buried according to the customs of the Makoni people, and that the curse of the gods will fall upon the people if they did not see to it that he is given a proper burial in accordance with their tradition. The restless, unburied dead remain dangerous to their descendants and to the nation. In the post-independence period, as the abundance that many had expected to come with nationhood has failed to materialize, these concerns have mounted.

We view the failure of the British government to return the bones as a reason why the nation has suffered so much instability and has failed to 'develop' since gaining independence. Until the bones of all conflict-dead have been recovered it will not be possible to move ahead as a nation.

Once the bones are buried on our soil, they will be among their own people, their spirits will be with the bones, and the spirits will finally rest.

It is during the same epoch that cultural and spiritual artefacts were appropriated. In a 14 August 2015 article in the Herald, the National Director of the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) Dr Godfrey Mahachi said more than 2600 Zimbabwean cultural objects are displayed in the British Museum. He added that most of the objects were looted soon after the enactment of the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899, and it is on the basis of this act, whites could confiscate any object regarded as having spiritual value or significance. Some of the objects confiscated, include mbira (traditional thumb piano), mutsago (wooden headdress), drums, spears taken from

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prominent soldiers and military leaders, snuff boxes, wooden utensils, hides and hakata (divination bones).

We passionately condemn Britain's refusal, and or delay to send the remains and artefacts back to Zimbabwe as an indication of a lack of respect both for the lineal descendants and Zimbabwe at large.

We, therefore, demand that HM Queen Elizabeth II, British Government, the House of Lords and the House of Commons, British Museums, British Embassies, and other governmental bodies take immediate action to address this 123-year-old, on-going human rights issue.

We look forward to your response within the next seven (7) working days, failure of which Zimbabwe's sons and daughters will engage in protests at British Embassies around the world.

### **REASONS WHY BRITAIN SHOULD ACCEDE TO OUR REPATRIATION DEMANDS**

1. There is a moral case for giving back the human remains and artefacts because they were violently appropriated without regard to the feelings of our people who at the time were judged to be less than human.
2. Zimbabwe's culture has a special connection with ancestral remains. Handing over the remains will allow families and communities to practice burial rites for the dead and to help them deal with the traumatic past.
3. The customary rite of honouring the dead is considered a universal norm, hence the UK's Human Tissue Act of 2004 calling for human remains to 'be treated with appropriate respect and dignity'. It is this same Act that allowed the Natural History Museum to return the Torres Strait Islander bones, and the World Museum to give a skull to representatives of the Ngarridjeri people of South Australia in 2009.
4. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's, Article 12 states that '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 people concerned'.

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5. Repatriation can turn British Natural Museum from being a place of colonialism into a mediating space that confront and then move beyond its own past.
6. There is obviously a variety of political advantages to this process. Repatriation cannot undo historical wrongs, but it will improve relations between the two nations.

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### HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

In 1890, British colonists, under the flag of British South Africa Company (BSAC), invaded Mashonaland (currently Zimbabwe) and confiscated the land and livestock of the native people living there to find gold. The British government had granted them exclusive mining rights, and the BSAC imposed forced labour and strong taxes on native families.

This scenario prompted an upheaval known as Chimurenga (“War of Liberation”)—a military campaign that commenced in March 1896 to expel the British. The First Chimurenga came close to destroying the nascent white state almost before it had begun.

A defining aspect of this first uprising was its strong link to the religion and tutelary spirits of the local communities. Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana belonged to the Shona people, one of the local ethnic groups. Regarded as a spiritual leader, she was a medium of an ancestral spirit known as mhondoro. The mhondoro were among the most powerful spirits in the local tradition.

Together with the mediums of the other two mhondoro, Mukwati in Matabeleland and Kaguvi in western Mashonaland, Nehanda organized and led her people’s resistance until she was captured.

The first Chimurenga spanned until late 1897, when the peoples of Shona and Ndebele were defeated, after running out of supplies.

Nehanda’s words, “My bones shall rise again,” are believed to have predicted the second Chimurenga from 1964 to 1979, which culminated in the independence of present-day Zimbabwe.

