

# AUECHO

2025 Annual Magazine



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The destruction of Black Wall Street and the fight for reparations



**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

# What are Reparations?

refers to measures to redress violations of human rights by providing a range of material and symbolic benefits to victims or their families as well as affected communities

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## From the Editor



**Leslie Richer**

Director, Directorate of Information and Communication, AUC

### Restoring Dignity, Repairing History — The Imperative of Reparations

With the declaration by the African Union of 2025 as the **Year of Reparations** calling for “**Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations,**” we find ourselves at a historical crossroads — a moment demanding not only remembrance but restitution.

The echoes of slavery, colonialism, and systemic dispossession reverberate across centuries, shaping contemporary inequities and distorting the narrative of Africa and her diaspora and thus making reparations more

than about financial compensation but also about moral, political, and cultural reckoning. Reparations are a call to restore dignity, identity, and justice to a people whose contributions have too often been erased or undervalued.

The call for Reparations is not new, but for far too long, the global conversation on reparations has been confined to the margins of diplomacy and conscience. Yet, from the Caribbean to Africa, from the Americas to Europe, the momentum is shifting. The African Union’s 2025 theme gives institutional expression to what activists, scholars, and moral leaders have long asserted: that the legacies of slavery and colonialism are not historical footnotes but living realities demanding deliberate repair.

The transatlantic slave trade represents one of humanity’s greatest crimes — a system that commodified over 12 million Africans, rupturing societies, destroying knowledge systems, and sowing racial hierarchies that persist today. The descendants of those who were enslaved continue to face structural discrimination in education, housing (redlining), labour and justice. The demand for reparations is thus not about revisiting the past for its own sake, but about addressing the enduring consequences of that past in the present. We must not forget that even when the descendants of slaves chose to rise above their past rooted in slavery, their efforts were deliberately destroyed as was the case with the harrowing and violent racial attacks witnessed in the Tulsa Race Massacre in the United States in 1921 (covered in this edition). The Harlem Renaissance which begun in the early 1900’s was another example of descendants of slavery attempting to arise beyond their roots to drive a cultural,

intellectual, and artistic explosion that celebrated Black creativity and identity centred in Harlem, New York City. The movement was basically undermined through economic sabotage from loss of funding as well as political and structural racism from housing segregation, policing and discrimination. One cannot help but wonder what would have been the case if these societies had been allowed to grow and thrive. Beyond the destruction of livelihoods, we must not forget that Black people were subjected to unethical and non-consensual medical experiments spanning the eras of slavery, segregation, and even into the 20th century. From the Tuskegee Syphilis Study from 1932 to 1972 to surgical experiments on enslaved Black women in Alabama in the 1840's.

In Africa through colonialism and apartheid, there was epistemic violence on African education, indigenous knowledge, language, philosophy, culture, religion and traditional medicine which were vilified and discredited even though some of this knowledge has been used as data sources, a form of intellectual and cultural exploitation.

In her speech made during the African Union Summit in February 2025, Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados said it well. When it comes to recognition of the injustices peoples of African descent have endured and the call for reparations... "Say Sorry...and Mean It"

It's undeniable that the wealth of the modern global economy was built upon the unpaid labour and stolen humanity of Africans. To acknowledge this is to shine a torch on institutions and individuals whose descendants are still enjoying the fruits of the poisonous

labour and wealth created from slavery or other violent acts of destruction carried out upon slaves and descendants of slavery, populations who suffered under colonialism and systems of systematic discrimination and oppression, it also seeks to recognise a collective historical responsibility. Reparations, therefore, are not a charity extended to Africa and her diaspora — they are a debt owed. Justice requires that we balance the moral ledger of history.

The path toward this justice is not singular. It may involve restitution through material compensation, investment in education and health systems, the return of looted artifacts, and, critically, institutional reform that dismantles the racial hierarchies slavery and colonialism constructed. But perhaps the most vital form of reparations is truth — an honest engagement with history that reclaims Africa's central place in the story of humanity.

Whereas slavery violently uprooted millions from their homeland, colonialism entrenched exploitation within it. It extracted Africa's wealth, reconfigured her borders, and imposed alien systems of religion, governance, economy, and thought. Even after political independence, the structures of economic dependency and epistemic dominance remain.

The question of reparations for colonialism thus extends beyond the financial to the systemic. It calls for a reordering of global power relations, for trade justice, debt cancellation, and equitable participation in international decision-making. It compels us to rethink the language of development itself — too often couched in paternalistic narratives that obscure historical responsibility.

The focus on reparations is an invitation to the world to participate in a new social contract — one grounded in fairness, respect, and shared prosperity. As Africa asserts her agency in the 21st century, reparations must become part of the architecture of global justice, not a footnote to it.

I dare say that cultural and linguistic reparations are central to restoring the soul of a people. The importance of considering restoration of language as part of cultural and heritage reparations cannot be ignored as language has played a key role in promoting mental colonisation which as pointed out in *Decolonising the Mind* by the late Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, language was an effective weapon of colonialism which effectively annihilated Africans' beliefs in their own languages, culture, and identities. Colonial languages are a cultural bomb that destroyed the past and continues to detonate across generations. Centuries of erasure and distortion have denied Africa control over her own narrative. Colonial education systems privileged European languages, philosophies, and aesthetic standards while marginalising indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and spiritual traditions. The reparation of culture, therefore, is a reparation of identity — an act of reclaiming memory and meaning. The role of cultural reparation must be one that is led by Africans. Across the continent, young Africans are rediscovering the weight and value in the languages their ancestors spoke, reviving traditional art forms, and asserting cultural sovereignty in digital spaces. This cultural renaissance is in itself a form of reparative justice. It restores continuity between past and present, ensuring that future generations inherit not a fractured history but a coherent

and proud identity. Language, lies at the heart of this reclamation. Every African language embodies a worldview, a way of knowing and relating to the universe. The revitalisation of African languages, their inclusion in education, governance, and technology, is both symbolic and practical reparation. To speak one's mother tongue without apology is to affirm existence. To hear African languages in parliaments, in literature, in AI systems, is to witness justice in motion.

Narrative justice goes hand in hand with visual justice and reparations take on a new meaning when we consider that visually, Africa's true size has been misrepresented for centuries on global maps. The calls to correct Africa's true size in global maps #CorrectTheMap are a form of Reparations for a geography and history that is rooted in a colonial legacy that has been entrenched in everyday knowledge systems including sadly in Africa's education curricula.

At its core, the reparations movement is about healing. It seeks to mend the torn fabric of humanity. This healing requires more than monetary transfer; it requires moral imagination. It demands that societies which benefited from African exploitation confront uncomfortable truths and engage in genuine acts of repair. It also demands that Africa herself unites around a shared vision of restitution — one that transcends borders and ethnic lines, recognising that our collective liberation is interlinked.

The African diaspora, too, plays a central role. People of African descent across the Americas, Europe, and the Caribbean continue to bear the psychological and social burdens of racial injustice. The institutional linkages established

between the AU and CARICOM aim to bridge continents, creating a global network of solidarity, research, and advocacy. The proposed African Reparations Fund and Pan-African Reparations Framework can serve as vehicles for this transnational collaboration — grounding moral claims in actionable policy.

We must not err in thinking of Reparations as an issue that addresses the past only and as such solely backward-looking; rather Reparations are also profoundly future-oriented asking what kind of world do we wish to build from the ruins of injustice? A world that continues to privilege some at the expense of others? Or one that restores balance, equity, and mutual respect?

As we endeavour to achieve the #TheAfricaWeWant, the conversation about Reparations must be woven into Africa’s development agenda. Investment in youth, innovation, education, and cultural industries are themselves forms of reparative justice. They transform historical grievance into creative power. Moreover, reparations challenge the global community to confront the moral contradictions of our age: the persistence of inequality amid plenty, the silencing of the past amid calls for progress. Justice for Africans and people of African descent is inseparable from the quest for justice for all humanity. When the descendants of the enslaved and colonised are restored to full dignity, the human story itself is repaired.

Reparations is more than a theme — it is an act of moral leadership. It signals that Africa will no longer negotiate the terms of her dignity. It calls upon states, institutions, and individuals to participate in the great project of restoration.

Reparations are not just about one dedicated year, or a commemoration, I see it as a movement that bridges past and present, Africa and her diaspora, memory and imagination. The task before us is immense - to transform the pain of history into a foundation for justice, and the scars of oppression into symbols of resilience and ensure that the call for reparations moves from the moral margins to the centre of global conscience — when the world finally recognises that justice for Africa is justice for all. ■



**2025**  
**YEAR OF**  
**REPARATIONS:**

**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

**Slaves were not taken  
out of Africa.**

**People were taken out  
of Africa and made into  
slaves**



# New Leadership elected for the African Union Commission

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Since the launch of the African Union in 2002, there have been six (6) elections undertaken to elect members of the African Union Commission. The first Commission served from 2003 to 2008 and the current sixth Commission elected in 2025 will serve for a four year term from 2025-2029 (renewable once)

In November 2018, as part of Institutional Reforms of the African Union, the Assembly decided that, from 2021, the AU Commission (AUC) would be composed of eight members – the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and 6 Commissioners (reduced and merged from 8 commissioners).

In addition to the reduction in the number of elected senior officials, it was decided that in line with the Institutional Reforms, the election process would be enhanced to promote transparency and meritocracy in the selection process of AUC leadership by applying principles of:- equitable regional representation, gender parity, predictable rotation, attracting and retaining Africa's top talent, accountable and effective leadership and management, and transparent and merit-based selection.

For all the 8 positions, regions are expected to submit both male and female candidates. In addition to providing detailed curriculum vitae, along with their vision statements outlining how candidates vying for elections will address the most pressing issues facing the African Union and the continent in order to deliver Africa's development Agenda 2063; all candidates for the position of the Chairperson of the AUC are required to participate in a televised debate that is broadcast live to all African citizens in which they present their visions and ideas on delivering the mandates of the AU and the implementation of Agenda 2063.

In line with the principles of equitable rotation for the 2025 elections, the Eastern region contested for the role of Chairperson and the Northern region contest for the role of Deputy Chairperson. The regions from which the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson are to be appointed, are not eligible for consideration for the 6 remaining Commissioner posts as a mechanism for equitable representation and to avoid concentration of power. Central, Southern and Western regions therefore contested for the 6 portfolios of Commissioners.

The African Union Commission elections are conducted by secret ballot. The Assembly of Heads of State and Government elects the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, whereas the Executive Council elects the Commissioners, who are thereafter appointed by the Assembly.

The eight members charged with leading the African Union Commission, which is the secretariat to the African Union, were elected during the 38th Ordinary Session of the African Union in February 2025 (6 officials) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and the 7th Mid-Year Coordination Meeting in July 2025 (2 officials) held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The elected officials will serve for a term of four years from 2025 to 2029,

**THE 8 OFFICIALS  
ELECTED ARE:**

**Chairperson;**

H.E. Mahmoud  
Ali Youssouf  
*(Djibouti - Eastern Region)*

**Deputy Chairperson**

H.E. Selma  
Malika Haddadi  
*(Algeria - Northern Region),*

**COMMISSIONERS**

**Political Affairs, Peace and  
Security Department (PAPS) H.E.**

Amb. Bankole Adeoye *(Nigeria  
- Western Region)* / (re-elected)

**Health, Humanitarian Affairs,  
and Social Development  
Department (HHS) H.E. Amb.**

Amma Twum-Amoah *(Ghana-  
Western Region)*

**Infrastructure and Energy  
Department (IED)**

H.E. Ms. Lerato Mataboge  
*(South Africa- Southern Region)*

**Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Blue Economy and Sustainable  
Environment Department  
(ARBE)**

H.E. Mr. Moses Vilakati  
*(Eswatini, Southern Region)*

**Economic Development, Trade,  
Tourism, Industry, and Minerals  
Department (ETTİM)**

H.E. Francisca Tatchouop Belobe  
*(Equatorial Guinea, Central Region)*

**Education, Science, Technology,  
and Innovation Department  
(ESTI)**

H.E. Professor Gaspard  
Banyankimbona  
*(Burundi, Central Region)*



**CHAIRPERSON:**

**H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf** *(Djibouti - Eastern Region)*

has extensive diplomatic experience. He served as Djibouti's Foreign Affairs Minister since 2005 and previously held roles such as Ambassador to Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. He also chaired the Council of Ministers of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The Chairperson holds a Master's degree in Management from the University of Laval, Canada. *Read his full CV on [https://au.int/en/AUC\\_Elections\\_2025\\_Candidates](https://au.int/en/AUC_Elections_2025_Candidates)*

The Chairperson is at the helm of guiding the delivery of the vision and mandates of the African Union and Africa's Agenda 2063 anchored on the Institutional Reforms. The Chairperson is the Chief Executive Officer, Legal representative of the African Union and the Chief Accounting Officer of the African Union Commission.

**VISION STATEMENT**

***"A Vision for Africa's Radiant Future"***

I present to you my ambitious vision for Africa. This vision aims to make Africa an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent! guided by the values of diversity, gender equality, transparency and integrity inspired by Agenda 2063 and its second ten-year plan. I am committed to pursuing institutional reforms to achieve our common goals. My leadership will focus on governance, democracy, peace, security, economic and social development, infrastructure, the environment, youth, gender equality, the African diaspora and Africa's position on the international stage.

**Responsible Leadership**

I pledge to provide clear and determined leadership to advance the mission of the AU. I will advocate for a collaborative and inclusive approach, celebrating diversity, merit and skills. Promoting a culture of accountability and

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Candidates](https://au.int/en/AUC_Elections_2025_Candidates)



transparency will be essential. I will ensure compliance with financial and regulatory rules, along with rigorous accountability for our activities. Effective and accountable governance is key to strengthening our institutional foundations.

**Governance and Democracy**

Promoting democracy and condemning any unconstitutional change of power are of paramount importance. I am committed to defending democratic institutions and ensuring fair and transparent governance. Respecting democratic procedures and promoting citizens' fundamental rights are crucial to the stability and legitimacy of African governments.

**Institutional Capacity Building**

Strengthening the AU's institutional capacity is fundamental to realising our continental aspirations. It is essential to modernise internal processes and invest in skills development to



ensure optimal functioning. Collaboration, with Member States and international partners is essential. Transparency and accountability will be at the core of our efforts, with rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the responsible use of resources.

**Promoting Peace and Security**

Peace and security are essential for Africa's sustainable development. Inspired by the programme to silence the guns by 2030, I pledge to step up our actions to prevent conflict and promote stability. Drawing on my diplomatic experience, I will strengthen mediation and arbitration mechanisms and address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and inequality. Working with Member States, regional and international organisations,

and civil society will be crucial to building a peaceful future.

**Economic and Social Development**

I acknowledge the progress made in the fields of health, education, and technology, but challenges remain. I am committed to strengthening the ties between the Commission and the Regional Economic Communities to promote economic and social development. I will invest in robust health systems, nutrition programmes, and education at all levels, focusing particularly on technical skills and innovation. Promoting scientific research and innovation will be essential to solving continental challenges.

**Infrastructure Development**

I am committed to pursuing strategic projects such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and infrastructure development, such as the integrative railway and the DINGA hydroelectric dam. Collaboration with the private sector will be essential to mobilise the necessary resources. My aim is to stimulate economic growth through the transport market and electrification.

**Environmental Challenges**

In the face of environmental and climate challenges, it is crucial to promote policies that facilitate a transition to a green economy. I will support investments in renewable energy, the protection of ecosystems, and sustainable agriculture. Regional and international cooperation will be strengthened to mobilise the necessary financial and technological resources. Protecting the environment and combating climate change will be at the heart of our continental agenda.

**Commitment to Youth, Employment, Gender Equality, and the African Diaspora**

Africa's youth is the future of our continent. I pledge to support African education, employment and entrepreneurship policies to unlock their full potential. The fight against unemployment will be a priority, with policies that encourage job creation and support local entrepreneurship. I will champion gender equality by ensuring equal access to education, health, employment, and political participation for women. The African diaspora is a precious resource for Africa's development. I will work hard to strengthen its role on the continent.

**Promoting Africa on the International Stage**

I pledge to defend Africa's fair representation in international institutions and to strengthen its role in global forums. Africa must assert itself as an influential player in global policy discussions, advancing its economic and developmental interests.

**CONCLUSION**

I am convinced that we can turn this vision into reality, making Africa a beacon of hope and progress. Together, we can overcome challenges and build a better future for all Africans, placing our continent at the centre of global transformation. Let us unite for a future where every African citizen achieves their full potential in an environment of peace, prosperity, and dignity.



**DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON:**

**H.E. Selma Malika Haddadi**  
*(Algeria - Northern Region),*

is a seasoned diplomat and legal expert. She has served as Algeria's Ambassador to Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan, and held various roles in her country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. H.E. Haddadi is a sworn lawyer and member of the Algiers Bar Association, with master's degrees in Private Law from the Peace and Development Law Institute, Law School, Nice- Sophia Antipolis University, and Private International Law from the Law School, Nantes University. Her extensive experience spans diplomacy, law, and international relations.

The Deputy Chairperson assists the Chairperson in the execution of their functions for the smooth running of the AU Commission. The Deputy Chairperson is in charge of administration and finance and acts as the Chairperson in their absence.

**VISION STATEMENT**

***Bringing in new energy and healthier management to the African Union Commission to unleash the potential of "The Africa We Want"***

This vision is not merely a statement. It is deeply rooted in my dedication to Africa and my loyalty and commitment to our Organization. It will guide and shape every action and decision during my tenure. It emphasizes the importance of fresh and innovative energy in unlocking the vast potential of the continent, through the best use of its human capital and resources, as part of providing African solutions

to African problems.

While refocusing on the principles and objectives set by the Founding Fathers of the OAU-AU, and under the guidance of the AUC Chairperson, I am determined, together with the new Commission and the Member States, to leverage new ideas to overcome current and new challenges and seize every possible opportunity to boost collaborative endeavors towards driving the transformative vision of Agenda 2063.

In this respect, lessons learnt from previous experiences, including those related to the implementation of the Institutional Reform, will be duly taken into account.

My pledge is to strengthen the AU's administrative and financial management, bringing about a culture of efficiency, transparency, and accountability at all levels, to enhance effectively its performance.

I also pledge to foster unity and solidarity for greater and impactful Global Influence of Africa, especially at this challenging time for our Continent. I will therefore uphold the principles of Pan Africanism and African unity while sticking to the scrupulous mainstreaming of African Common Positions and Policy Organs decisions in all relevant aspects of my mission. This will help amplifying Africa's voice and leadership in international fora, including the G20.

Therefore, building a high-profile secretariat capable of efficiently supporting its Member States constitutes a priority.

**Three main objectives** will be at the core of my vision, within the framework of my statutory missions and responsibilities:

**1. Enhancing AUC Administrative and Financial Management:**

- a. My goal is to foster efficiency, strengthen institutional capacity, and promote organizational excellence to ensure a cost-effective Implementation of policies, programs, and projects that support Agenda 2063. By embracing the recently

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established results-based management system, I will endeavor to empower the AUC with the necessary skills and expertise, strengthen cohesion and teamwork, while further anchoring values such as Pan-Africanism, transparency, accountability, integrity, ethics, and fairness.

Investing in our human capital is vital for building a capable, resilient, and performance-oriented AUC. An adequately equipped AUC will proactively implement AU policy decisions and address Member States' needs and expectations while optimizing available resources.

I will ensure the efficient and transparent implementation of the newly approved Staff Regulations and Rules and Merit-Based Recruitment System, to attract and retain highly skilled African professionals from the Continent and the Diaspora, with the required attention to women and youth competencies, to drive the Union's Agenda. I will foster a culture of continuous learning and address challenges and irregularities in recruitment. If necessary, corrective measures will be taken, while abiding by the quota system and gender parity.

Improving administrative processes is equally crucial for fulfilling the AUC's mandate. I will therefore prioritize enhancing coordination, communication, and streamlining of workflows, planning, and execution to bolster the Commission's operational agility and responsiveness, ensuring seamless coordination across departments. Required action to ensure IT-Security will also be taken.

- b. I am committed to ensuring that AUC resources are managed efficiently, transparently, and in line with AU rules and international standards. My leadership will focus on maximizing resource utilization and optimal budget execution while minimizing waste and inefficiency. I will lend special attention to addressing financial irregularities and ensuring sustainable funding with the overall objective of minimizing dependency on External Funding.