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## BIOGRAPHIES OF SOME OF THE FIRST CHIMURENGA HEROES AND HEROINE

### 1. MBUYA CHARWE NEHANDA NYAKASIKANA

Mbuya Charwe, the medium of the Nehanda spirit, was apprehended and hauled to her Majesty's court in March 1898, alongside Zindonga, Hwata and Gutsa for the alleged murder of one Hawkins Pollard, the brutal white Native Commissioner of the British South Africa Company who resided near Mazowe and terrorised natives in that district.

It is known that Pollard was killed when investigating the murder of a white man near Mount Darwin. The Mazowe Chiefs claimed they had rebelled because Pollard had sjambokked Chiweshe, an important Chief. In doing so he had transgressed accepted bounds. He was chased by the Mazowe Africans and killed.

She, along with Sekuru Gumboreshumba, the medium of Kaguvi, were arraigned in the High Court of Matabeleland which sat in Salisbury on February 20 1898, and were subsequently convicted on March 2 1898 in a case entered as "Regina (British Queen) versus Nehanda."

Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi were sentenced to death by hanging. The execution of Mbuya Nehanda was authorised by the British High Commissioner for South Africa, Alfred Milner. The British Imperial Secretary endorsed the hanging on March 28 1898.

The presiding Judge was Judge Watermeyer, while Herbert Hayton Castens, Esquire was the acting public Prosecutor Sovereign, and prosecuted on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen of England.

The authority to execute Mbuya Nehanda was unprocedural. The British Roman Dutch Law which applied then demanded automatic appeal in all murder convictions. In Mbuya Nehanda's case this was not done and as a result tainted the whole process with illegality. After displaying the body of Nehanda on a tree they skinned her and decapitated her body. The head was placed in a sack and taken to England as a trophy.

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During the last moments of her life, Mbuya Nehanda refused to accept conversion to Christianity, and on the scaffold, she pronounced a prophecy that 'my bones will rise' and win back freedom from the colonial invaders.

A statue in her honour was unveiled in Harare on the 25th of May, 2021. Although the gesture was welcomed by many Zimbabweans, others objected that her skull should have been repatriated first before erecting the statue. On the 9th of August, 2021, she was awarded by the Zimbabwe government, the Order of the Great Zimbabwe Diamond. Same objections were raised. Failure to regain possession of her skull diminished the significance of these awards.

## 2. CHIEF CHINGAIRA MAKONI

Chief Chingaira was one of the fiercest warriors to confront Cecil John Rhodes Pioneer Column. He was finally seized and killed on 4 September, 1896.

At Gwindingwi, Chief Chingaira defeated every colonial army which came to fight him. The Rhodesians had to send in reinforcements from Britain and South Africa. The British army was led by M. Alderson. The soldiers gathered at the cave at Gwindingwi where Chief Chingaira was hiding with his wives, children and his people. Using all kinds of artillery such as maxims, 7 pounders etc. failed to dislodge Chingaira from his stronghold of Gwindingwi.

The great warrior was only defeated in the end not in battle, but through betrayal by one Tom Dlamini a District Commissioner's Officer, who acted as an interpreter who lied to him that the whites had laid down their arms and wanted him to come out and talk peace with him.

As soon as he came out of the cave, he was apprehended together with his closest military aides. They were summarily executed without trial in full public glare. He was killed by simultaneous shots by a firing squad of 20, and his head was deposited in a bag which was thrown on the next wagon to the port in South Africa for shipping to the colonial headquarters in London, where it was put on display in a British museum.

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All the 21 Chiefs before him are buried at the royal Chitsotso enclave, only Chief Chingaira's body is incomplete and is interred in another sacred burial site in Gwindingwi Mountains. When the head returns, his body can be retrieved from Gwindingwi and be put to rest in his rightful place among the other Chiefs at Chitsotso.

The Makoni people say it is necessary for the head of Chief Chingaira to be returned so that his final wishes may be fulfilled. Before Chief Chingaira was executed he called upon his aides and instructed them that since he was going to die, they must ensure that he was buried according to the customs of the Makoni people, and that the curse of the gods will fall upon the people if they did not see to it that he is given a proper burial in accordance with their tradition. Therefore, the head need to be returned so that there is peace in the land.