Under the guidance of Member States and the AUC Chairperson, I will explore innovative revenue streams while maintaining transparency and accountability. I will encourage effective strategic planning for achieving Agenda 2063's aspirations, backed by budget proposals aligned with Africa's priorities, thus strengthening the role of the Commission as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation and regional integration.

## **2. Strengthening trust and synergy between the Commission and AU Member States**

To enhance and nurture trust between the AUC and Member States, I pledge to focus on transparent and seamless communication and collaboration within the Commission and with the Permanent Representatives Committee. I will assist the AUC Chairperson in ensuring effective implementation of AU Policy Organs decisions, while seeking their guidance on challenges encountered in the process.

I will ensure that all administrative decisions and financial transactions adhere to regulatory and ethical guidelines. To mitigate risks of mismanagement and corruption, I will setup robust monitoring mechanisms and I will implement audit recommendations. This proactive approach will safeguard the Commission's reputation, reinforce our commitment to transparent governance, and enhance Member States' confidence and trust.

## **3. Optimizing coordination within the AU organs and structures and cooperation with partners**

Optimizing coordination with AU organs and structures, on the one hand, and with partners on the other hand, is instrumental for addressing Africa's challenges and achieving peace, stability, integration, and prosperity. Leveraging the contributions of all stakeholders, including AU institutions, APRM, PAP, RECs/MRs and partners, is key in this respect.

Once finalized and adopted by Member States, the Reform recommendations will guide my actions in enhancing collaboration. The ultimate objective will be to bring about more synergy and better hierarchical relationships between the AUC and its external offices and avoid duplication of efforts to prevent resource wastage.

With partners, my aim will be to rebalance the relationship by allocating their contributions to financing programs decided upon by the AU, in line with its strategic priorities, thus directly supporting the realization of the 2nd Ten-Year Plan of Agenda 2063. Effective monitoring mechanisms will be put in place to this effect.

To reach the objective of taking ownership, by the AU, of its programs and aspirations as set out by its Founding Fathers and spelt out in Agenda 2063, I will promote the prioritization, revitalization and strengthening of partnerships with African development entities and institutions, such as the AfDB, Afreximbank, AUDA-NEPAD, Africa-CDC etc. as primary providers of development projects and funds.

**AUC COMMISSIONERS**

To coordinate continental integration through effective division of labor and enhanced mission convergence, I will focus on implementing AU Policy Organs' decisions on the alignment of the work of the AU, RECs/RMs, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, complementarity and comparative advantages.

I will support the finalization of the second phase of the division of labor process and the consolidation of the achievements of the first phase, while ensuring that the primary "raison d'etre" of the Mid-Year Coordination Summit to maintain constant communication between AUC, RECs/RMs is preserved for a meaningful decision-making process.

In conclusion, my vision and leadership as AUC-DCP will be rooted in loyalty to the Organization, integrity, competence and relentless commitment to administrative and financial excellence.

**COMMISSIONER****Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department (PAPS)**

**H.E. Amb. Bankole Adeoye** (*Nigeria- Western Region*), was re-elected as the Commissioner for the Department Political Affairs, Peace and Security. A seasoned diplomat, he previously served as Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the AU and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and Ambassador to Ethiopia and Djibouti. Commissioner Adeoye has also held key roles at the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) and in Nigeria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He holds a Master's degree in Political Science from the University of Lagos and a Postgraduate Certificate in Diplomatic Studies from the University of Oxford.

The work of PAPS is centred on delivering the Agenda 2063 aspirations which envision "an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law," (Aspiration 3) and "a peaceful and secure Africa" (Aspiration 4). PAPS leads the implementation of the Agenda 2063 flagship project to Silence the Guns in Africa and promoting the implementation of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

PAPS works in close collaboration with Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) towards the prevention, resolution and management of conflict and disruptive crises and promoting good governance, peace and stability, democracy and human rights as a foundation for inclusion, security and the development. The Department oversees the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACRST), African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL), the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCONe) and African Union Centre for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (AU-PCRD Centre).



**COMMISSIONER**  
**Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue**  
**Economy and Sustainable Environment**  
**Department (ARBE)**

**H.E. Mr. Moses Vilakati** (*Eswatini, Southern Region*) held various ministerial roles in Eswatini before his appointment. He served as Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs (2018-2023), and Minister of Agriculture (2013-2018). Previously, he served as the Project Director at the Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise, the Agribusiness Project Manager at the Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (EWADE), and Project Director and Lecturer at the University of Eswatini (UNESWA). He has a Master of Science (MSc) degree in Agriculture (International Development) from the California Polytechnic State University.

The mandate of ARBE is to initiate, develop and promote continental policies, frameworks and programmes that will contribute to agricultural transformation, rural development, development of Africa's blue economy and the sustainable management of the environment. The Department oversees the work of various AU technical offices: including the AU Inter-African Phytosanitary Council (IAPSC); AU-Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR); the Pan African Veterinary Vaccine Centre (PANVAC); the Pan African Tsetse and Trypanosomiasis Eradication Campaign (PATTEC); and Semi-Arid Food Grain Research and Development (SAFGRAD).



**COMMISSIONER**  
**Infrastructure and Energy Department (IED)**

**H.E. Ms. Lerato Mataboge** (*South Africa, Southern Region*), is a global policy and trade expert. She served as Deputy Director-General in South Africa's Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, and was the Chief Executive Officer of Trade Invest Africa. Ms Mataboge has extensive experience in trade, investment, and infrastructure development, including leading South Africa's engagements in BRICS, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). She holds a Master's degree in International Political Economy (International Trade and Global Finance) from the University of Warwick, UK.

IED coordinates and oversees the delivery of Africa's continental objectives related to the development of air, maritime, rail and road transport, information communications technology (ICT) and the energy sector infrastructure including facilitating private sector engagement on infrastructure development. The Department coordinates and supports policy implementation of Agenda 2063 flagship programmes and continental initiatives such as the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), cyber security, Pan-Africa e-network, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), Africa Renewable Energy Strategy, and the Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa. It works with specialised agencies including the AU's Africa Energy Commission (AFREC).



**COMMISSIONER**  
**Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development Department (HHS)**

**H.E. Ambassador Amma Twum-Amoah** a seasoned diplomat whose extensive experience spans diplomacy, international relations, and development, served as Ghana's Ambassador to several countries, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Ambassador Twum-Amoah held various roles in Ghana's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including Director of Economic, Trade, and Investment, and served in diplomatic missions in Washington, D.C., Canberra, and Geneva. She holds an MBA from the University of Canberra, Australia.

HHS has a wide portfolio across multiple sectors spearheading continental policies and programmes in the areas of sports, health and nutrition, humanitarian action, migration, labour and employment, social welfare, drug control, children's rights and culture. HHS coordinates its work with several AU institutions including the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN); the Centre for Linguistic and Historical Studies by Oral Tradition (CELHTO); the African Institute for Remittances (AIR); the African Migration Centres, the AU Sports Council and the African Audiovisual and Cinema Commission (AACC). HHS works closely with the AU's African Medicines Agency and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) to promote Africa' public health sector and implementation of the Pharmaceutical Plan for Africa.



**COMMISSIONER**  
**Economic Development, Trade, Tourism, Industry, and Minerals Department (ETTIM)**

**H.E. Francisca Tatchouop Belobe**, previously served as the Vice-President of the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). She served as Second Vice-President of Equatorial Guinea's National Assembly (2013–2020) and Minister and Deputy Minister of Economy, Trade, and Promotion of Small to Medium Enterprises. She holds a Master's degree in Political Science from the Johan Wolfgang von Goethe Universitat.

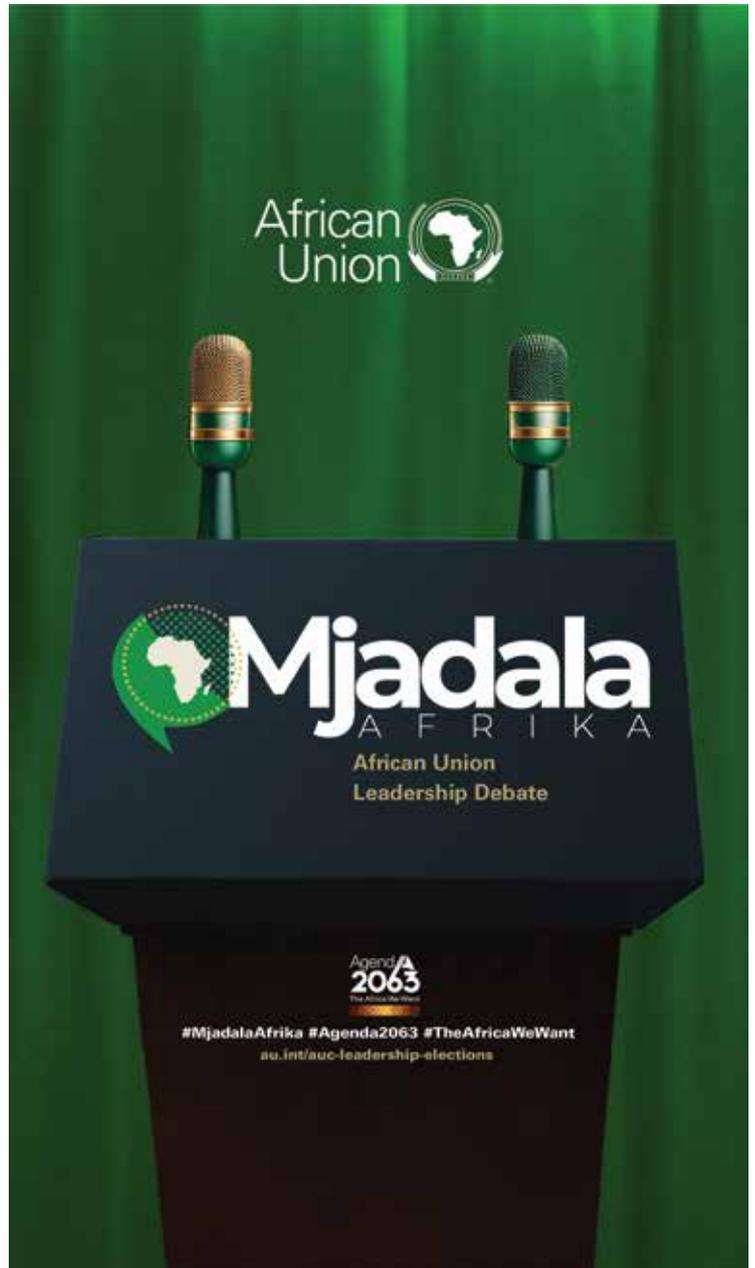
ETTIM leads the policy development and implementing of the AU's economic development and trade integration agenda and supporting the implementation of continental frameworks under Agenda 2063 such as the African Commodities Strategy, the African Economic Platform, the African Mining Vision, establishment of the AU Financial Institutions, and supporting the operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). ETTIM works various AU institutions to promote Africa's economic integration and development agenda including the AfCFTA Secretariat, the African Union Institute for Statistics (STATAFRIC) and the African Minerals Development Centre (AMDC)



**COMMISSIONER**  
**Education, Science, Technology, and**  
**Innovation Department (ESTI)**

**H.E. Professor Gaspard Banyankimbona** (Burundi, Central Region) has served as Executive Director of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA). Prior to that, he was Minister of National Education and Scientific Research in Burundi as well as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Burundi. He holds a PhD in Sciences from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium, and a Master's degree in Aquaculture and holds an undergraduate degree in biology.

ESTI spearheads the development of quality, relevant and harmonised education systems that respond to the social and human development needs of Africa; promoting and building capabilities of the continent on space, science, technology and innovation. The department coordinates the Agenda 2063 continental Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa and key flagship projects on the Pan African Virtual and e-University (PAVeU), and the Africa Outer Space Strategy and has oversight over several AU institutions including the Pan African University (PAU), the Scientific, Technical and Research Commission (STRC); the African Observatory of Science, Technology and Innovation (AOSTI); the International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA); and the Pan African Institute for Education for Development (IPED)/African Observatory for Education



Catch a recap of the Mjadala: AU Leadership Debate at [youtube.com/watch?v=7j\\_5yPB8frY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7j_5yPB8frY)





**2025**  
**YEAR OF**  
**REPARATIONS:**

**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

**A lot of people think they are equipped to have this conversation, they are not.....If we're going to have this fight, folks must educate themselves on the history.**

**You can oppose reparations all you want, but you got to know the facts**

**TA-NEHISI  
COATES**

# Justice for Africans and Peoples of African Descent, means Justice for the World and Humanity

By **Amb. Amr Aljowaily**

Director, Citizens and Diaspora Directorate, African Union Commission  
AljowailyA@africanunion.org

It is not coincidence that this article is in AU Echo. The call for Justice and Reparations for Africans and Peoples of African Descent must indeed echo around the world. This issue represents a loud and clear voice that our magazine has always represented.

As the sun rises on midyear through 2025, it illuminates this year's theme for our African Union, "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations.". Its radiant rays are not merely a reflection on past wounds, but a clarion call to action, a comprehensive blueprint for healing, growth, and sustainable development. The powerful message, conveyed by our Assembly in its decision 884 of February 2024 that designated the Theme of the Year for 2025, is a testament to our unwavering commitment for healing and accountability. It acknowledges the echoes of historical injustices – the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and apartheid to understand the foundations of present-day challenges. These events have undeniably shaped our societies, leaving a legacy of economic disparity and systemic inequality, including the plundering of natural resources. Our focus now is on the light of tomorrow.

While the African Union has consistently championed the cause of reparatory justice as a crucial step towards leveling the playing field and fostering equitable



**Amb. Amr Aljowaily, Director, Citizens and Diaspora Directorate, AUC**

**Reparations are not only about uncovering the past; they are about recognizing the persistent challenges we face: the crushing burden of debt relief, the bleeding wound of illicit financial flows, and the devastating impact of climate change, resulting in loss and damage; It extends to safeguarding our cultural heritage, ensuring the restitution of stolen artifacts and the preservation of our rich traditions, as we build a future rooted in strength and self-determination.**



development, I wish to recall the more recent inspiration from the powerful echoes of the Accra International Conference on Reparations, held in November 2023, which laid the groundwork for much of our current agenda. The Accra Proclamation on Reparations, as a multi-stakeholder outcome, which I had the honour to pronounce verbally at the conclusion of the conference, charted, in many ways, our journey towards a more equitable future. It has paved the way for vital initiatives and mechanisms, later endorsed by the Assembly, that will underpin the African continental and global movement for reparations. These include a Committee of Experts on Reparations, tasked with developing an African Common Position on Reparations and incorporating an African Reparatory Programme of Action, a Reference Group of Legal Experts to provide crucial legal advice, and a Global Reparations Fund, based in Africa, to advance the African Union's campaign on reparations. To achieve this, we are mandated to forge a Transcontinental Partnership Framework embracing the AU, CARICOM, and the African Diaspora in Latin America, North America, Europe, UK, and elsewhere in the world. This monumental grouping is designed to create a strong common front in pursuit of reparations and reparatory justice at the

global level. This collaborative spirit, exemplified by the call for an African Caribbean Joint Mechanism on Reparative Justice, underscores our commitment to a truly global movement.

Reparations are not only about uncovering the past; they are about recognizing the persistent challenges we face: the crushing burden of debt relief, the bleeding wound of illicit financial flows, and the devastating impact of climate change, resulting in loss and damage; in order to invest in our future, empowering communities, and fostering sustainable socio-economic development across Africa and the African Diaspora. Our mission also extends to safeguarding our cultural heritage, ensuring the restitution of stolen artifacts and the preservation of our rich traditions, as we build a future rooted in strength and self-determination. This initiative underlines the crucial importance of recognizing the need to safeguard the continent's culture, heritage and dignity, buttressing it through major continental cultural instruments including the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance of 2006, the AU Model Law on the Protection of Cultural Property and Heritage of 2022 and the African Union Common Position on Restitution of Heritage Resources of 2023.

A particularly poignant moment in our journey, and a testament to our shared vision, is the approval by our Assembly of the institution of an African Day to pay tribute to African martyrs and victims of the transatlantic slave trade, colonization, and apartheid, including through hosting an International Conference on the Crimes of Colonialism, a vital forum for dialogue, truth, and the development of forward-thinking solutions. The African Day and the International Conference will form a collective promise that the sacrifices will never be forgotten, and a powerful symbol of our commitment to a brighter future.

Our success will be a testament to collaboration and unity. We should work closely to implement the Assembly mandated tasks and outcomes. This should be a forward-looking strategy, guiding us towards concrete action and effective implementation. We commit ourselves to become a sturdy pillar in this grand edifice of justice, to allocate the necessary funds as a sacred duty, not merely an option, for the effective implementation of the activities specified therein. Let the theme of 2025 inspire this solidarity and carry it further.

Our quest for reparatory justice is mainly about building a future where every African and person of African descent can reach their full potential. It is about embracing our shared heritage, celebrating our resilience, and working together to create a world where justice and opportunity prevail. That is why we seek to address the lasting consequences of historical injustices, such as inequities in the global economic and political systems. Our goal is to create a future where every African and person of African descent has the opportunity to thrive, free from the burdens of the past. This requires fundamental reforms, including the global financial and trade architectures, and striving for a more equitable United Nations Security Council. Our call is loud and clear continuously endorsed at the whole continental scale and at the highest level of Heads of State and Government.

We proudly stand as the only continent at the global scale to have achieved that level of unity, and whose support worldwide is expanding by the day.

Through the African Union 2025 Theme of the Year, let our collective voice inspire hope, drive progress, and build a future where the brilliance of Africa and her diaspora shines brightly, for generations to come. We are confident that by working together, with a clear vision and unwavering commitment, we will achieve true justice and build a future of prosperity for all. The value of our Theme of the Year extends well beyond our dear continent. It stands for the value of justice in humanity. Justice for Africans and Peoples of African Descent means Justice for the World and Humanity!



**2025**  
**YEAR OF**  
**REPARATIONS:**

**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

**In order to know where  
you're going you must  
know where you've come  
from. Even if it's in your face  
or hard to swallow, people  
need to know the true  
history in order to move  
forward**

**ALICE  
PEPPER**

# Accra Proclamation on Reparations



The International Conference on Building a United Front to Advance the Cause of Justice and Reparations to Africans (**Accra Reparations Conference**) was held from 14 to 17 November 2023, and attended by delegates from Africa and the African Diaspora, including the Caribbean, Latin America, USA, Europe and the United Kingdom.

The Accra Reparations Conference was convened under a shared commitment to address historical injustices and injurious crimes committed against Africans and people of African descent, through transatlantic enslavement,

colonialism and apartheid, and to address the inequities present in the international economic and political orders, and to call for reparatory justice and healing represented in the mobilisation and advocacy for reparations.

The Conference affirmed that the fulfilment of reparations is a moral as well as a legal imperative rooted in principles of justice, human rights and human dignity, and that the claim for reparations represents a concrete step towards remedying historical wrongs and fostering healing among the people of Africa and people of African descent.



Artifacts returned from UCLA's Fowler Museum are carried to Asante King Otumfuo Osei Tutu II at the Manhyia Palace in Kumasi, Ghana. © AP Photo/Misper Apawu

**THE ACCRA REPARATIONS CONFERENCE RESULTED IN THE FOLLOWING COMMITMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**1. Establishment by the African Union Commission (AUC) of a Committee of Experts on Reparations for the purpose of developing a Common African Policy on Reparations and incorporating therein, an African Reparatory Programme of Action:**

to serve as a principal point of reference for the African Union (AU) on matters relating to reparations and healing; to solicit, nurture and promote reparatory justice knowledge between the AU, Member States and the global African community; and to support the mandate of an AU Special Envoy on Reparations for Africa, amongst other tasks which may be assigned and determined by the African Union.

**2. Establishment of a Global Reparations Fund,** based in Africa and supported by multilateral institutions and agencies aligned with the reparatory justice agenda. The Fund will complement the efforts of similar initiatives in and outside the Continent, while operating as an autonomous entity geared towards ensuring the judicious utilisation of a pool of resources to advance the campaign for reparations

**3. Establishment of the Office of AU Special Envoy on Reparations for Africans,** to help champion the international advocacy and campaign for reparations at the global level and reinforce the work of the Committee of Experts on Reparations and Healing.