On the 9th of August 2021, he was awarded by the government, the Order of the Great Zimbabwe Diamond.

### **3. CHIEF MUTEKEDZA CHIASHIRA**

Chief Chiwashira's real crime was that he stood up against the British plunderers and successfully waged two battles against them at Nhororiya and Zuru in 1896, before falling at the third one.

A charging regiment closed in on Chief Chiwashira's stronghold, and the settlers demanded his surrender, short of which they threatened to kill his captured heir.

Chief Chiwashira emerged from his underground tunnel and surrendered to the white soldiers to avert further crossfire. He was then tied to a horse and dragged by the galloping stallion to the colonial prison at Fort Charter, where he arrived dead. The atrocity played out in full view of the Vuhera people, to strike fear into them and make them docile subjects of the enemy.

During the same time, thousands of blacks imprisoned at Fort Charter were burnt to death on stakes, and their charred remains interred in a mass grave, known as

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Dhoronga. To date, the mass grave at Chikomba is an indictment on the evil imperialist dispensation.

On the 9th of August 2021, he was awarded by the government, the Order of the Great Zimbabwe Diamond.

#### **4. CHIEF CHINENGUNDU MASHAYAMOMBE**

The First Chimurenga started in Mhondoro, the area under his dominion.

After Chief Mashayamombe showed prospector Henry Hartley a rich reef of gold on the northern bank of the Mupfure River, he broke the news to Thomas Baines and German explorer Carl Mauch. The then Natal Mercury wrote: "So, the question of the ancient Ophir is at last settled. We are all in a high state of excitement."

Several years after the discovery, Cecil John Rhodes dispatched the Pioneer Column in 1890 where every member was promised 16 gold mining claims, but they soon met resistance as successive raids failed to subdue Chief Mashayamombe who had created a garrison on the banks of Mupfure River.

The Mashayamombe people are credited for killing the first white person during a military clash between the two sides. Later, the local people killed two white men and this signalled the start of the First Chimurenga in Mashonaland. On June 21 1896, Captain J.F. Taylor was sent to attack Chief Mashayamombe and he was repulsed and retreated.

Several battles were fought and won by Chief Mashayamombe, forcing British South African Police to establish a fort at his kraal, which they called Fort Martins.

The end came on July 24th. The British South Africa Police under de Moleyns and the 7th Hussars under Captains Carew and Poore, a total force of 670 men, stormed the kraal and after a sharp fight, which lasted only a few minutes, occupied the kopje and started to picket and dynamite its many caves. Among the attackers two Europeans and three Africans were killed. At dawn on the 25th, Mashayamombe himself appeared at

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the mouth of a cave, wounded by the blasting, and was shot down. His body was never found and it is believed that he was decapitated and taken to Britain as a trophy.

On the 9th of August 2021, he was awarded by the government, the Order of the Great Zimbabwe Diamond.

## **5. CHIEF KADUNGURE MAPONDERA**

He was arguably the last surviving gallant fighter of the First Chimurenga who waged a war of resistance against colonial occupation.

History records that he was born in Mazowe near Nyota Hills to VaBiri, the senior wife of Paramount Chief Gorejena Negomo. Mapondera grew up to be a great soldier leading successful rebellions against white colonial rule. Mapondera was later arrested and tried in the then Salisbury in 1901 where he was accused of several crimes, including allegations that he wanted to wipe out the white community in the Mazowe area.

He was sentenced to seven years in prison, but died in 1907 in the arms of his wife who had visited him. He is said to have gone on a hunger strike.

The historical records do not specify where Mapondera was buried, but as per tradition, his people were said to have collected soil from where he is believed to have died in Salisbury and placed it in the Nyota Hills, and gave the head of a cow and a length of cloth as a burial rite in 1940.

On the 9th of August 2021, he was awarded by the government, the Order of the Great Zimbabwe Diamond.