**4. Recognition of African civil society efforts on reparations:** Engaging and collaborating with African peoples through civil society actors, and expanding engagement with the African Diaspora community through State and non-state institutions including supporting relevant African networks, coalitions and initiatives that foster synergy and cooperation between and among the relevant actors of the reparatory justice movement.

**5. Creation of a transcontinental partnership framework between the AU, CARICOM Latin American States, and the African diaspora in Europe and all other regions in the world, including, where appropriate, relevant CSOs** to enhance

Global South cooperation through stronger collaboration between the African Union (AU) and inter-governmental entities in the Global South with significant African and people of African descent. The framework will support efforts to enhance transcontinental messaging around reparations, including emphasising reparations as an integral pillar for the achievement of sustainable development.

**6. Exploration of legal and judicial options for reparations:** Determine the question of how international law interacts with or supports the quest for reparations, including the potential for exploring litigation options in regional and international court systems. This effort will require engagement on the legal merits of the call for reparations, including the question of whether acts of enslavement, colonialism and apartheid against Africans, constitute grave violations of human rights at the time they were committed.

**7. Increased role for the United Nations:** especially the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, to convene, in close coordination with the African Union Commission, an International Conference, involving former colonial powers, on the issue of reparations as well as to extend the Decade for People of African Descent, for acknowledgement and healing with regard to the Trans-Atlantic enslavement, colonialism, and apartheid.

**8. Establishment of a Legal Reference Group,** in close coordination with the African Union Commission, to be set up to support the AU Committee of Experts and the AU Special Envoy, through the provision of legal advice on the question of reparations, including best practice on the law, practice and litigation of the reparation's agenda.

**9. Amplification of marginalised voices in the reparatory justice movement.**

Contemporary forms of discrimination, especially against women and young people, stem from long-standing discriminatory and non-representative policies rooted in colonialism, apartheid and neo-colonialism, which have further strained the overall development of former colonised countries in the Global South and as such political discussions on reparations must be accompanied by actions that demonstrate genuine socio-political equality through fair representation of marginalised voices.

**10. A united front for the reform of global financial systems and structures:**

**Achieving** a new global financial pact that is reparatory in nature and economically equitable in scope and practice. Member States of the AU, CARICOM and other developing and Least Developed Countries that have been adversely impacted by trans-Atlantic enslavement, colonialism, apartheid and other forms of extractivism, were urged to support the advocacy campaigns for the reform of the global financial infrastructure such as those undertaken by the Government of Ghana and similar efforts, including the Bridgetown Initiative championed by the Republic of Barbados, to pursue joint reparatory efforts within the global multilateral system.

**11. Increased and active role for AU organs Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in the reparations campaign:**

**Undertaking** concrete measures that would promote and sustain linkages between the AU organs, the RECs and Civil Society, including through the use of ICT, the arts and culture industries to advance reparatory justice and healing.

**12. Climate justice and reparatory justice:**

Victims of Trans-Atlantic enslavement and colonialism have also been exposed to the dangers of climate change, including the impact of environmental damage caused by the exploitative forces of colonialism and through the forced relocation of enslaved African labour to other regions and must be supported in their efforts to seek compensation for the people of African

descent suffering from those effects.

**13. Repatriation, restitution and safeguarding of African cultural artifacts:**

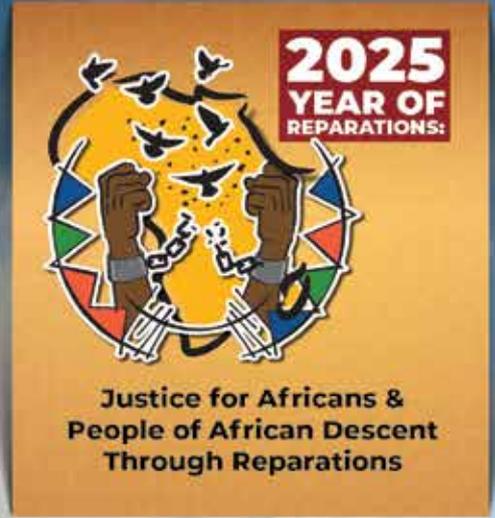
Developing a strong Common African Position on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage and producing a Framework for Action on the Negotiations for the Return/Restitution of illicitly trafficked cultural property from the Continent in accordance with the Continental Consultations on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage held from 30 November to 2 December 2021. African experts should endeavour to establish networks of African cultural experts, policymakers, certified dealers and auctioneers, and museum curators, among others, working in combatting illicit trafficking in cultural property and heritage. As the African Union Agenda 2063 underscored, Africa's stolen culture, heritage and artifacts should be fully repatriated and safeguarded.

**14. Neo-colonialism:** African States are still facing the repercussions of trans-Atlantic enslavement, colonialism, and apartheid through the persistence of neo-colonialism and dependency on former colonial powers and call for immediate, just and comprehensive reforms of the prevailing architecture of multilateral institutions by fully realising related African Common Positions. Particularly in regard to the composition and working methods of the United Nations Security Council, and the Bretton Woods Institutions, as well as ensuring an equitable and just international system through concrete measures including, but not limited to, special and differential treatment, common but differentiated responsibility and mechanisms for loss and damage, debt relief, curbing illicit financial flows and return of African cultural artifacts.

**15. Regular holding of the International Conference on Reparations** alongside other relevant mechanisms for dialogue relating to specific aspects of reparations to sustain the momentum. ■

Scan to Read the full declaration of the Accra Conference on Reparations

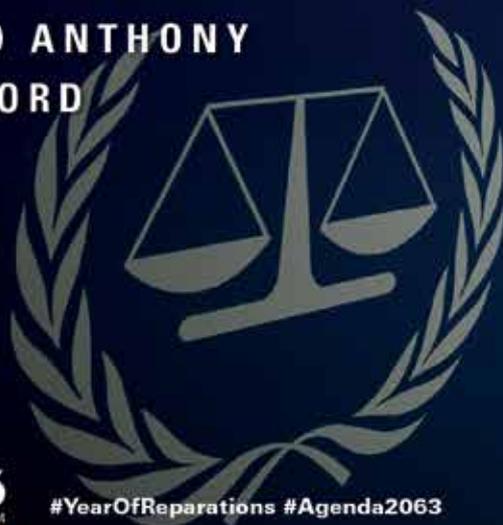




The enslavement of Africans was a crime against humanity. International law recognises that those who commit crimes against humanity must make reparation.

There is no legal barrier to prevent those who still suffer the consequences of crimes against humanity from claiming reparations, even though the crimes were committed against their ancestors

LORD ANTHONY  
GIFFORD



Cour  
Pénale  
Internationale  
International  
Criminal  
Court

# CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice #IAMCARICOM

caricom.org

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is a grouping of twenty-one countries: fifteen Member States and six Associate Members. CARICOM came into being on 4 July 1973 with the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas by Prime Ministers Errol Barrow for Barbados, Forbes Burnham for Guyana, Michael Manley for Jamaica and Eric Williams for Trinidad and Tobago. The Treaty was later revised in 2002 to allow for the eventual establishment of a single market and a single economy. **Dr. Carla Natalie Barnett**, from Belize is the current Secretary-General CARICOM appointed on 15 August 2021, by the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM.

The Headquarters and seat of the CARICOM Secretariat is located in Turkeyen Georgetown, Guyana.

**The work of CARICOM is anchored on four main pillars: Economic Integration; Foreign policy Coordination; Human and Social development; and Security.**

Through the implementation of its mandates CARICOM aims to create a community that is integrated, inclusive and resilient; driven by knowledge, excellence, innovation and productivity; a Community where every citizen is secure and has the opportunity to realise his or her potential with guaranteed human rights and social justice; and contributes to, and shares in, its economic, social and cultural prosperity ; a Community which is a unified and competitive force in the global arena..

#### **The Caricom Reparations Commission**

In 2013, CARICOM Heads of Government established the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) to address the historical injustices and ongoing impacts of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean. Its mandate includes to prepare the case for reparatory justice for the Region's indigenous and African descendant communities who are victims of Crimes against Humanity in the forms of genocide, slavery, slave trading and racial apartheid.

## CARICOM Members

### Member States 15

**Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago.**

### Associate Members 6

**Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Turks and Caicos Islands.**



**THE CARICOM REPARATIONS COMMISSION (CRC) ASSERTS THAT EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS**

- Were owners and traders of enslaved Africans.
- Instructed genocidal actions upon indigenous communities.
- Created the legal, financial and fiscal policies necessary for the enslavement of Africans.
- Defined and enforced African enslavement and native genocide as in their 'national interests'.
- Refused compensation to the enslaved with the ending of their enslavement.
- Compensated slave owners at emancipation for the loss of legal property rights in enslaved Africans.
- Imposed a further one hundred years of racial apartheid upon the emancipated.
- Imposed for another one hundred years policies designed to perpetuate suffering upon the emancipated and survivors of genocide.

- And have refused to acknowledge such crimes or to compensate victims and their descendants.

The CRC sees the persistent racial victimization of the descendants of slavery and genocide as the root cause of their suffering today. The CRC recognizes that the persistent harm and suffering experienced today by these victims as the primary cause of development failure in the Caribbean. It calls upon European governments to participate in the CRJP with a view to prepare these victims and sufferers for full admission with dignity into the citizenry of the global community.

A Ten Point Action Plan for Reparatory Justice was endorsed by Heads of Government, in March 2014, and is used as the basis for discussions on reparations and outlines the path to reconciliation, truth, and justice for victims and their descendants through a Ten Point Agenda

**1. Full Formal Apology**

The healing process for victims and the descendants of the enslaved and enslavers requires as a precondition the offer of a sincere formal apology by the governments of Europe. Some governments in refusing to offer an apology have issued in place Statements of Regrets.

Such statements do not acknowledge that crimes have been committed and represent a refusal to take responsibility for such crimes. Statements of regrets represent, furthermore, a reprehensible response to the call for apology in that they suggest that victims and their descendants are not worthy of an apology. Only an explicit formal apology will suffice within the context of the CRJP.

**2. Repatriation**

Over 10 million Africans were stolen from their homes and forcefully transported to the Caribbean as the enslaved chattel and property of Europeans. The transatlantic slave trade is the largest forced migration in human history and has no parallel in terms of man's inhumanity to man. This trade in enchained bodies was a highly successful commercial business for the

**“Through strengthened collaboration between CARICOM and the African Union there is the opportunity to articulate a clear diplomatic, and advocacy strategy to advance the Reparations agenda through joint action in the United Nations, the Commonwealth and other intergovernmental bodies...”**



**DR HILARY BROWN**

PROGRAMME MANAGER, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,  
CARICOM SECRETARIAT

nations of Europe. The lives of millions of men, women and children were destroyed in search of profit. The descendants of these stolen people have a legal right to return to their homeland.

A Repatriation program must be established and all available channels of international law and diplomacy used to resettle those persons who wish to return. A resettlement program should address such matters as citizenship and deploy available best practices in respect of community re-integration.

### **3. Indigenous Peoples Development Program**

The governments of Europe committed genocide upon the native Caribbean population. Military commanders were given official instructions by their governments to eliminate these communities and to remove those who survive pogroms from the region.

Genocide and land appropriation went hand in hand. A community of over 3,000,000 in 1700 has been reduced to less than 30,000 in 2000. Survivors remain traumatized, landless, and are the most marginalized social group within the region.

The University of the West Indies offers an Indigenous Peoples Scholarship in a desperate effort at rehabilitation. It is woefully insufficient. A Development Plan is required to rehabilitate this community.

### **4. Cultural Institutions**

European nations have invested in the development of community institutions such as museums and research centres in order to prepare their citizens for an understanding of these Crimes against Humanity (CAH).

These facilities serve to reinforce within the consciousness of their citizens an understanding of their role in history as rulers and change agents.

There are no such institutions in the Caribbean where the CAH were committed. Caribbean schoolteachers and researchers do not have the same opportunity. Descendants of these CAH continue to suffer the disdain of having no relevant institutional systems through which their experience can be scientifically told. This crisis must be remedied within the CRJP.



Scan to watch Ms. Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados Speech at the AU Summit 2025



### 5. Public Health Crisis

The African descended population in the Caribbean has the highest incidence in the world of chronic diseases in the forms of hypertension and type two diabetes.

This pandemic is the direct result of the nutritional experience, physical and emotional brutality, and overall stress profiles associated with slavery, genocide, and apartheid. Over 10 million Africans were imported into the Caribbean during the 400 years of slavery.

At the end of slavery in the late 19th century less than 2 million remained. The chronic health condition of Caribbean blacks now constitutes the greatest financial risk to sustainability in the region. Arresting this pandemic requires the injection of science, technology, and capital beyond the capacity of the region.

Europe has a responsibility to participate in the alleviation of this health disaster. The

CRJP addresses this issue and calls upon the governments of Europe to take responsibility for this tragic human legacy of slavery and colonisation.

### 6. Illiteracy Eradication

At the end of the European colonial period in most parts of the Caribbean, the British in particular left the black and indigenous communities in a general state of illiteracy. Some 70 percent of blacks in British colonies were functionally illiterate in the 1960s when nation states began to appear.

Jamaica, the largest such community, was home to the largest number of such citizens. Widespread illiteracy has subverted the development efforts of these nation states and represents a drag upon social and economic advancement.

Caribbean governments allocate more than 70 percent of public expenditure to health

and education in an effort to uproot the legacies of slavery and colonization. European governments have a responsibility to participate in this effort within the context of the CRJP.

### **7. African Knowledge Program**

The forced separation of Africans from their homeland has resulted in cultural and social alienation from identity and existential belonging. Denied the right in law to life, and divorced by space from the source of historic self, Africans have craved the right to return and knowledge of the route to roots.

A program of action is required to build 'bridges of belonging'. Such projects as school exchanges and culture tours, community artistic and performance programs, entrepreneurial and religious engagements, as well as political interaction, are required in order to neutralize the void created by slave voyages.

Such actions will serve to build knowledge networks that are necessary for community rehabilitation.

### **8. Psychological Rehabilitation**

For over 400 years Africans and their descendants were classified in law as non-human, chattel, property, and real estate. They were denied recognition as members of the human family by laws derived from the parliaments and palaces of Europe.

This history has inflicted massive psychological trauma upon African descendant populations. This much is evident daily in the Caribbean.

Only a reparatory justice approach to truth and educational exposure can begin the process of healing and repair. Such an engagement will call into being, for example, the need for greater Caribbean integration designed to enable the coming together of the fragmented community.

### **9. TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER**

For 400 years the trade and production policies of Europe could be summed up in the British slogan: "not a nail is to be made in the colonies".

The Caribbean was denied participation in Europe's industrialization process, and was confined to the role of producer and exporter of raw materials. This system was designed to extract maximum value from the region and to enable maximum wealth accumulation in Europe.

The effectiveness of this policy meant that the Caribbean entered its nation building phase as a technologically and scientifically ill-equipped- backward space within the postmodern world economy.

Generations of Caribbean youth, as a consequence, have been denied membership and access to the science and technology culture that is the world's youth patrimony. Technology transfer and science sharing for development must be a part of the CRJP.

### **10. DEBT CANCELLATION**

Caribbean governments that emerged from slavery and colonialism have inherited the massive crisis of community poverty and institutional unpreparedness for development. These governments still daily engage in the business of cleaning up the colonial mess in order to prepare for development.

The pressure of development has driven governments to carry the burden of public employment and social policies designed to confront colonial legacies. This process has resulted in states accumulating unsustainable levels of public debt that now constitute their fiscal entrapment.

This debt cycle properly belongs to the imperial governments who have made no sustained attempt to deal with debilitating colonial legacies. Support for the payment of domestic debt and cancellation of international debt are necessary reparatory actions. ■

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**2025**  
**YEAR OF**  
**REPARATIONS:**

**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

**The invasion of African territories, the mass capture of Africans, the horrors of the middle passage, the chattelisation of Africans, the extermination of the language and culture of the transported Africans, constituted violations of international laws.**

**International law recognises that those who commit crimes against humanity must make reparations**



The Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles, the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum recently returned looted gold and silver objects that British troops looted from the Asante kingdom in the 19th century.

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Getty Images

# Stolen Heritage: Why African Cultural Artefacts and bodies matter – and Why they Must be Returned

By **Leslie Richer**

Director Information and Communication, African Union

## **LOOTED ARTEFACTS AND THE CONTINUED EXPLOITATION OF AFRICAN HERITAGE**

Cultural artefacts of Africa and from Africa hold immense historical, spiritual, and identity significance for the continent. A large number of Africa's cultural heritage is currently held outside the continent in museums and private collections, mainly across Europe and North America. Returning these artefacts is not only an act of justice and cultural sovereignty but a critical step in healing, reclaiming African identities, and ensuring the preservation, study, and celebration of Africa's diverse histories and civilizations on the continent itself.

What has long been ignored yet understood by African communities the world over, is that cultural artefacts are not merely objects of aesthetic value or academic interest. They are repositories of memory, law, lineage, cosmology and identity. Statues, regalia, manuscripts, masks, royal insignia and ritual objects are embedded in social life: they legitimise authority, structure ceremonies, hold oral history, encode medicinal knowledge, and sustain languages and rituals that make communities what they are. When these objects were removed whether by force, covert looting or exploitative collecting — entire circuits of meaning were broken. The theft was not only material; it was epistemic and moral.

Cultural artefacts serve as tangible links to Africa's past, embodying the art, technology,

beliefs, and social structures of historic African societies. They are invaluable historical documents that enable communities to study, reinterpret, and evolve their cultural narratives on their own terms. Artefacts like the Benin Bronzes, Nok terracotta sculptures, Timbuktu manuscripts, and Egyptian sarcophagi are of great significance, often serving as conduits to collective memory and identity. Their presence in Africa is essential for cultural pride, continuity, education, scholarly research, and the promotion and vitalisation of cultural sectors such as tourism. Restitution is therefore not only a matter of museums or international law, but also a matter of social and cultural repair and the quest for collective dignity.

The return of African artefacts addresses historical injustices stemming from colonial plunder, where many pieces were forcibly removed under exploitative conditions and remain in foreign institutions. Beyond symbolism, restitution allows African countries to regain cultural sovereignty, reconnect communities to their heritage, and reinvigorate their cultural and creative industries. Properly restored to their original contexts, these artefacts offer opportunities for intercultural dialogue and economic development through tourism and heritage projects. Repatriation of artefacts will also strengthen historical knowledge generation and preserve fragile or unique objects more appropriately and respectfully within their cultural landscapes.

Return of artefacts also carries practical, forward-looking value. Repatriated collections can underpin contemporary cultural revitalisation, support tourism and local economies, enable community-led research, and form the basis for museums, archives and educational programmes that are locally governed.

Moreover, restitution is central to an honest re-telling of global history — one that acknowledges extraction and dispossession as foundations of modern wealth and knowledge.

Cultural artefacts are indispensable to Africa's heritage, identity, and future. Restitution is a vital step in rebalancing historical injustices and unlocking the continent's cultural wealth for Africans themselves.

### **BONES OF HISTORY - THE UNSPOKEN ASPECT OF REPARATIONS AND RESTITUTION**

Across Africa's colonial past, the violence was not only political or economic; it was deeply bodily. Africans were not merely exploited for labour or resources; their very bodies became trophies, specimens, and evidence of subjugation. Skulls, bones, and remains were shipped to European museums for "anthropological study," part of a racist pseudoscience that justified imperial domination. Resistance leaders, spiritual figures, and ordinary people alike were stripped of both life and dignity — their bodies denied rest in their homelands. The demand to repatriate human remains and to properly memorialise those taken from Africa is central to any genuine reparations project: it is about returning dignity, restoring ancestral ties, and confronting the physical evidence of colonial and racist violence.

As Africans we suffered collective heartbreak when all that remained of the great pan-Africanist Patrice Émery Lumumba was a tooth. Patrice Lumumba the first Prime Minister of the independent Democratic Republic of Congo, was assassinated in 1961 with the covert complicity of Belgian and Western intelligence. His body was dissolved in acid — an act

meant to erase both the man and the symbol of African liberation. Decades later, in 2022, Belgium returned a single relic: one tooth, kept by a Belgian police officer as a "souvenir".

Lumumba's tooth, similar to other acts of desecration of African bodies symbolises the violence of erasure — the attempt to obliterate an African vision of self-determination. It represents the incompleteness of justice; a small gesture that cannot heal a vast historical wound. Yet, it also carries an enduring power, a reminder that even a fragment of truth can indict an empire. Lumumba's case is not isolated. The remains of many Africans — both known and unnamed — still lie in foreign lands. The return of Lumumba's tooth was accompanied by a haunting realisation: how many other Lumumbas were buried without names, scattered across oceans and continents?

Tanzanian resistance leaders like Chief Mkwawa and Akida Kiwelu were decapitated and their skulls taken to Berlin. Some have been returned; many remain missing. Namibian skulls taken after the genocide of the Herero and Nama were stored in museums and only repatriated in the 2010s. Across the Atlantic, the bodies of enslaved Africans rest in unmarked graves throughout the Americas and Caribbean — Saint Helena, Barbados, Saint Eustatius — where their bones still tell the story of forced displacement.

The islands of Saint Helena and Saint Eustatius, the overseas territories of Britain and the Netherlands, exemplify destructive colonial legacies with both islands linked to the Middle Passage of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. St. Helena Island served as a Middle Passage pit stop during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Between 1840 and 1872, over 25,000 enslaved Africans were transported there during the abolition phase. Though "liberated", most of them were then sent to the British West Indies as indentured labourers; many perished and were buried on the island. Their unmarked burial grounds are the most significant physical remnants of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, a haunting testament to forgotten lives.

Ironically, the enslaved Africans were "rescued" from Portuguese illegal slave ships by the British navy but were instead abandoned on the island in poor conditions. On St. Helena, archaeological excavations of an African burial ground were conducted to make way for the island's first airport. The ancestral remains were packed in boxes, and their possessions were sent to museum exhibitions in the UK without the knowledge or consent of their global descendants. The ancestral remains were stored in inappropriate, undignified conditions for years. These acts, whether wilful or not, further dehumanise black bodies, reducing them to commodities.

Colonialism played a major role in the fetishising of the bodies of black women (which unfortunately has become entrenched in modern society). This is aptly displayed in the story of Sara Baartman one of the most painful and revealing in the long history of the exploitation of African bodies; a narrative that captures the intersection of racism, sexism, colonialism, and scientific dehumanisation. Sara was a Khoikhoi woman (one of the Indigenous peoples of southern Africa) who was taken to Europe where she was exhibited as a freak-show attraction under the stage name "The Hottentot Venus." She was treated as both an entertainment curiosity and an object of scientific study. The shows reinforced racist pseudoscientific myths about African women being hypersexual and subhuman. Even after her death in 1815 at around the age of 26, Sara was not granted peace. Her body was dissected by the infamous French scientist Georges Cuvier, who sought to prove European racial superiority. Her skeleton, brain, and genitalia were preserved in jars and displayed at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris and a cast of her body was exhibited publicly until 1974 — more than 150 years after her death. The call to return Baartman's remains began in the 1940s but gained global momentum after the end of apartheid. In 1994, South Africa's new democratic government led by Nelson Mandela formally requested France to return her remains and France initially refused, citing *national heritage laws that prevented the removal of museum objects*. After a prolonged fight for justice, in 2002, Baartman's remains

were finally returned to South Africa to be respectfully interred.

These are not isolated tragedies. Together, they form a pan-African geography of dispossession of African bodies, stretching from Congo to Cape Coast, from Windhoek to Bahia.

In the end, Lumumba's tooth as well as the numerous body parts kept in museums and private collections and in unmarked graves around the world speak to all of us as a continent and as humanity. It whispers that justice delayed is not just justice denied, but that also justice without memory is hollow. It demands that Africa and the world remember not only how Lumumba and others died, but why. That tooth — small, fragile, luminous — is Africa's last moral nerve exposed to history's cold air. Until every body is named, every relic returned, and every story told, the wound remains open.

Reparations, therefore, are not only about money or apologies. They are also about restoring the sacredness of the African body, acknowledging that colonialism desecrated it, in life and in death.

### **RESTITUTION AS PART OF AFRICA'S CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY**

The calls to return artefacts is not rhetorical, they are central to the African Union's cultural agenda and commitment to cultural heritage as a strategic asset. The Agenda 2063 flagship project, the **Great Museum of Africa (GMA)** located in Algeria is a continental hub envisaged to collect, preserve and exhibit Africa's material and intangible heritage, and to serve as a permanent memorial to the transatlantic slave trade and the African diaspora. The GMA has as one of its core objectives to be the continental centre for returned heritage and will be the driving institution in Africa's restitution strategy functioning as a premier institution dedicated to showcasing Africa's rich history, material culture and genealogy. It aims to inspire generations across Africa and the diaspora by preserving and promoting cultural inheritance to drive economic prosperity and unity.

## AFRICAN MUSEUMS, ARCHIVES AND THE GREAT MUSEUM OF AFRICA: HUBS OF RESTITUTION AND RENEWAL

The Great Museum of Africa is intended to operate at continental scale — as a repository, research institute, exhibition platform, and training hub that can receive returnees, host shared digital archives, and coordinate provenance research across the continent. It will also anchor Pan-African narratives of memory and restitution under Agenda 2063, connecting returned objects with living communities, genealogies and research agendas. However, underpinning the GMA will be the collaboration with African museums and archives which are critical to the restitution process, providing the infrastructure to collect, conserve, interpret, and exhibit returned artefacts and serve as centres for cultural education, research, and public engagement, helping to re-establish narratives shaped by African voices.

Restitution is not only about legal transfer; it is about capacity, curation, and trust. Too often Western institutions have argued that “Africa lacks the capacity” to conserve complicated collections. I have often wondered at the weakness of this argument, given that generations of Africans preserved cultural artefacts in pristine and respectful traditions for centuries before they were robbed of these items. Some of these items are not even on display, they are disrespectfully locked away in boxes in basements of museums who balk at the idea of giving back even one item. The argument that “Africa lack capacity” to protect its own heritage is a narrative entrenched in the belief that Africans are incapable of preserving their own heritage when in reality where African heritage has been destroyed its often through influences and beliefs whose roots are not African. Furthermore, recent years have shown a different truth: African museums and initiatives are expanding professional conservation, digitisation, climate-controlled storage, provenance research and curatorial practice.

With the call for restitution of stolen artefacts African museums and archives will (and must) perform practical roles:

- **Conservation & storage:** Build and operate climate-controlled repositories and conservation labs meeting international standards so objects can be preserved and studied.
- **Community repatriation councils:** Ensure objects are returned to communities (not merely national institutions) where appropriate, and to develop protocols for ritual reintegration and display.
- **Research & provenance units:** Systematic provenance research to document how objects left their communities and to support legal and diplomatic claims.
- **Exhibition & provenance transparency:** Shared digital catalogues and travelling exhibitions that contextualise objects before and after return.
- **Training & partnerships:** Expand conservator, registrar and curatorial training in Africa and coordinate with diaspora institutions to ensure ethical stewardship.

Furthermore, successful restitution will require a mix of:

- **Loan-to-permanent transfer pathways** that begin as long-term loans and evolve into permanent repatriation as capacity is demonstrated.
- **Bilateral and multilateral agreements** (museum-to-museum transfer, state agreements).
- **Shared custodianship models** (co-curation, rotating loans, diasporic exhibit collaborations).
- **Pan-African legal and funding instruments** (the AU Common African Position on Restitution, a Pan-African Reparations Fund with a cultural restitution pillar, and international pressure via UNESCO mechanisms).

The recent returns and agreements — from European museums returning Benin Bronzes to ongoing German and other restitutions or negotiations over objects like the Nefertiti bust — offer useful precedents and pitfalls to learn from.

**Returned Artifact:** Obelisk of Aksum (Ethiopia)\*\*: A monumental ancient stele taken by Italy in 1937 and repatriated in 2005, it symbolizes Ethiopia’s ancient civilization and resilience





## WHAT RETURNS SHOULD LOOK LIKE: PRINCIPLES FOR RESTITUTION AND REINTEGRATION

- 1. Community-centred exit and re-entry:** Returns must be accompanied by processes that allow communities to decide the future use of objects (ritual, display, conservation).
- 2. Capacity and funding:** Transfers should be supported by finance for conservation, public display, curatorial training and security — not mere shipping containers. African institutions (national museums, regional hubs, and the Great Museum of Africa) need predictable funding.
- 3. Provenance transparency:** Museums must publish provenance research, digitise collections, and enter into open negotiation.
- 4. Shared, creative models:** Where appropriate, shared custodianship, long-term loans, travelling exhibitions and digital twins (high-quality 3D scans) can complement permanent return and help build cooperation.
- 5. Legal and diplomatic pathway:** The African Union's Common African Position on Restitution and UNESCO frameworks should be leveraged to create standardised procedures and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Ultimately, we must always keep in mind that cultural restitution is not charity. It is corrective justice and a strategic investment in Africa's future: in education, in cultural industries, and in the intangible continuities that sustain communal life. The Great Museum of Africa — together with revitalised national museums, community archives, and diasporic partnerships — can make restitution transformative rather than merely symbolic. Reparation of artefacts and African bodies will not undo the harms of empire alone, but it is a concrete and generative step toward restoring memory, authority and dignity to the communities that created these treasures and birthed those bodies.

## Some notable African Cultural Artefacts held outside Africa and their significance



- **Benin Bronzes (Nigeria):** Thousands of brass plaques and sculptures looted during the British punitive expedition of 1897. These artefacts depict royal and spiritual scenes

central to the Kingdom of Benin's history and culture. From the Royal court of the Kingdom of Benin (now Edo State, Nigeria); central to Oba lineage, ritual authority, history of diplomacy and trade; plaques record historical events and genealogies.

- **Nok Terracotta Figures (Nigeria):** Ancient sculptures dating from 1000 BCE to 300 CE, important for understanding early West African artistry and social organisation. Many are exhibited abroad, limiting local access to their cultural knowledge

- **Timbuktu Manuscripts (Mali):** Thousands of manuscript pages containing Islamic scholarship, history, and literature crucial to West African intellectual heritage. Many were taken during colonial times, limiting Mali's (an Africa's) ability to preserve and study this knowledge.





- **Egyptian Artefacts, mummies and remains, Nefertiti Bust and the Rosetta Stone** the latter considered important for unlocking ancient Egyptian language and history.



The Rosetta Stone remains in the British Museum despite repeated requests for its return, symbolising ongoing debates about cultural ownership.

- **Bronze Head of Queen Idia (Benin/ Nigeria):** A brass head symbolizing one of the most powerful female figures of the Benin Kingdom. It represents feminine power and historical legacy
- **Akan Goldwork and Drum (Ghana) Artifacts** reflecting the wealth, ritual, and artistry of the Asante people.
- **Ethiopian artefacts, symbols of imperial and resistance history** intimately connected to Ethiopian sovereignty and anti-colonial struggle looted during Italian occupation held in various European collections and auction markets as well as Ethiopian Crosses and Bible artefacts reflecting Ethiopia's unique Christian tradition

- **Soapstone Figures from Great Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe):**

Archaeological artefacts representing the stone-built civilization's art and religious symbolism



- **Gold artifacts from the Kingdom of Mapungubwe,** predecessor to Great Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe)

- **The Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium holds approximately 180,000 items primarily from Central Africa,** including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These include ceremonial objects, ritual masks, statues, and ethnographic items integral to the identities and histories of Congolese ethnic groups such as the Luba, Kongo, and Kuba peoples Many artefacts were collected during Belgian colonial rule under King Leopold II, often acquired through violence, coercion, or exploitation. Among the items are intricate wooden figures, copper and ivory regalia, and ritual objects that are deeply tied to religious practices and historical governance systems in Central African communities

- **Vigango memorial statues** stolen from sacred sites in Kenya

- **Fossil and archaeological artefacts from Kenya's Great Rift Valley**—such as early hominid remains and stone tools—have been taken abroad, limiting local scientific study and heritage connection

- **Benin Ivory Pendant Mask(s) (Idia masks)** held in European and American museums and private collections and are representations of Queen Idia (Iyoba); used in royal regalia and ceremonies; spiritual and dynastic importance to the Benin people.



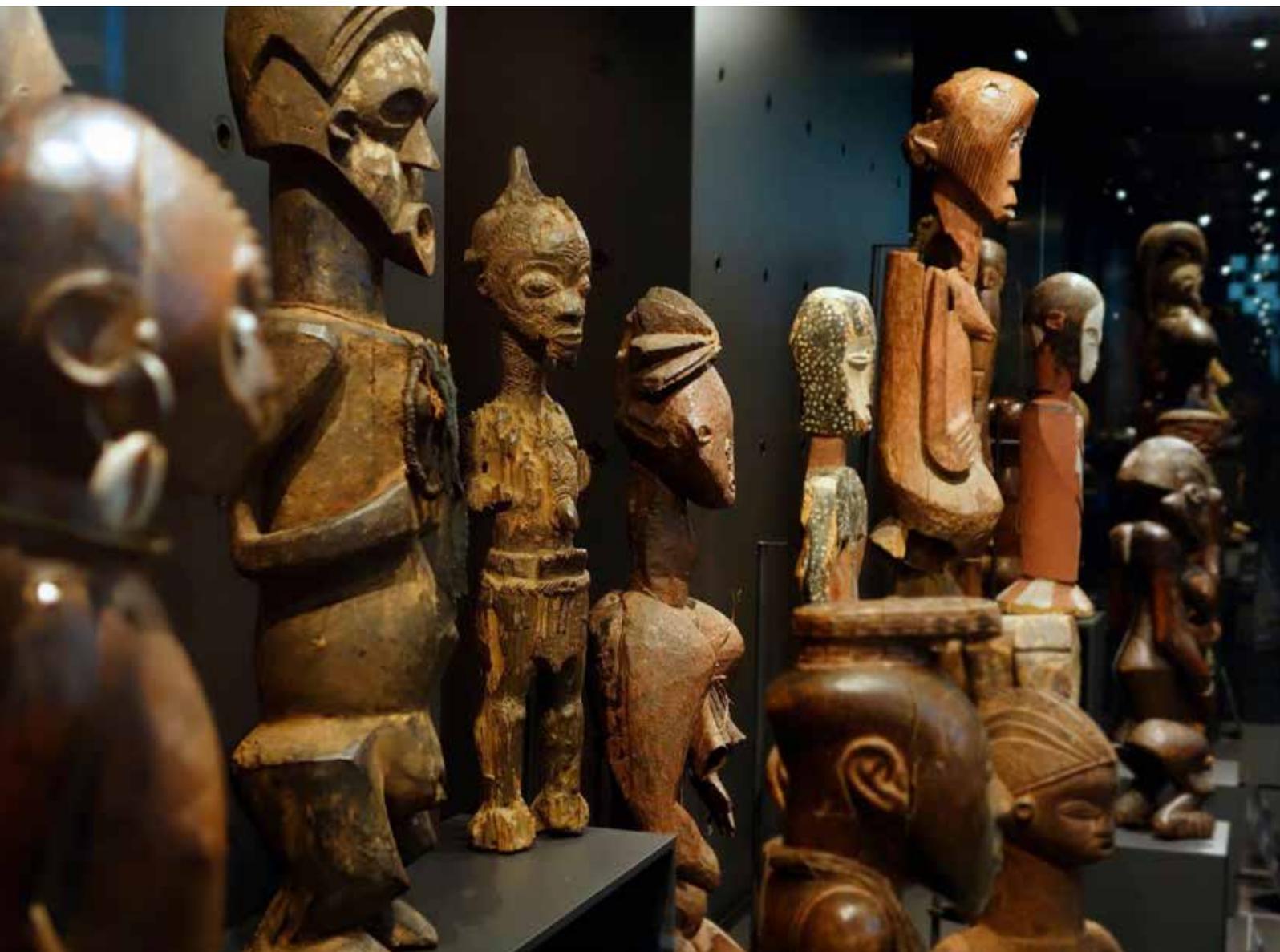
Wooden African statuettes in the AfricaMuseum / Royal Museum for Central Africa, ethnography and natural history museum at Tervuren, Belgium  
© rterra/Universal Images Group via Getty Images



- **Ife bronze and copper heads masterpieces** of ancient Yoruba metalworking
- **Objects from Kush and Nubia** which testify to ancient African civilizations — temples, inscriptions and royal regalia important to Sudanese, Nubian histories.
- **Large numbers of ethnographic collections** (masks, regalia, ritual objects) from across West, Central and East Africa

held in natural history and ethnographic museums across Europe (e.g., Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, Pitt Rivers Museum, Ethnological Museum Berlin) and North America.

- **Bangwa Queen Sculpture** and **Mandu Yenu Throne** (Cameroon)
- **Kabwe (Broken Hill) Skull** (Zambia)



# Decolonising Reparations: A Social Psychoanalytic Approach for Justice for Africans and People of African Descent

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The concept of reparations for the atrocities committed against Africans and people of African descent involves both material restitution and constructive reparation—a forward-looking approach that addresses historical harms while transforming current structures of inequality. Olúfémí Táíwò's (2022) theory of constructive reparations provides a framework for understanding reparative justice not merely as compensation but as an endeavour to build systems of equity and sustainability. This aligns with the African Union's (AU) 2025 theme, "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations," as articulated in the Abuja Proclamation (1993) and the Durban Declaration (2001).

This paper draws on psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of Melanie Klein, John Steiner, and Earl Hopper, and integrates group-analytic insights from Farhad Dalal and Vamik Volkan. These theories explain how psychic defences—such as guilt, envy, and psychic retreats—block reparative processes. Coupled with Ubuntu, the African philosophy of relational justice (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2012), this approach underscores the need to address both the material and psychological dimensions of reparations. Legal perspectives from Tembeka Ngcukaitobi (2018) further inform the call for reparations, emphasizing the need for a framework that addresses structural injustices caused by colonialism

## **GUILT, ENVY, AND THE DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES OF COLONIALITY: INSIGHTS FROM MELANIE KLEIN**

In psychoanalytic theory, particularly, *Object Relations Theory*, as developed by Melanie Klein, guilt and envy are key to understanding the reparative impulse. Guilt arises when individuals feel responsible for harming a loved or idealized object (Klein, 1940). In the context of colonialism, guilt manifests in former colonial powers that must confront their exploitation and violence. Yet, this guilt is often repressed, leading to policy-level resistance to reparations.

Envy complicates the reparative process. Envy arises when individuals perceive that others possess something valuable that they lack, resulting in destructive impulses (Klein, 1957). In the context of reparations, former colonizers may feel threatened by demands for reparations, viewing them as a challenge to their moral superiority or wealth.

This envy often manifests in political resistance, where former colonial powers create policies that avoid or downplay their historical responsibilities.

John Steiner’s (1993) Concept of Psychic Retreats, further illuminates how individuals and groups withdraw into defensive mental states to avoid confronting painful emotions. Former colonial powers often engage in narratives that minimize or deny historical responsibility, framing themselves as benefactors rather than oppressors. Hopper’s (2003) Theory of Social Psychic Retreats, explains how these collective defences obstruct reparations by preventing moral reckoning.

### **COLLECTIVE DEFENCES AND REPARATIVE RESISTANCE: GROUP-ANALYTIC INSIGHTS**

Farhad Dalal (2012) elaborates on how power dynamics and prejudice prevent reparative efforts. Dalal argues that acknowledging guilt threatens the power structures that former colonial powers rely on, thus motivating denial and avoidance of reparations. His analysis complements Táiwò’s concept of constructive reparations, which calls for redistributing power as part of reparative justice.

Vamik Volkan (2006) adds to this by exploring how nations create collective identities based on chosen traumas—shared historical narratives that often glorify colonial history. Reparations require confronting these narratives, which threatens the collective self-image of former colonial powers. Ubuntu, the African philosophy of relational justice (Ramose, 2002), insists that reparations restore not only material wealth but also relationships between colonizers and formerly colonized peoples. Reparations, in this sense, become part of a relational healing process, addressing both historical harms and future cooperation (Metz, 2012).

### **PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPARATIVE JUSTICE**

Understanding the psychic defences that block reparations provides a pathway for effective reparative policies. These defences are embedded in political resistance, which manifests in legal and policy frameworks that deny responsibility for the legacies of colonization. Below are key recommendations for overcoming these psychological and structural barriers.

#### **1. Convene a Global Reparations Summit**

The AU should convene a Global Reparations Summit, involving African nations, former colonial powers, and global organizations like the United Nations and CARICOM. This summit would address both material and psychological dimensions of reparations, incorporating symbolic acts of acknowledgment—such as official apologies—alongside material reparations. These symbolic gestures are essential for dismantling the psychic retreats (Steiner, 1993) that prevent moral reckoning and impede reparative progress.

The summit should establish legal standards for reparations based on successful models like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Tutu, 1999) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (Cavallaro & Schaffer, 2004). The summit must also engage in debt cancellation—a central tenet of CARICOM’s Ten-Point Plan—acknowledging that African nations’ debts are a direct result of colonial exploitation (Piketty, 2014). The psychological resistance to debt cancellation, often driven by envy and guilt, must be addressed as part

of the summit’s framework for reparative justice.

This summit should also engage with contemporary global reparations movements, such as the U.S. debate around H.R. 40 or ongoing discussions in Europe, where similar psychological barriers obstruct meaningful reparative action.

#### **2. Land Restitution and Economic Reparations**

Land restitution is crucial for addressing colonial dispossession. As Bernadette Atuahene (2014) argues, colonial land takings were not just economic acts but also dignity takings—severing people from their land. Reparations must involve both land return and resources for making that land productive.

Wealth redistribution programs, such as microfinance and entrepreneurship initiatives for marginalized groups, should complement land restitution. These programs should follow models like the Grameen Bank, which has empowered communities through small loans for entrepreneurial projects (Yunus, 2007). Such economic reparations address the psychic defences of envy and guilt by framing reparative efforts as moral responsibilities rather than economic losses.

#### **3. Cultural Restitution and Symbolic Justice**

Cultural restitution, including the return of stolen artifacts like the Benin Bronzes, is essential for restoring both material and symbolic dignity. Volkan’s (2006) Concept of Chosen Trauma high-

lights how cultural restitution helps heal collective wounds caused by colonization. This process must also include support for indigenous knowledge systems, as articulated by Ng g wa Thiong’o (1986), ensuring that African languages, traditions, and histories are preserved and revitalized.

Public acknowledgment of cultural erasure through official apologies and truth commissions is critical for addressing the collective guilt of former colonial powers. These symbolic gestures help break the cycle of psychic retreats, creating space for moral and psychological reconciliation.

#### **4. Environmental and Climate Reparations**

Climate reparations must address the disproportionate impact of climate change on African nations, which contributed little to global emissions (IPCC, 2014). Establishing a Climate Justice Fund—similar to the loss and damage fund proposed at COP26 (UNFCCC, 2021)—would ensure that former colonial powers compensate for environmental degradation caused by historical exploitation.

These reparations must include investments in renewable energy and compensation for environmental destruction caused by corporations, such as Shell’s oil spills in the Niger Delta (Watts, 2010). Addressing collective guilt over environmental harm, often avoided through psychic retreats, is essential for ensuring that reparations include both material compensation and moral accountability.

**Envy complicates the reparative process. Envy arises when individuals perceive that others possess something valuable that they lack, resulting in destructive impulses. In the context of reparations, former colonizers may feel threatened by demands for reparations, viewing them as a challenge to their moral superiority or wealth. This envy often manifests in political resistance, where former colonial powers create policies that avoid or downplay their historical responsibilities.**

Reparations for Africans and people of African descent must address the material, psychological, cultural, and environmental harms caused by colonialism. As Táíwò (2022) emphasizes, reparations must be future-oriented, creating systems that prevent ongoing harm. By understanding psychological defences such as guilt, envy, and psychic retreats (Klein, Steiner, Hopper), reparations efforts can more effectively dismantle the resistance to moral and material justice.

Reparations are not only about compensating for past wrongs but about restoring the dignity and humanity stripped from colonized peoples, while ensuring that the legacies of colonialism are addressed. Reparations are both a moral responsibility and a practical necessity for building a just and sustainable future, as outlined by the AU’s Agenda 2063 and CARICOM’s Ten-Point Plan.



**2025**  
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# Did You Know?

## **The destruction of Black Wall Street**

- Over 35 square blocks burned,
- Over 1,200 homes destroyed
- Businesses, churches, and schools looted
- Estimates of over 300 deaths, exact number unknown as official records were suppressed or destroyed

**NO ONE WAS EVER HELD ACCOUNTABLE**

# The Tulsa Race Massacre:

## The destruction of Black Wall Street and the fight for reparations

A Forgotten Atrocity



**“I still see Black men being shot, Black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire. I still see Black businesses being burned. I still hear airplanes flying overhead. I hear the screams.”**



**LESSIE BENNINGFIELD RANDLE**

The Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 was one of the worst acts of racial violence in the history of the United States of America and has increasingly become the subject of reparations claims, especially over the past two decades.

From May 31 and June 1, 1921, a white mob — with support from law enforcement and even private armed aircraft — attacked the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma and Tulsa’s prosperous Black community known as “Black Wall Street. They burned over 35 square blocks, destroyed more than 1,200 homes, and looted businesses, churches, and schools; and as many as 300 Black residents killed, with roughly 10,000 displaced. and no one was ever held accountable. The destruction of the prosperous Black neighbourhood of Greenwood, left



Black smoke billows from fires during the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, in the Greenwood District, Tulsa, Oklahoma, US, June 1921. ©ORBIS/Corbis via Getty Images

hundreds dead, thousands displaced, and Black wealth and property decimated. The community lost millions in property and generational wealth, and the survivors and their descendants have long sought reparations. No one (including descendants of the beneficiaries of the destruction and looting of Greenwood property) has even been held accountable

**Reparations Efforts:**

In 2003, survivors and descendants filed a lawsuit seeking reparations under the theory that the government had failed to protect them and their property.

**Legal Battle for Reparations**

In September 2020, three survivors of the Tulsa massacre— Viola Fletcher (born May 1914), Lessie Benningfield Randle (born November 1914), and Hughes Van Ellis (1921-2023)— filed a landmark lawsuit under Oklahoma’s public nuisance statute, holding the City of Tulsa, county, state agencies, and the Tulsa Regional Chamber responsible for the ongoing effects of the massacre. In 2021, a new public nuisance lawsuit was filed by survivors and descendants, arguing that the massacre created ongoing harm to the Black community in Tulsa.

The supercentenarians testified before the U.S. Congress One in 2021, 100 hundred years after the massacre about the need for reparations and in Oklahoma courts demanding reparations and justice. Their testimonies led to increased calls for direct payments, tax relief, free education, business grants, and restoration of land and property. However, courts dismissed the case, citing that too much time had passed (statute of limitations!!).

In July 2023, Tulsa County District Judge Caroline Wall dismissed the suit, ruling it didn’t fit the public nuisance framework. The plaintiffs appealed. On June 12, 2024, the Oklahoma Supreme Court upheld that decision unanimously, concluding the plaintiffs had “legitimate grievances” but that the law did not allow legacy racial injustices as a basis for civil remedies! Justice Dustin Rowe notably declared the court could not “expand liability to include lingering social inequities from historical tragedies” .

Advocates argue the city and state still benefit from the generational wealth stripped from Black Tulsans. The Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission raised millions of dollars for memorials and museums, but descendants have criticized the effort for prioritizing tourism over actual compensation.



**Tulsa massacre survivor Lessie Benningfield Randle, 106, waits to be escorted in the Greenwood district of Tulsa on May 28, 2021 in Tulsa, Oklahoma © Brandon Bell/Getty Images**



**The Long Wait for Justice...always denied, Queen Mother and Founder of the VFF Foundation, Viola Ford Fletcher, age 108, attends the Oldest Living Tulsa Oklahoma Massacre Survivors © Brian Stukes/Getty Images**



“We are deeply saddened that we may not live long enough to see the state... honestly confront and right the wrongs...”



**LESSIE RANDLE AND VIOLA FLETCHER**

The state of Oklahoma and city of Tulsa have not formally offered monetary reparations, though there have been discussions about community investments and educational initiatives.

In the US Congress, lawmakers pushed for broader federal reparations frameworks, including specific consideration of Tulsa. However, no federal reparations legislation have passed, and efforts are largely symbolic or under state and city jurisdiction.

Advocates continue pressing for congressional action and targeted federal reparations, such as direct compensation, community investment zones, scholarships, and land restitution. While the Tulsa Massacre is increasingly recognized, reparations remain a live and contested issue, with legal, moral, and political implications. The case is one of the clearest historical examples of racialized economic violence, and pressure for reparative justice particularly from descendants and Black advocacy groups — continues today.



(L-R) Front Row: Survivors Lessie Benningfield Randle; Born November 1914, Viola Fletcher; Born May 1914, and the late Hughes Van Ellis sing together at the conclusion of a rally during commemorations of the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre  
© Brandon Bell/Getty Images

“Don’t make any mistake about it: Their strategy is for these people to die”



**DAMARIO SOLOMON SIMMONS, Attorney**

**Cultural Representations**

Public awareness of the Tulsa Massacre has grown through books and films including:

- **Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy (2003)**. James S. Hirsch.
- **The Case for Reparations (2014)** by Ta Nehisi Coates.
- **Unspeakable (2021)**—Caldecott Honor-winning picture book by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Floyd Cooper
- **Black Birds in the Sky (2021)** by Brandy Colbert
- **Before They Die (Documentary 2008)**
- **Hate Crimes in the Heartland (Documentary 2014)**.
- The HBO series **Watchmen (2019)** opened its pilot with a visceral depiction of the massacre, increasing visibility. ■



**2025**  
**YEAR OF**  
**REPARATIONS:**

**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

## **Justice Delayed is Justice Denied**

**Viola Fletcher Born May 1914  
and Lessie Benningfield Randle  
Born November 1914 are the only  
living survivors of the 1921 Tulsa  
Race Massacre that  
destroyed what was known  
as Black Wall Street**



# Linguistic Reparations: Restoring African Languages as a Path to True Decolonization

By **Ntibinyane Ntibinyane**

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Former editor, Mmegi newspaper, Botswana.  
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Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, in his seminal work *Decolonising the Mind*, introduces the concept of the cultural bomb, a weapon of colonialism designed to annihilate a people’s belief in their own language, culture, and identity. The cultural bomb was not just metaphorical; it was an intentional act of epistemicide that sought to erase indigenous African languages and replace them with the language of the coloniser and promote harmful white ideologies. Today, as the African Union (AU) declares 2025 the Year of Reparations, the conversation cannot be limited to economic or political reparations alone. It must extend to the realm of language, where colonialism’s most insidious violence was inflicted.

The cultural bomb strategically implanted in African societies did more than replace one language with another; it destabilised indigenous knowledge systems and ruptured intergenerational transmission of culture. It

ensured that African children grew up learning to see the world through the eyes of the coloniser, often at the expense of their history, traditions, and ways of knowing. As Ngũgĩ eloquently puts it, the bomb “annihilates a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.”

According to Kwesi Kwaa Prah, a prominent Ghanaian scholar and linguist, the destruction of African languages was not merely incidental but a systematic effort to entrench colonial domination by severing the link between African people and their cultural consciousness.

## THE CASE FOR LINGUISTIC REPARATIONS

Reparations for the theft and destruction of language must be understood as both symbolic and material. The West owes Africa more than apologies for the erasure of linguistic diversity and the imposition of European languages. What is the point of acknowledging past injustices if the structures that continue to marginalise African languages remain intact, leaving indigenous languages to languish on the margins of education, governance, and public discourse? So, the West owes concrete steps toward the revitalisation and preservation of indigenous languages that continue to face extinction. However, reparations in this context cannot simply mean returning what was taken. As we all know, language cannot be restored in the same way that stolen artifacts and cultural objects can be returned. Instead, “linguistic reparations” demand sustained efforts to re-invest in African languages through education, media, policy, and cultural production.

## WHAT THE WEST CAN DO

Western nations, especially former colonial powers, have a moral obligation to fund language revitalisation efforts across Africa. Indeed, they should finance large-scale projects to document endangered African languages and support their inclusion in national education systems. Western institutions – universities, museums, and media organisations – should fund scholarships,

**Reclaiming Indigenous languages is not merely a cultural project; it is a form of resistance. Language carries the worldviews, aspirations, philosophies, and histories of people. To restore African languages to their rightful place is to affirm the legitimacy of African knowledge and ways of being. It is to resist the continued neocolonial domination that insists that African languages are inadequate for complex thought, governance, and technological advancement. It is also about dismantling the colonial hierarchies that have marginalised African epistemologies and reclaiming the power to define and narrate African realities on African terms.**

fellowships, and research programs that prioritize the teaching, learning, and preservation of African languages. These institutions should also deconstruct their Eurocentric academic canons and include works written in African languages, allowing indigenous knowledge systems to shape global discourse.

Moreover, Western media outlets should provide platforms for African stories to be told in African languages, dismantling the linguistic hierarchies that continue to privilege English, French, and Portuguese as the languages of knowledge and power. Reparations must also include a commitment to translating significant works of global literature into African

languages, reversing the one-sided flow of knowledge that has historically marginalised African epistemologies.

For Africans in the diaspora, including the historical diaspora resulting from the transatlantic slave trade, the West has a responsibility to support language reclamation efforts. African-descended communities in the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe have been systematically denied access to their ancestral languages through generations of forced assimilation and cultural erasure. Reparations in this context should involve funding and facilitating language reclamation programs, cultural exchanges, and curriculum development that reconnect diasporic communities with African languages and traditions.

Of course, the West cannot undo centuries of linguistic oppression and genocide, but it can play a crucial role in reversing the long-term damage caused by their deliberate policies of cultural erasure and epistemicide. Beyond financial contributions, the West must engage in genuine partnerships with African institutions, respecting African agency and knowledge systems rather than imposing top-down solutions. Reparations in this context require a fundamental shift in power dynamics, where African languages and epistemologies are treated as equal contributors to global knowledge rather than peripheral curiosities and exotic artifacts of a distant past.

### **WHAT AFRICA MUST DO: Reclaiming Our Linguistic Sovereignty**

While the West bears responsibility for the linguistic violence of colonialism, African nations and institutions have a critical role to play in reclaiming linguistic sovereignty. Reparations cannot be outsourced. Africa must invest in its languages as a matter of urgency. Indeed, African countries have been slow in this regard; they have internalised colonial language hierarchies, often prioritising European languages as the primary mediums of education, governance, and public discourse

while relegating Indigenous languages to informal settings or the private sphere. In some cases, most African states have elevated one African language, often the language of the dominant ethnic group, to a privileged status while marginalising other indigenous languages, thereby replicating colonial patterns of exclusion and inequality. This internal linguistic hierarchy has further alienated many communities from fully participating in national discourses and development.

African governments should legislate the use of indigenous languages as mediums of instruction in schools, from primary to tertiary education. Language policy should go beyond token gestures and establish pathways for African languages to become languages of science, law, and technology.

Institutions like the African Union's, the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), and national cultural institutions should lead coordinated efforts to fund language revitalisation programs and promote linguistic pride. African universities should establish more research centers dedicated to language preservation, curriculum development, and indigenous epistemologies. Media companies should create space for African languages to flourish, ensuring that news, entertainment, and information are accessible to all, regardless of linguistic background. In diasporic communities, African languages must be nurtured and preserved to maintain cultural ties and strengthen transnational connections.

### **THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN LINGUISTIC REPARATIONS**

Technology offers a powerful tool for linguistic reparations, but this effort must be a collaborative initiative led by Africans and supported by tech giants and Western institutions. African tech innovators and governments should invest in developing digital resources, apps, and platforms that facilitate learning in indigenous languages. At the same time, global tech companies, with their vast

resources and expertise, should play an active role by incorporating African languages into artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) models.

AI systems that exclude African languages contribute to linguistic marginalisation in the digital space, experts have warned. Prioritising African languages in digital technologies is essential to ensuring that they thrive in the digital age. UNESCO's declaration that indigenous languages are in danger underscores the urgency of these efforts, and Africa must take the lead to safeguard its linguistic heritage.

Ensuring the survival of African languages requires a multi-stakeholder approach. Tech giants like Google, Microsoft, and Meta should collaborate with African governments, universities, and cultural institutions to develop language models that accurately reflect the richness and diversity of African languages. Western governments and philanthropic organisations should provide funding and technical support to ensure that African languages are not left behind as the world moves further into the digital era. This is not about being aid-reliant; it's about fulfilling a moral obligation to rectify historical injustices.

As Burgert Senekal and Susan Brokensha argue in their work *The Potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Decolonising Education in South Africa Through the Development of Indigenous Languages*, AI presents a significant opportunity for revitalizing African languages in the educational context. They emphasize that expanding online corpora through community participation and digitising existing materials in African languages can significantly enhance AI's ability to recognise and translate these languages effectively.

### **LANGUAGE AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE**

Reclaiming Indigenous languages is not merely a cultural project; it is a form of resistance. Language carries the worldviews, aspirations,





▲▲  
Members of the Batwa tribe dance as they live inside the rainforest located in south western part of the country in Uganda. Located in the eastern part of the African continent, the landlocked country of Uganda is home to more than 40 ethnic groups with different languages, cultures and traditions. Bantu peoples make up 60 per cent of the population living in the country, where traditional dance is an integral part of the identity. The unique dances of each ethnic community, which have different meanings and purposes, make it easier for outsiders to tell apart different tribes. Members of these ethnic groups transmit their cultural values to different generations through integrating traditional dance and languages into their daily lives.

philosophies, and histories of people. To restore African languages to their rightful place is to affirm the legitimacy of African knowledge and ways of being. It is to resist the continued neocolonial domination that insists that African languages are inadequate for complex thought, governance, and technological advancement. It is also about dismantling the colonial hierarchies that have marginalised African epistemologies and reclaiming the power to define and narrate African realities on African terms.

### REPARATIONS BEYOND APOLOGIES

Linguistic reparations cannot be reduced to apologies and symbolic gestures. They require sustained investment in the restoration and promotion of African languages, both by former colonial powers and by African nations themselves. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o reminds us that “language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture.” For Africa to reclaim its full identity, it must reclaim its languages. As the AU calls for reparations, linguistic justice must be at the heart of that call. Without the restoration of language, true decolonisation remains incomplete, and the cultural bomb continues to detonate across generations.

# Addressing the Economic Legacy of Enslavement and Colonization: The Path to Reparative Justice

By **Colonel (R) Samuel Kamé-Domguia**  
International Senior Consultant. Expert in Disruptive Geostrategies

The debate on reparations for Africa and people of African descent is not simply a matter of historical recognition, but a fundamental necessity for economic justice. Since its inception in 1963, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), has placed the issue of reparations at the centre of its priorities. The designation of 2025 as the "Year of Reparations" by the AU testifies to the urgency and continuing relevance of this quest. This article examines the economic dimensions of the legacy of slavery and colonization and explores how reparations can serve as an instrument of economic justice and are not merely compensation for past injustices, but a necessary framework for rebuilding African economic systems compromised of centuries of systematic exploitation.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION**

The transatlantic slave trade and colonization together represent one of the greatest transfers of wealth in human history. Millions of Africans were torn from their lands, depriving the continent of a productive workforce for centuries. According to historical estimates, between 10 and 15 million Africans were deported to the Americas, not counting the millions who perished during capture and transport.

Colonization subsequently institutionalized the extraction of African resources. Colonial powers imposed extractive economic systems that deliberately hindered local industrial

development. Raw materials were exported at low prices to Europe, while manufactured products were sold at high rates to Africans. This trade imbalance enriched European economies while keeping Africa in a state of economic dependence.

The Abuja Proclamation on Reparations (1993) clearly recognizes that "the damage inflicted remains visible in the persistent dislocation of African economies." This historical exploitation is not simply a closed chapter of history, but the foundation upon which contemporary global economic inequalities rest.

### **The Enduring Economic Impact**

The economic consequences of slavery and colonization persist in contemporary African economic structures. As highlighted in the AU's Agenda 2063, "the African continent remains marginalized in the global economic system," a situation directly linked to its forced and disadvantageous integration into the world economy during the colonial era.

### **This marginalization manifests in several ways:**

#### **1. Persistent Trade Imbalances:**

Africa continues to export primarily unprocessed raw materials, reproducing the colonial model of unequal exchange. According to UNCTAD, primary commodities still represent more than 60% of African exports.



An exhibit at EJI's Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, features more than 200 sculptures by Ghanaian sculptor Kwame Akoto-Bamfo memorializing those who died during the Middle Passage.

© [eji.org/report/transatlantic-slave-trade/origins/#the-barbarity-of-the-middle-passage](http://eji.org/report/transatlantic-slave-trade/origins/#the-barbarity-of-the-middle-passage)

## 2. Structural Indebtedness:

Many African countries are trapped in cycles of debt to international financial institutions dominated by former colonial powers. The Durban Declaration (2001) explicitly recognizes that these debt dynamics perpetuate historical inequalities.

## 3. Continued Extraction of Maritime Resources:

As emphasized in the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy), adopted at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Conference of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in January 2014, in addition to losses from undeclared offshore oil exploitation, Africa loses billions of dollars annually due to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in its territorial waters. This modern maritime exploitation reproduces historical

patterns of colonial extraction, depriving African economies of essential resources for their development.

4. **Capital Flight:** According to a report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Africa loses approximately \$50 billion annually in illicit financial flows, often facilitated by multinational corporations based in former colonial powers.

These contemporary economic realities are not isolated phenomena, but direct manifestations of a global economic system shaped by centuries of colonial and post-colonial exploitation.

Reparations as Economic Justice  
Faced with these structural challenges, reparations represent a comprehensive framework for rethinking and rebuilding global economic relations. As stated in the Accra Proclamation on Reparations, reparations constitute "an essential step toward correcting historical injustices and creating a more equitable new world economic order."

### Several models of economic reparations deserve exploration:

1. **Debt Cancellation:** The external debt of many African countries constitutes a burden that perpetuates unequal economic relations. Cancellation of these debts would be a significant form of reparation, freeing up resources for domestic development.

## Models of Economic Reparations include...

- Debt Cancellation
- Restitution of Maritime Resources
- Technology Transfer
- Reform of International Financial Institutions
- Direct Infrastructure Investments

- 2. Restitution of Maritime Resources:** In accordance with the AIM 2050 Strategy, reparations should include measures to end the illegal exploitation of African maritime resources and compensate for historical losses. The strategy explicitly recognizes that "the protection and sustainable exploitation of the African maritime domain are essential for the well-being of African populations" and calls for reparative measures for damages caused by illegal fishing and other forms of maritime exploitation.
- 3. Technology Transfer:** Reparations should facilitate African nations' access to advanced technologies, particularly in sectors where colonial exploitation hindered local technological development.
- 4. Reform of International Financial Institutions:** True reparative justice requires restructuring institutions such as the World Bank and IMF to ensure equitable representation of African interests in global economic governance.
- 5. Direct Infrastructure Investments:** Former colonial powers could contribute to funds dedicated to developing African infrastructure, thus bridging the investment deficit created by centuries of wealth extraction.

### **CASE STUDY: THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN MARITIME RESOURCES**

The AIM 2050 Strategy offers a concrete example of how reparations can be conceptualized in a specific domain. Adopted in 2014, this strategy recognizes the immense economic potential of the African maritime domain, but also highlights how this potential has been systematically exploited by external actors.

The strategy's approach is particularly relevant to the reparations discourse because:

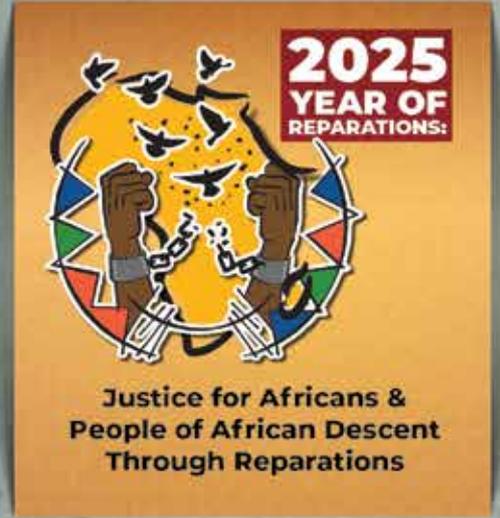
- 1. It quantifies economic losses:** Illegal fishing costs Africa approximately \$10 billion annually.
- 2. It establishes a direct link between historical and contemporary**

**exploitation:** Current patterns of maritime exploitation reproduce colonial dynamics of resource extraction.

- 3. It proposes concrete solutions:** The strategy calls for strengthening maritime surveillance capabilities and developing a sustainable African blue economy.

This integrated approach demonstrates how reparations can be conceptualized not simply as financial compensation, but as a comprehensive process of restoring African economic sovereignty in specific sectors. The economic legacy of slavery and colonization is not a historical vestige but a structural reality that continues to shape African economies. Reparations represent a moral and economic necessity to correct these persistent injustices. As Agenda 2063 affirms, Africa aspires to become "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent," but this vision cannot be realized without addressing the fundamental economic imbalances inherited from colonial history.

The designation of 2025 as the Year of Reparations offers a historic opportunity to make concrete progress in this quest for economic justice. By building on frameworks such as the AIM 2050 Strategy, the Abuja Proclamation, and the Durban Declaration, the African Union can forge continental and international consensus on concrete economic reparation mechanisms. It is only through such decisive actions that we can transform the global economy from a system that perpetuates historical inequalities into a truly equitable and just order. ■



**It's time for Black people to stop playing the separating game of geography, of where the slave ship put us down. We must concentrate on where the slave ship picked us up....**

**Africa is our centre of gravity, our cultural and spiritual mother and father, our beating heart, no matter where we live on the face of this earth.**

**JOHN HENRIK  
CLARKE**



# Ecological, cultural and economic reparation in Central Africa: A path to justice for future generations

By **Cathia Itoua-Bienayme**

Finance Assistant; African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, African Union Youth Volunteer Corps, bienaymec@african-union.org

Sub-Saharan Africa, and in particular Central Africa, which is rich in natural resources, has for centuries overexploited its agricultural land, forests and minerals throughout its colonial and post-colonial history. This exploitation has left deep scars on local cultures, regional economies and the environment.

The shift in attention to issues of justice and reparations is important to highlight the importance of not only ecological but also cultural and economic compensation for the peoples of Central Africa. These reparations must include not only the restoration of local ecosystems but also the recognition of the region's cultural practices and a model of sustainable economic development for the benefit of local communities.

## **I**mpacts and consequences of colonial exploitation on natural resources:

During colonial rule, Europeans plundered the natural resources of Central Africa without considering the local populations. The forests of the Republic of Congo, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo were exploited for timber and rubber; arable land was occupied for cash crops and minerals were extracted to feed the colonial economies. Today, the consequences of this exploitation are soil erosion, river pollution, massive deforestation, and loss of biodiversity among others.

Local communities have lost access to their ancestral lands and natural resources, leading to the loss of their traditional way of life. Redressing these injustices requires a holistic approach that combines ecological justice, cultural recognition and economic development. The consequences of this exploitation are not only environmental, but also economic and cultural.



## Ecological, cultural and economic reparations for Central Africa are not only a matter of justice but also a necessity to ensure environmental sustainability, social justice and economic development in the region.



### **C**ultural substitutes: Protection of local artistic practices and traditions

Central African communities have a deep relationship with nature that is reflected in their beliefs, art, and cultural practices. Mountains, forests, and rivers are often considered sacred, and form an integral part of the local people's identity. Exploitation of natural resources has not only degraded the environment but has also eroded the cultural and artistic practices associated with it.

Cultural renewal must include the protection and promotion of local artistic expression, highlighting artistic traditions such as wood carving, painting, music and traditional dances, which have often been devalued by the impact of colonisation and globalisation. Additionally, projects for the restitution of cultural heritage, such as art and ritual objects that were confiscated during the colonial period, may also constitute a form of cultural redress.

### **E**cological reparation: a priority for future generations

Ecological compensation for Central Africa must go beyond financial compensation. It requires an approach that includes the sustainable management of natural resources and the restoration of ecosystems. Initiatives for biodiversity conservation, reforestation and land restoration need to be implemented. These measures, while important, must also integrate the ancestral knowledge of local communities into the management of nature.

Indigenous communities (Ba Mbenga) in Gabon, the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo have traditional knowledge of forest and farmland management. Recognising this knowledge in environmental policies can offer a more

◀ The economic value of Congo Basin forests systems is enormous. ◀ Timber alone is worth several Billion Euros annually to the Forest industry, while minerals are also being heavily exploited. The importance of the Congo Basin as a global, natural reservoir to store Carbon is also massive. CO2 emissions from deforestation of this region could be devastating for agriculture and water resources. The challenges for countries of the Congo Basin are enormous. © Brent Stirton/Getty Images

sustainable and environmentally friendly approach while also providing symbolic reparations to communities who have seen their land degraded by colonial and industrial exploitation.

### **S**ustainable economic development: the key to recovery

The region's economies, which are often based on the exploitation of natural resources, have been weakened by resource mismanagement and economic inequalities created by colonisation. Economic remediation in Central Africa must focus on rebuilding the foundations of local communities and integrating them into a sustainable development model. A development model based on a green economy, sustainable agriculture and ecotourism can offer a viable alternative while guaranteeing economic benefits for local communities.

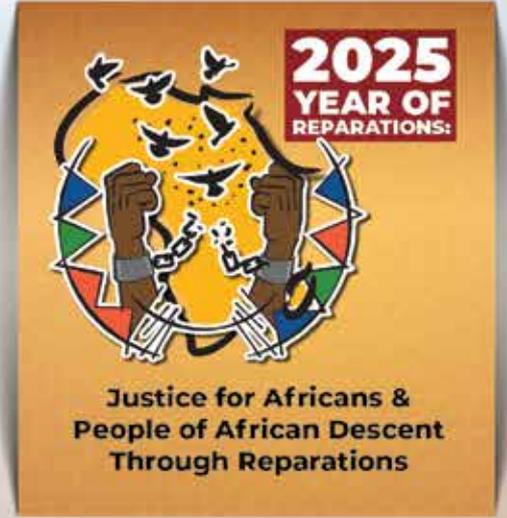
Ecotourism, which highlights natural parks, unique biodiversity and local cultural traditions, could become a major source of income for Central African countries. This would create jobs while preserving the environment and local cultures.

### **R**ole of regional and international institutions

Central African governments have an important role in implementing these reparations but cannot do it alone. Regional institutions, such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), must work with international organizations to fund and support environmental, cultural, and economic reparations initiatives through Win-Win partnerships.

By incorporating local cultural practices into ecosystem restoration efforts, promoting sustainable economies and creating equitable partnerships, Central Africa can right the wrongs of the past as well as build a more just and prosperous future.

This road to reparation and recovery is complex, but it is critical to ensuring real justice for the people of Central Africa. Ecological, cultural and economic reparations for Central Africa are not only a matter of justice but also a necessity to ensure environmental sustainability, social justice and economic development in the region.



**Africa's current debt burden exacerbated by opaque resource-backed loans and reinforced by international financial institutions is a direct legacy of colonial exploitation and resource extraction.**

**This burden is entrenched in historical injustices that have led to contemporary economic challenges**



# Reparation or transformation?

## Africa's path to economic sovereignty

By **Dr George Elombi**, President and Chairman of the Board of Directors, Afreximbank



The “Year of Reparations” presents a unique opportunity for historical reflection on the economic realities that have shaped our present and to firmly lay claim to a future in which Africans control the systems that govern their prosperity. True reparations should go beyond symbolic acknowledgement. They must also restore what was systematically taken away: agency, autonomy, and the ability to determine Africa’s own economic destiny. For decades, Africa traded under structures that were not designed for its benefit, systems that extracted value, restricted access, fragmented markets and entrenched dependency. The cost has been immense: lost wealth, lost opportunity, lost dignity and the loss of Africa’s rightful place in global value chains. Afreximbank’s mandate seeks to correct this imbalance. The Bank’s founding purpose to reshape the structure of Africa’s trade was conceived as a direct response to these historical inequities. What is required is not a symbolic gesture but a fundamental economic transformation. We are not asking for apologies or compensation; rather, we are asserting agency, demonstrating our capacity to define our future and operate from a position of strength. Through initiatives such as the Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF), the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), the AfCFTA Adjustment Fund, the Africa Trade Gateway ecosystem; including its Global Africa and Africa–Caribbean integration platforms, and the Afreximbank African Trade Centres (AATC),

we are rebuilding the architecture of African trade on African terms. This is economic reparation in action.

Africa’s trade constraints were never accidental. A fractured payment landscape, over-reliance on external currencies, restrictive infrastructure, and the absence of continent-wide value chains meant that African countries were often better connected to markets thousands of miles away than to their own neighbours.

To achieve justice for trade, Africa must dismantle these inherited barriers and replace them with systems designed to serve its citizenry’s interests. This is precisely the mission entrusted to Afreximbank.

Africa cannot trade unless it produces and it cannot produce unless it owns the systems that enable production, exchange and settlement. Our task therefore is not to simply finance trade, but also to build the foundations that make transformative trade possible: payment systems, industrial platforms, value chains, logistics corridors, and trade intelligence systems that are built for Africa and controlled by Africa. This will enable us to achieve our goal to anchor value addition within the continent and therefore ensure that Africa retains more of its wealth at home.

For too long, Africa has exported its raw materials, its young talent, and imported finished goods, and consequently its value and prosperity. This structural imbalance is the root of Africa’s development paradox.

Afreximbank’s work to catalyse value addition demonstrates what is possible when African resources are processed on the continent before they are exported. From the Special Economic Zones in Benin and Togo to the wood-processing revolution in Gabon and the transformative Dangote Refinery in Nigeria, we are witnessing the power of industrialisation to create jobs, retain wealth, and build self-sustaining economies.

When we produce, we trade. When we add value, we create wealth. And when wealth stays on the continent, development becomes irreversible.

For reparations to be truly impactful, they must be directed towards transformative investments on the continent rather than reduced to an exercise in income sharing. Financial transfers that are donated and consumed rather than invested risk reproducing the very dependency that reparations seek to dismantle. Afreximbank’s position is clear:

## For Africa, the “Year of Reparations” is not merely a moment for historical reflection. It is an opportunity to confront the economic realities that have shaped our present and to lay claim to a future in which Africans control the systems that govern their prosperity.

resources mobilised through reparative frameworks should be channelled into productive assets that expand Africa’s economic capacity by financing infrastructure, industrialisation, value chains, and institutions that generate sustained growth and shared prosperity. When reparations are deployed to build power plants, processing facilities, payment systems, and development finance institutions, they cease to be symbolic redress and become engines of structural change. This is how reparations restore agency..

### **Minerals processing: The frontline of Africa’s trade transformation**

If Africa is to rewrite its trade story, nowhere is the opportunity more striking or more urgent than in strategic minerals. Today, African nations collectively hold more than 40% of the world’s critical minerals, including cobalt, manganese, platinum group metals, copper and vast lithium reserves. Yet Africa captures only a small fraction of value because we export raw ores while importing finished components at many multiples of the price.

The era of exporting raw potential must end. Africa must no longer be the world’s warehouse of unprocessed minerals feeding global value chains while remaining excluded from the wealth they generate. Whether in batteries, electric mobility, energy storage, or advanced manufacturing, the future of global industry will be shaped by the very minerals found in African soil. Our future prosperity must therefore be shaped on African soil as well. Without processing, Africa cannot trade competitively or industrialise sustainably. Local processing of minerals is therefore one of the most important frontiers of reparative economic justice, enabling Africa to capture more of the value it creates and secure a stronger position in global manufacturing.

### **IATF: The marketplace of African self-determination**

In today’s competitive world with ever increasing protectionism and trade restrictions, countries will continue to impose various barriers to value added or manufacturing imports that compete with local production. Hence, African countries must look to internal markets, building and relying on regional and continental value chains. One such manifestation of this is the Intra African-Trade Fair (IATF).

IATF, conceived by Afreximbank and organised in partnership with the

African Union Commission and the AfCFTA Secretariat, has, since 2018, rewritten the narrative of African trade in real time. Over \$160 billion in trade and investment deals have been closed, cumulatively during the last four editions. This premium trade event has also brought together over 180,000 visitors and more than 6,500 exhibitors, showcasing Africa’s capacity to trade with itself at scale.

More importantly, the IATF has shattered a long-standing myth: that African demand does not exist or that African producers cannot meet African needs. Every fair proves quite the opposite. The appetite for African-made goods and services is immense, and the potential for intra-African trade is far greater than is wrongly assumed.

IATF has many success stories, among them the US\$2.9 billion Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project (Rufiji Dam), one of Africa’s largest energy infrastructure undertakings, which exemplifies a critical truth: value addition and the processing of Africa’s minerals and agricultural produce cannot advance without substantial investments in reliable power.

The Rufiji Dam is therefore not an isolated achievement, but one of several foundational steps being taken to build the local and regional energy capacity required to drive industrialisation across the continent.

### **PAPSS and the AfCFTA: Foundations of economic justice**

To trade freely, Africa must be able to pay freely. PAPSS is therefore one of the most significant instruments of reparative economic justice on the continent today. For the first time, African countries can trade and settle payments with each other in their local currencies without routing transactions through foreign correspondent banks or incurring the hidden costs of currency conversion.

Since its debut in West Africa in 2022, PAPSS has expanded significantly. As of December 2025, it connected 18 countries across four regions, bringing together more than 150 commercial banks and 14 national and regional switches. Northern Africa is advancing rapidly, with its leading economies such as Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria onboarding. This reflects growing trust in a system that is revolutionising how money moves across Africa and beyond.

At the inaugural PAPSS COWRY event in Lagos in December 2025, **AfCFTA Secretary-General H.E. Wamkele Mene** underscored a simple truth: *Africa cannot build an integrated market while relying on payment systems that sit outside the continent.* He described PAPSS as the backbone of AfCFTA implementation, a system that dismantles structural barriers, reduces the cost of trading, enhances liquidity, and unlocks opportunities for SMEs who were previously priced out of regional commerce. He pointedly mooted “why do two African countries who want to trade with each other require a third currency?”

I fully endorse H.E. Wamkele Mene’s point of view, noting that PAPSS is not just a payment switch; it is an instrument of sovereignty. Africa needs to own its payment rails, de-risk African trade from external shocks, and to give African businesses the predictability and simplicity required to scale across borders.

Afreximbank is also in the process of exploring the concept of a pan-African digital currency or stablecoin which would be a potential game-changer for financial integration.

Alongside PAPSS, the AfCFTA Adjustment Fund ensures that no country is left behind during the transition to a single African market. The Fund supports governments, industries, and SMEs to adapt to tariff changes, build competitiveness, and implement structural reforms, including the African Diaspora, which is part of the African Union’s sixth region. Together, PAPSS and AfCFTA form the policy, financial, and operational ecosystem required to make continental integration a lived reality rather than an aspiration.

### **Intra-African Trade: Building wealth that stays on the continent**

Economic reparations must restore power, not dependency. As an affirming, progressive pan-African collective, for instance, we must challenge all African countries to repatriate some of their capital reserves, held overseas, back to Africa to strengthen our development financial institutions. This is how we reclaim value that is, by right, our own, and channel it into mechanisms that reinforce our collective financial sovereignty. It is precisely within this context that the role of robust, African-owned institutions becomes indispensable. Afreximbank is helping build the institutional



foundation for a continent that trades, produces, and prospers on its own terms. Beyond capital repatriation, Africa must also direct the vast pools of long-term savings held in pension funds and sovereign wealth funds; tens of billions of dollars that too often sit in low-yield assets offshore towards productive opportunities at home. Deploying even a fraction of this capital into African financial institutions would transform the continent’s liquidity landscape and deepen our capacity to finance trade, infrastructure, and industrialisation on African terms. Afreximbank’s Central Bank Deposit Programme (CENDEP) is already demonstrating what is possible. By providing a secure, well-structured mechanism for African central banks to place part of their reserves within the continent, it strengthens Africa’s own financial system while keeping value circulating where it is most needed.

### **The African Medical Centre of Excellence & African Trade Centres: reclaiming strategic sectors**

Why should the life of Africans be in the hands of others? Why should others hold the ultimate decision on which African lives, and which one

▲▲  
**Afreximbank’s African Medical Centre of Excellence, Abuja, Nigeria**

doesn't? Why should Africans spend millions of US dollars plying for medical services outside the continent? We must take care of our own at home. The US\$300 million and 500-bed African Medical Centre of Excellence (AMCE) in Abuja represents a bold statement of health sovereignty. It reduces medical tourism, expands access to specialised care, and positions Africa to build high-skilled medical industries. In doing so, it tackles an historical injustice: Africa's over-reliance on overseas systems that drain resources and talent.

**Protecting African Institutions: stepping up and forward fighting for financial sovereignty**

Yet even as Africa builds institutions to reshape the continent's future, new threats have emerged. Recent coordinated attempts to undermine the Preferred Creditor Status (PCS) of African Multilateral Financial Institutions (AMFIs) are direct challenges to African sovereignty.

Unlike other institutions whose PCS is granted through goodwill, Afreximbank's PCS is enshrined in its Establishment Treaty. Attacks against it stem from the Bank's success and its growing ability to offer Africans an alternative to external conditionalities that restrict investment, weaken industries, and deepen dependency.

African governments must therefore continue to work with African multilateral and development financial institutions to defend this sovereignty. Without PCS and without strong African-owned banks, Africa will remain vulnerable and beholden to development pathways designed elsewhere. This moment requires unity, resolve, and an unambiguous assertion of Africa's right to chart its own economic path.

Africa possesses the human spirit, the resources, and the leadership to redefine its destiny. With the systems we are building today, we are not merely repairing the past we are securing the future. And in doing so, we affirm the enduring truth: Africans were never poor; we were simply excluded from the structures that created wealth.

Now, we are building our own.



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# The Urgent Need for a Truth-Telling Commission on British Imperialism: A Pathway to Justice and Reconciliation

By **Dr Asha Herten-Crabb**,

Fellow in International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science`

This article advocates for the establishment of an international Truth-Telling Commission on British Imperialism, to address the long-term impacts of colonialism in Africa. It outlines the need for reparative justice to document these historical injustices and reclaim looted cultural heritage as a basis for reparations.

## **A Truth-Telling Commission on British Imperialism as a Pathway to Reparations**

'In order to know where you're going you must know where you've come from. Even if it's in your face or hard to swallow, people need to know the true history in order to move forward. *Alice Pepper (First Peoples Assembly of Victoria Member, Australia) '*

The enduring legacy of British imperialism has profoundly shaped Africa's political, economic, and social landscape. From resource exploitation and forced labour to cultural erasure and violent suppression, the scars of colonization continue to affect African countries today. While political independence was achieved in the mid-20th century, the deeper, structural injustices left behind by British imperial rule have yet to be fully addressed in Britain, its former colonies, or the international order it helped to establish as its power waned. These unresolved grievances fuel ongoing inequalities, political instability, and economic challenges across the continent.

In recent years, global movements calling for justice and reparations for colonialism have gained momentum. In this context, a Truth-Tell-

ing Commission on British Imperialism (TTCBI) for Africa would offer a significant opportunity to confront these historical wrongs, document their long-term impacts, and chart a path towards justice and reconciliation. Such a Commission would not only acknowledge the suffering endured by African nations, communities, and individuals but also create a foundation for social healing alongside specific and systemic reparations. This article argues that establishing a TTCBI is a critical step toward reclaiming Africa's history and addressing the enduring consequences of British imperialism.

## **Why Truth-Telling is Essential for the Reparations Movement**

While the calls for reparations have grown ever louder over the last few decades, the majority of those in Britain remain apathetic or even proud of Britain's imperial past. This means that political pressure for reparations is currently limited and there is much work to be done to better educate British people on the realities of British imperialism, past and present. While grassroots movements and policy challenges from the African continent are critical to push forward the argument for specific and systemic reparations, it is equally important that those in



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**Mr. Rhodes Before the South Africa Committee**, circa 1897, (c1900). British imperialist, businessman and politician who played a dominant role in southern Africa, driving the annexation of vast swathes of land. He and his British South Africa Company founded the southern African territory of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe and Zambia), which the company named after him in 1895  
 © The Print Collector/Heritage Images via Getty Images

the financial and political halls of power – the United Nations Security Council, the UK government, the Boards of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade organisation (WTO), and the citizens of the Global North – are exposed to a deeper reckoning of the harms, past and present, of British imperialism. Ultimately, reparations will be a very hard sell in these spaces without a dramatic shift in the mindset of the average Western European who can contribute to pressuring their governments for change.

A Truth-Telling Commission on British Imperialism would provide a formal platform for African nations to document these harms and present a unified narrative of colonialism’s impacts. Truth-telling commissions have proven effective – albeit imperfect – in addressing historical injustices in other parts of the world, such as South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools. These commissions allowed victims to share their experiences, perpetrators to be held accountable, and nations to move forward with a collective understanding of their past.

In the African context, a TTCBI would similarly enable African voices to lead the discourse on colonialism. By documenting the crimes committed during British imperial rule – both the physical violence and the structural exploitation – a truth-telling process can facilitate a reckoning with the past and lay the foundation for reparative justice at the level of the global economy, cultural restitution, and international solidarity, which I outline in brief below.

**Economic Impacts of British Imperialism**

One of the most damaging legacies of British imperialism in Africa is the deep economic inequality it has left behind. Colonization was, at its core, an economic project aimed at extracting wealth from African nations and transferring it to Britain and other nations in Western Europe. African labour was exploited through forced work, and raw materials such as gold, diamonds, rubber, and other resources were plundered. The development of African infrastructure, including railways and ports, was designed not to benefit the local population but to facilitate the extraction of resources to Europe. The economic repercussions of these practices are still felt today. African countries

continue to struggle with unequal trade relationships and external debt burdens that were, in part, created during the colonial era. These structural inequalities have hindered Africa's ability to develop self-sufficient economies and achieve long-term stability.

A TTCBI would highlight the economic devastation caused by British imperial power and colonial rule and create the moral and legal basis for reparations. It could pave the way for reparative justice measures, including debt cancellation, trade reforms, and compensation for the theft of African resources and labour power. African policymakers could leverage the findings of the TTCBI to negotiate with Britain and in places where Britain holds some power, such as the G7, for meaningful economic reparations that address these historical wrongs and facilitate Africa's future development. The restitution of stolen wealth could fund infrastructure projects, education, healthcare, and sustainable development initiatives across the continent.

### **Restitution of Cultural Property**

The looting of African cultural artifacts during British imperial rule was both a theft of material goods and a dehumanization and erasure of African identity, justifying exploitation. Countless objects of cultural significance - artworks, religious artifacts, manuscripts - were taken from African nations and placed in British museums, private collections, and universities.

A TTCBI would play a key role in documenting the scale of cultural theft and advocating for the restitution of these items. The 2021 Continental Experts Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage, organized by the African Union (AU), laid the groundwork for this process by developing a common African position on restitution. However, further political momentum is needed to ensure that African cultural heritage is returned to its rightful owners. A Truth-Telling Commission would provide the necessary platform to negotiate the return of these artifacts, while also fostering a broader dialogue on the importance of cultural restoration for national identity and healing.

### **International Solidarity: A Collective Approach to Truth and Justice**

As is well understood by African policymakers, the legacy of British imperialism extends beyond the African continent to the African diaspora, with millions of people of African descent in Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean continuing to experience racial discrimination, economic marginalization, and cultural erasure. A Truth-Telling Commission on British Imperialism would also be relevant to these diaspora communities, providing a platform for their voices to be heard and their experiences to be acknowledged.

By working in solidarity with diaspora movements, such as the Pan-African Reparations Coalition in Europe and the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on African Reparations, African policymakers can build a global coalition for reparative justice. The African Union's collaboration with CARICOM on the African Caribbean Joint Mechanism on Reparative Justice is a promising step in this direction. A TTCBI would further strengthen these ties, and ensure that the fight for reparations is a truly global movement, uniting Africa and its diaspora in the pursuit of justice.

The need for a Truth-Telling Commission on British Imperialism is both urgent and profound. Such a commission offers an opportunity to confront the enduring legacies of colonialism, document the harms inflicted by British imperial rule, and seek justice through reparations to build a future free from the structural inequalities imposed by imperialism. By addressing the economic, political, and cultural impacts of British imperialism, a Truth-Telling Commission would lay the groundwork for reparative justice, providing a pathway to healing, reconciliation, and sustainable development.



**Justice for Africans & People of African Descent Through Reparations**



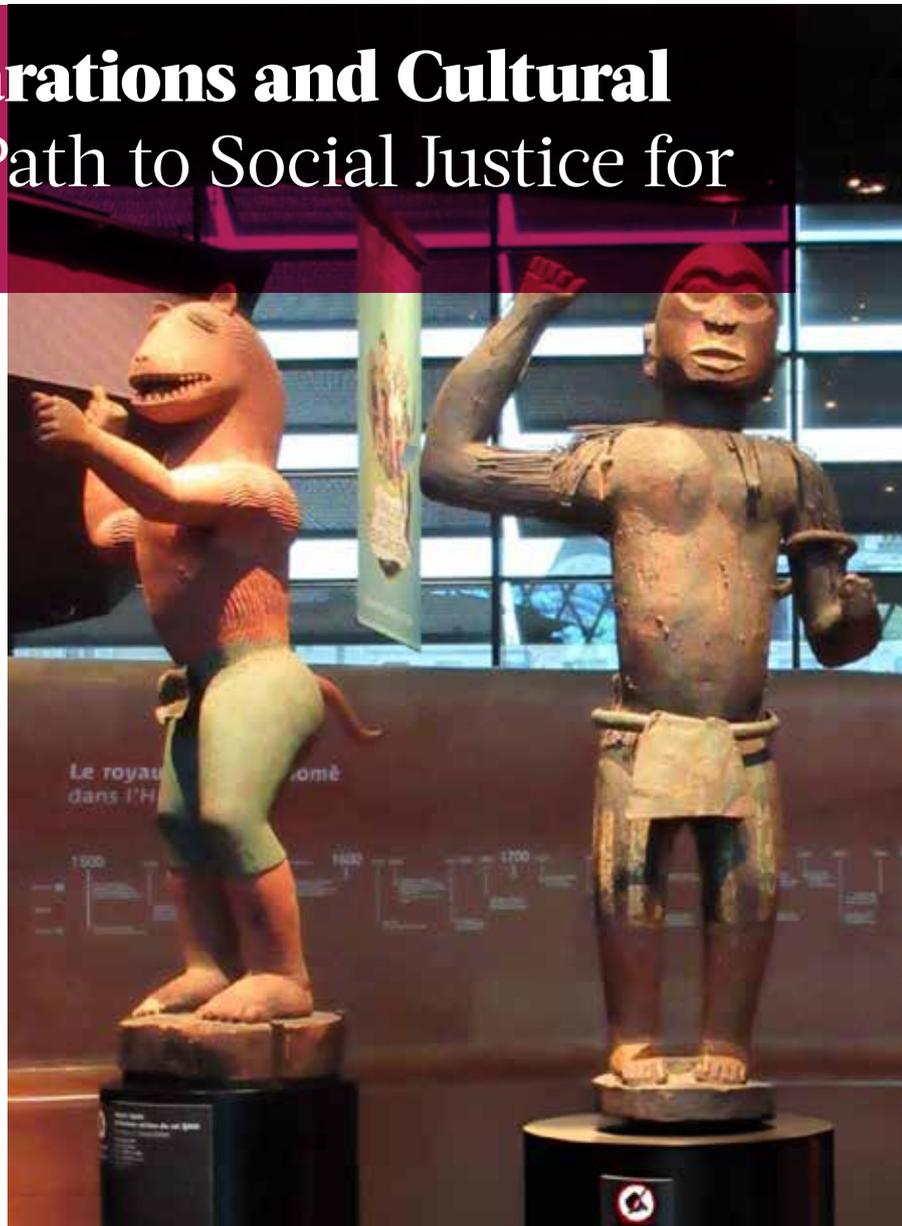
**We demand the unconditional return of STOLEN historical or culturally significant artifacts and human remains to their countries and communities of origin**

# Economic Reparations and Cultural Restitution: A Path to Social Justice for Africans

The years of colonial rule not only imposed economic underdevelopment, political oppression, and psychological trauma but also set many African states back and robbed them of the opportunity for equal development as the Western world. The result of this systemic contraction is expressed in the present-day imbalanced development between the Global North and Global South. Colonization and the resultant neo-colonial world order are intertwined and characterized by an enduring legacy of crimes, prejudice, segregation, injustice, violations of human rights and abuses coupled with economic exploitation, and the plundering of resources, including artifacts. This has sparked a demand for reparations and restitution.

Meanwhile, attempts at reparation, repatriation, and restitution have largely ignored the rights of victims, as negotiations are made with neo-colonial governments in Africa, who in often cases may continue to represent the interests of the erstwhile colonial powers. Moreover, amid these calls, the global community has not made any serious effort to acknowledge or address these injustices.

To this end, the idea of social justice against years of colonial rule remains elusive while the “moral debt owed to the African peoples is yet to be paid.”<sup>1</sup> To address this, attention must be focused on the economic and cultural dimensions of social justice. Violations of economic and cultural rights exacerbate tension and foster further injustice. The looting of cultural paraphernalia connotes an invasion of property



rights and encourages unequal distribution of wealth.<sup>2</sup> Considering that these cultural items hold economic value, their reparations will add to the wealth of victims and promote a just society that is integral for sustainable peace. Attention must therefore be paid to reparations and restitution not merely as financial compensations but as essential mechanisms for healing, cultural identity reclamation, societal empowerment and for psychological closure.



▲▲  
 Large royal statues of the Kingdom of Dahomey from the years 1890-1892 in the Musée du quai Branly - Jacques. Dahomey was a West African kingdom and predecessor of the modern republic of Benin. Paris, France

© Sabine Glaubitz/picture alliance via Getty Images

### Historical Context

Economic injustice in Africa is rooted in the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and colonial subjugation. The former was characterized by the extraction and commodification of human lives, thus entrenching a regime of inequality, social hierarchy, and economic stratification, necessitating the emergence of powerful elites in pre-colonial African states. By transitioning to the latter phase, these inequalities became entrenched as European powers imposed coercive institutions and economic systems that were designed to extract resources for their benefit. This has transformed the landscape of economic inequality and deepened socioeconomic disparities. The colonial legacy of centralized authority and control of natural resources continued in the post-colonial state, as resource-rich countries remained enmeshed in exploitation, inequality, injustice, and violence, centred on resource control and access.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the struggle for reparations and restitution remains crucial in confronting historical injustices and creating sustainable pathways for social justice.

By framing reparations as an essential component of the broader agenda for social justice, the Abuja Proclamation acknowledged the “damage done to Africa and its Diaspora by enslavement, colonization, and neo-colonialism” (p.1) and advocated for a comprehensive approach that encompasses both financial compensation and the return of stolen artifacts

and other traditional treasuries. This approach is crucial for addressing historical injustices, fostering a sense of identity and dignity among the African people, and helping Africans dominate the narrative of reparations. Africans must continuously lead discussions regarding their heritage and the reclamation of their identity through cultural representation. This would help to shift the narrative from victimhood to empowerment and agency.

### Economic Reparations and Cultural Restitution

Economic reparation is a central theme in broader reparative justice discourse. This refers to the financial compensation granted to victims or their descendants for injustices associated with slavery, colonization, or systemic exploitation. The Accra Proclamation addresses “historical injustices and injurious crimes committed against Africans and people of African descent” (p.1).<sup>4</sup> Among other things, the Proclamation expresses a commitment to establishing a Global Reparations Fund that would enable African nations to seek financial redress and promote economic development initiatives that benefit communities affected by historical injustices. However, beyond financial compensation, economic reparations must prioritize investments in critical areas

such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. By channelling reparative measures into these sectors, African nations can address the legacies of exploitation and build a foundation for sustainable development. Meanwhile, the call to reform global financial systems, recommended in the Accra Proclamation, is essential to dismantle the neo-colonial structures that perpetuate economic disparities. The challenge remains how African countries would combine efforts to influence the 'global' financial system, much less reform it.

Cultural restitution is essential for the movement toward reparations. This involves returning lost or stolen historical or culturally significant artifacts and human remains to their countries of origin. This process seeks to address the injustices of colonialism and people's forceful disconnection from their heritage through the looting of their treasure.<sup>5</sup> This is essential in Africa, where historical artifacts looted during colonialism have become prized possessions at museums across Europe. Cultural restitution transcends the reclamation of objects. It is a movement for healing, closure, and social justice, as the continued retention of these cultural treasures in foreign countries symbolizes neo-cultural colonial domination. Thus, cultural restitution indicates cultural renaissance, the return of a country or community's pride, and emphasizes its national identity and cohesion while providing a sense of belonging to the younger generation. As expressed in the Accra Proclamation, it is critical that African experts establish "networks of African cultural experts, policymakers, certified dealers and auctioneers, and museum curators, among others, working in combatting illicit trafficking in cultural property and heritage" (p.6).<sup>6</sup>

While the African Union's Annual Report for 2021 records significant milestones towards restitution including the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance and the Great Museum of Africa (GMA)<sup>7</sup>, significant legal, ethical and practical challenges persist. For instance, establishing rightful ownership and determining the origin of a cultural item may be stalled by a complex web of international laws, inconsistent documentation and collaboration between source communities. More so, claims that

African countries lack the resources to receive, preserve and manage repatriated objects has sparked resistance from some museums and collectors.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is essential that the African Union pays more attention to capacity building of indigenous countries in sustainable management. It should prioritize the inclusion of the civil society and local communities in restitution efforts, whilst developing clear guidelines on the timeline for restitution, and how Member States can ensure the protection and preservation of repatriated items.

### **Engaging the Diaspora: A Transcontinental Approach**

The idea of diaspora involvement is crucial to the reparation movement. The Accra Proclamation mentions the need "to consider the establishment of an AU diaspora-wide program of action in pursuit of the objective of realizing a global African community" (p. 2) while the African Union mentions elsewhere that "the payment of reparations and granting of reparatory justice to Africa and the African Diaspora is one of the pillars of sustainable socio-economic development in Africa" (p. 2).<sup>10</sup> Taken together, these instruments underscore the critical role of the diaspora in advancing economic reparations and cultural restitution for social justice. For one, the diaspora is symbolic of leveraging global influence and presenting a united yet transnational front in the demand for justice. This community possesses unique access to platforms to pressure international bodies and promote the visibility and legitimacy of the reparation movement. The strengthening of a transcontinental partnership framework will facilitate collaboration between African nations, the diaspora, and global partners. Such partnerships can amplify the call for reparations and foster solidarity among marginalized communities worldwide. The AU must continue to leverage the alliance of the diaspora in promoting awareness of economic reparation and cultural restitution as well as taking on the role of information and knowledge transfer in the reparation campaign.





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**Musee du Quai Branly Museum**  
 with a collection of 300,000 pieces  
 of indigenous artwork collected for  
 centuries by France from Africa, the  
 Americas, Oceania and Asia - In the  
 background: Iniet sculpture, rare  
 by its size (Snake mythology, Toli  
 population) and Masks from Papua New  
 Guinea, Paris, France  
 © Raphael GAILLARDE/Gamma-Rapho  
 via Getty Images

### Agenda 2063: A Vision for a Transformed Africa

The Agenda 2063 framework envisions a plan for a transformed Africa by shifting focus from the struggle for independence to prioritizing integration, security, democratic governance, and economic development. To achieve this, it is essential to incorporate mechanisms to showcase the achievements of economic reparations and cultural restitution as essential elements of economic development and inclusion such as making social justice one of the indicators for measur-

ing people-centred development. By pushing for economic reparations and cultural restitution, Africa is better poised to demonstrate its commitment to justice and equity. As a result, it is imperative that the AU continue to emphasize arts, culture, and heritage as essential levers for achieving a unified and prosperous Africa. ■

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# Namibia's Urgent Call for Justice and Why Germany's Genocide Apology Is Not Enough

By **Frida Frans**, ffrida207@gmail.com

For centuries, Africa has endured the profound and lasting consequences of colonial exploitation, systemic dispossession, and historical injustices that have shaped its socio-economic and political landscape. From the transatlantic slave trade to the brutal era

of European imperialism, the continent has borne the weight of oppression, resource plunder, and cultural erasure, leaving deep scars that persist to this day. Namibia is no exception to this. The genocide committed by German colonial forces against the Ovaherero and Nama people between 1904 and 1908 stands as one of the earliest record-



German troops killed up to 80,000 of Herero and Nama people in what is now Namibia between 1904 and 1908 in response to an anti-colonial uprising. © ullstein bild/Getty Images

**“Performative Reconciliation,”** wherein former imperial states engage in diplomatic expressions of remorse without implementing meaningful restitution or structural redress.



**BARKAN, 2001**

**“Post-Colonial Moral Diplomacy,”** where former imperial states seek to control historical narratives while deflecting full responsibility for past atrocities.



**COOPER, 2005**

ed genocides of the 20th century. The mass killings, land dispossession, and cultural erasure perpetrated during this period remain an unresolved historical injustice. Although Germany formally acknowledged this genocide in 2021, its proposed reparations package, which was referred to a development aid fund worth €1.1 billion over 30 years, has been widely criticised for its inadequacy and lack of direct reparative justice (Zeller, 2021). This article examines the ongoing negotiations and Namibia’s unrelenting push for a comprehensive and legally binding reparations framework, grounded in historical justice, post-colonial reparatory theory, and transitional justice paradigms.

**The Genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama as a Crime Against Humanity**

The Ovaherero and Nama genocide meets the criteria of a crime against humanity under international law, particularly the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Lempinen, 2020). Historical records show that up to 80% of the Ovaherero and 40% of the Nama population were exterminated through forced displacement, starvation policies, and mass executions in concentration camps (Zimmerer, 2008). The genocide was compounded by the systematic expropriation of indigenous lands and livestock, resulting in long-term economic disenfranchisement (Gewald, 1999). The historical trauma and inter-generational consequences of these crimes persist today, fueling Namibia’s demand for reparations that extend beyond symbolic gestures.

**The Political Calculus of Germany’s Apology**

The 2021 declaration by then German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, recognising the genocide, was deliberately structured to mitigate Germany’s legal exposure while simultaneously addressing both domestic and international political sensitivities. By carefully selecting language that could trigger binding legal obligations under international law, the statement exemplifies a broader trend among former colonial powers offering symbolic acknowledgments without committing to substantive reparative measures, a pattern extensively analysed by Moses (2020). This further aligns with the theoretical framework of “performative reconciliation,” wherein former imperial states engage in diplomatic expressions of remorse without implementing meaningful restitution or structural redress (Barkan, 2001). Such an approach underscores the limitations of state-led reconciliation efforts that prioritise political expediency over genuine historical accountability.

Critically, the timing of Germany's announcement raises concerns about its sincerity. The statement coincided with France's public reckoning with its colonial role in the Rwandan genocide, leading analysts to suggest that Germany's move was not purely motivated by historical accountability but rather by geopolitical calculations and diplomatic image management (Melber, 2021). This strategic positioning reflects what some scholars describe as "post-colonial moral diplomacy," where former imperial states seek to control historical narratives while deflecting full responsibility for past atrocities (Cooper, 2005).

Beyond these political considerations, the procedural weaknesses of the negotiations further undermine the legitimacy of Germany's proposed settlement. The exclusion of traditional leaders and affected communities from direct participation contradicts fundamental principles of transitional justice and violates the doctrine of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), a cornerstone of international human rights law designed to protect indigenous and historically marginalised populations (Anaya, 2009). This exclusion reflects a continuation of colonial-era paternalism, wherein external actors dictate the terms of engagement without fully recognising the agency and self-determination of affected communities.

Moreover, the failure to integrate affected communities into the negotiation process contradicts established frameworks in reparative justice, such as the UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation, which emphasise victim-centered approaches in addressing historical wrongs (UN General Assembly, 2005). Without direct participation and consensus from the Ovaherero and Nama descendants, Germany's financial commitment risks being perceived as a development aid package rather than a genuine reparation mechanism. Consequently, the settlement, as it stands, not only falls short of addressing the intergenerational harm inflicted by genocide, but also perpetuates historical patterns of exclusion and marginalisation.

### **Development Aid vs. Reparative Justice**

One of the most contentious aspects of the current agreement is the framing of the €1.1 billion as development aid rather than direct reparations. Reparative justice requires restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition (Barkan, 2000). Development aid, in contrast, is discretionary, subject to political conditions, and does not constitute a legal admission of wrongdoing (Hickel, 2017). By categorising the funds as aid, Germany perpetuates a neocolonial model of donor-recipient relationships rather than acknowledging its historical debt.

Moreover, the lack of transparency regarding the fund's administration raises concerns about whether affected communities will directly benefit. The creation of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) managed by genocide descendants has been proposed as a means to ensure community-led decision-making in fund allocation (Nandi-Ndaitwah, 2023). However, such a mechanism must be embedded in a legally binding reparations framework to prevent political interference.

Germany's reluctance to provide direct reparations to Namibia stands in stark contrast to its approach to Holocaust reparations. Following World War II, Germany established the Luxembourg Agreement (1952), which provided financial restitution to Jewish survivors and institutions (Schneider, 2006). This legal precedent strengthens Namibia's case for direct reparations, highlighting the racialised disparities in reparatory justice. Similar claims have been made by Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo against Belgium and Germany, demanding financial redress for colonial atrocities (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2022).

**Namibia’s Renewed Push:  
A Deadline for Justice**

Namibia’s President, Dr. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, has reaffirmed her commitment to securing a fair reparations deal by 2026. She has called for renegotiations to increase the compensation package and ensure that the affected communities directly benefit from any agreement (BBC, 2024). The government is also exploring mechanisms such as a special purpose vehicle managed by descendants of genocide victims to oversee reparations distribution. The pressing nature of these negotiations is undeniable. However, domestic opposition persists, with the Landless People’s Movement and 11 traditional authorities formally challenging the Joint Declaration. They argue that it inadequately addresses the economic and psychological aftermath of colonial violence. In response, legal scholars have suggested invoking the International Court of Justice (ICJ) under the principle of state responsibility for wrongful acts (Crawford, 2019).

In conclusion, it is important to mention that Namibia’s call for reparations is not merely about financial compensation; it is about historical accountability, economic restitution, and the dismantling of enduring colonial structures. Germany’s current proposition is insufficient, both in monetary terms and in its failure to acknowledge the full extent of harm inflicted. As international discourse on reparative justice gains traction, Namibia remains steadfast in its pursuit of a legally binding and community-driven reparations framework. The world

is watching, and the deadline is tight. Justice must be served!

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# Quantifying and Qualifying: The Sounds of Reparations for Global Africa

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This essay explores the possibilities of reparations pertaining to musical culture, also understood as a part of 'intellectual property,' to Africans globally. I use the illuminating work of African American lawyer Kevin Greene who advocates for reparations from the United States music industry, to argue the same for Africans on the continent and the diaspora more broadly. Finally, I argue that through exploring the economic restoration of African intellectual property, we might imagine reparations in a form which is enduring and wholly beneficial to the masses of African peoples.

Since the Abuja Declaration of 1993, the steady call for the return of 'stolen goods, artefacts and other traditional treasures,' has highlighted Africa's historical and global cultural importance. While we can estimate the number of looted artefacts globally, there is perhaps no unit measurement which could accurately quantify Africa's cultural impact dating from antiquity. Items looted since the arrival of the Portuguese on the West African coast in 1418 is only the surface of much larger, drawn-out history in which African culture has been expropriated for profit. While these artefacts hang in a neo-colonial purgatory, and notwithstanding the looting of instruments, there has been a more serpentine expropriation of African culture in the distribution of music. There is little room

to argue the impact of black music on popular culture, an epicentre of the imperial economy. So profound is the impact, and at the same time, equally profound is the exploitation of the artists and art forms.

Intellectual property lawyer Kevin Greene has emerged in the last decade as the leader in advocating for reparations from the music industry. Although Greene argues solely in the context of African American artistry, his work has obvious implications for Africans in the diaspora more broadly and for those on the continent. Greene has argued that ‘the furnace of slavery forged black creation in the arts. Slaves resisted oppression in part by “creating new expressive forms out of African traditions”’ (Greene 1187). Moreover, creative property was the one form of property that could not be wholly taken during the Middle Passage from Africa and the transition to America. Although “by and large the black man came to America empty-handed...what he contained in his head...could not be so easily be stripped from him as his physical possessions. (1217)

Greene argues that ‘the early music industry was built largely on the creativity and innovation of black composers and artists’ who ‘created virtually every original American musical genre and profoundly influenced the development of popular music and culture’ (Greene 1188). This began with minstrelsy, the “first and most popular form of mass culture in the nineteenth-century United States” (Greene 1190) in which white musicians in black-face would pirate and disfigure African American performance traditions. Eventually, black musicians themselves would step into the minstrelsy industry, opening up further pathways for black entertainers to bring authentic music to the public.

The legacy of cultural piracy is wholly connected to the systematic financial exploitation of black musicians and creatives. The ‘pattern of appropriation is still in place today,’ Greene argues. Within the formative years of blues and jazz, white musicians were systematically credited and economically rewarded for music and songs which were created by black cre-

atives who seldom received any reward. Thus, Greene comments that ‘the financial control of minstrelsy, with regards to rap music, is retained by whites, “even though the success of [minstrel] troupes depended on black stars”’ (Greene 1191). The modern-day United States music industry, perhaps the most coveted in the world, emerged from the Antebellum period, the birth and end of Reconstruction, and the beginning of Jim Crow. Consequently, much of the economic and intellectual property control within the music industry was and still has been ‘situated in a matrix hostile to both black cultural production and to black economic autonomy’ (1217).

However, it is not just Africans born in the Atlantic world who have undergone the expropriation of their intellectual property. On the continent there was the rise of stars like Fela Kuti, Mariam Makeba, and Mulatu Astatke who entered the mainstream Western music industry in the second half of the twentieth century. Though the legacy of twenty first century continental African musicians would pave the way, with the rise of megastars like Burna Boy, Ayra Starr, and Musa Keys, and unprecedented ability of mass digital distribution of both culture (image and sound), it seems that Africans globally must consider the potential of cultural capital more seriously. From rumba, to reggae, to afrobeat, it is clear that ‘creative intellectual property also belongs in the debate on reparations because inventive and creative activity constituted a significant economic component of black society’ (Greene 1217).

Because the socio-economic benefits gained through the exploitation of Africa and Africans are still being perpetually reaped today, it is critical that any demand for reparations is also situated in longevity. Indeed, the Abuja declaration asserts cognizance ‘of the fact that compensation for injustice need not necessarily be paid only in capital transfer but could include service to the victims or other forms of restitution and readjustment of the relationship agreeable to both parties.’ ‘Readjustment of the relationship,’ is the key phrase here, as it points to the ever-present link between Africans and their



Sierra Leone musician Asadata Dafora (1890–1965) demonstrates African dance and rhythm to the beating of an African drum, as he sits beside two Africa dancers, circa 1940. Dafora was one of the first Africans to introduce African drumming music to the wider world  
© FPG/Archive Photos/Getty Images

former colonisers, a relationship which must be empirically managed for the foreseeable future. This is the consequence of an imperialist mindset which refuses to die, but must be kept in check, and thus reparations in terms of a calculated lump-sum, for example, is an inadequate approach. There must be systematic changes in the relationship, and this is why reparations for intellectual property such as music challenges us to think more critically about the nature of our demands. If colonial powers have been and are currently reaping benefits rooted in the disfiguration of Africa and Africans, so should there be perpetual benefits to the victims of their exploitation. And if perpetual benefit to the Africans means the demise of benefits to the colonial powers, then that explicitly indicates the relationship of exploitation that carried on prior.

As a lawyer, Greene has advocated for systematic reparations in the form of amending the discriminatory contracts which have plagued modern-era black musicians and creatives. At the same time, it is clear that in 'matrix hostile to both black cultural production and to black economic autonomy,' amendments are but another bandage for deep and still open wounds. It is the proactiveness and imagination of Africans which is here called into question. At the 2023 Accra conference it was declared that, 'African experts should endeavour to establish networks of African cultural experts, policy-makers, certified dealers and auctioneers, and museum curators, among others, working in combatting illicit trafficking in cultural property and heritage.'

What this general goal of 'combatting illicit trafficking' and amendments to contracts have in common is that both approaches seek to insert themselves into a prefigured circumstance which was designed to disadvantage black creatives. On one hand, to combat illicit trafficking implies a defensive position towards a continued legacy of looting and misappropriation. On the other hand, to amend a contract rather than change entirely the terms of agreement, as we have seen historically, is almost guaranteed to leave the fundamental power dynamic unchanged.

Rather, just like physical land and resources, Africans must gain control of their intellectual property. We must seriously consider 'cultural capital' as valuable in economic terms while also framing it in its social importance. At the Abuja conference, it was declared Africans must have conviction that 'the pursuit of reparations by the African peoples on the continent and in the Diaspora will itself be a learning experience in self-discovery and in uniting experience politically and psychologically.' Indeed, music has been an indispensable unifier of African peoples across the globe. At the 2012 conference in Ethiopia, it was declared that efforts should be put toward evolving a 'fundamental law that will improve and consolidate the bonds of our common ancestry and guide the evolution and pattern of our relationship as a basis for strengthening the collective impact of African people in the global environment.' To pursue not just reparations for intellectual property, but to also economically and structurally control said intellectual property is part of the fulfilment of this effort. Pan-African institutions capable of economically and structurally supporting the world's leading sounds must be erected, and must be at the forefront of repairing, securing, and protecting the rights of both contemporary and past black musical creatives.

But such a reorganisation of the music industry will not be easy. It comes with the hindsight of mistakes of the 'first generation of African leaders' (E. Akyeampong) and nation-builders across the globe. In attempts to invigorate the nationalist project fought so hard for in the revolutionary period, many leaders resorted to censorship and ultimately mismanaged cultural capital. The mistrust and scepticism of black leadership persists today, and if we are to regain control of our physical and intellectual resources, that trust must be rebuilt. If we are seeking to rectify the exploitation of our physical and intellectual property, neither concessions nor a cash-drop is sufficient. We must have an organised, not uniform, pan-African ideology whose only goal is the preservation and flourishing of the economic and cultural capital of Africans everywhere, as a means of serving the billions of Africans who inhabit each continent. ■



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**Most of the laws  
prohibiting restitution  
were enacted long after  
the work in question  
was taken, or in some  
cases, in order to justify  
criminal activity**



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# Reparations for Colonialism: A Human Rights-Based Approach to Climate Justice in Africa

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## The Link Between Colonization and Climate Change in Africa: The Burgeoning Legacy in Africa's Struggle

The colonization of the African continent and the exploitation of its people and its natural resources is one of the worst historical injustices that is yet to be formally acknowledged by the perpetrators. Moreover, this is not a mere historical issue, the continuation of colonial structures and processes that result in the exploitation of people and natural resources, are present today in various manners. The Durban Declaration recognizes that African and people of African descent continue to be victims of the consequences of colonization. One of the most glaring manifestations of the continued impact of colonization is the disproportional adverse impact of climate change on Africans.

It is usually noted that we live in the epoch of Anthropocene, a geological period characterized by "significant human-driven changes to the structure and functioning of the Earth System, including the climate system." The Anthropocene is mainly characterized by the Anthropogenic Green House Gas (GHG) emissions that have resulted in climate change. However, scholars contest the use of the term Anthropocene as it contains an implicit assumption that all humans have collectively contributed to climate change. Some scholars remark that the term "assumes that the climate crisis is caused by universal human nature,

rather than the actions of a minority of colonialists, capitalists, and patriarchs"

Climate change is largely a result of GHG emissions through the industrialization activities of global north countries over the past century. Colonial states "have benefited from historical and current carbon emissions for their development, taking up more than their fair share of the 'atmospheric budget.'" One of the most consequential conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), on the question of climate justice in Africa is the acknowledgement of the nexus between colonialism and climate change. The IPCC, in its 2022 sixth assessment report, noted the following: "Vulnerability of ecosystems and people to climate change differs substantially among and within regions ... driven by patterns

**Colonial states "have benefited from historical and current carbon emissions for their development, taking up more than their fair share of the 'atmospheric budget.'**

of intersecting socio-economic development, ... inequity, marginalization, historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism, and governance.”).

There is a complex connection between colonialism and climate change in Africa. and evidence of direct and indirect link between colonization and climate change continues to emerge, supported by research in different disciplines. Colonial exploitation extracted resources and wealth from Africa, leaving it more vulnerable to climate impacts today.

The Accra Proclamation on Reparations acknowledges the connection of colonization with climate injustice affecting Africans past and present. It notes that, “descendants of the victims of Trans-Atlantic enslavement and colonialism have also been exposed to the dangers of climate change, including the impact of environmental damage caused by the exploitative forces of colonialism and through the forced relocation of enslaved African labour to other regions.”

The legacy of colonial exploitation is evident in the way resources were appropriated during colonial times for industrial purposes, with contemporary versions of this seen in extractive industries like mining and logging, often controlled by foreign companies. Historically, practices such as the banning of subsistence farming by former French colonizers in several parts of Africa and the forced shift to cash crop cultivation are cited as the causes of ‘desertification’. Such practices are connected with the increased vulnerability of the continent to the adverse impacts of climate change, significantly hampering food security, among others.

**Ongoing Climate Action:  
A Manifestation of the Neo-Colonial Order**

In the current climate action discourse, Africa is primarily seen as a ‘carbon sink’ and source of minerals for clean energy. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Development, Surya Deva notes the self-defeating nature of the “current mitigation and adaptation strategies operating within a neo-liberal, neo-colonial capitalist economy” For instance, while it is acknowledged that there is a need to convert

large areas of land for agricultural production to ensure food security of the fast growing population in the continent, “there is massive interest in using African landscapes to store carbon and offset global carbon emissions.” The soaring demand for ‘clean energy’ in climate action is driving a new wave of resource exploitation in Africa, particularly in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is the world's largest producer of cobalt. It is also important to underscore that former colonial states continue to overutilize their unfair share of the carbon budget. It is estimated that “the average person in Britain emits more carbon in the first two weeks of a year than the average per capita emissions in Rwanda, Malawi, Ethiopia, Uganda, Madagascar, Guinea and Burkina Faso combined.”

**Prospects: The role of African states and the African Union**

The global north, which benefited from colonialism and industrialization, has a responsibility to provide climate reparations to African nations. Reparations anchored on human rights-based climate justice can be done “in the form of monetary compensation, land and natural resource allocation, and debt cancellation” Comprehensive reparations should also include structural changes in global economic systems to ensure climate justice for affected regions.

African nations and other global south countries are to be credited for their relentless efforts in incorporating loss and damage in climate change frameworks and for the cardinal principle of climate law, Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). Accordingly, “responsibilities should be proportional to contributions” and with consideration for the impact of colonization in the reduction of state capacity. The institutionalization of loss and damage along with the CBDR-RC are key in the path towards reparations for climate injustice that is tied with colonial legacies and continued neo-colonial structures.

Counties in the global north continuously evade providing reparations for colonialism; similarly,

they continue to resist a rights-based-framework for climate change loss and damage. Hence it is important to take necessary measures to ascertain human rights based legal responsibility and thereby the correlating duty to guarantee reparations. In this regard, it is crucial to commend the historic participation of the African Union in the ongoing advisory opinion proceedings at the International Court of Justice, on the obligations of states in the climate crisis. It is notable that the input by the Office of Legal Counsel of the African Union Commission (AUC) covers avenues for African countries to seek comprehensive reparations under international law, encompassing both restitution and compensation for material and moral damages caused by climate change.

While these are commendable efforts by the AUC and individual African countries, significant steps need to be taken towards enforcement of obligations anchored on human rights and environmental law principles, with recognition of links with colonial legacy and neo-colonialism. As noted by Deva in his landmark report to the UN General Assembly, the needed transformation to a “human rights economy” requires the transformation of the international financial architecture that “continues the colonized legacy of hegemonic dominance and systemically discriminates against developing countries and their peoples’ right to development.” Considering the intricate link between colonization, the impact of climate change in Africa and the associated minimal

capacity of African states to address climate change; comprehensive reparation for climate injustice should be one of the key pillars of reparation for colonization. ■

**Historically, practices such as the banning of subsistence farming by former colonizers in several parts of Africa and the forced shift to cash crop cultivation are cited as the causes of ‘desertification’. Such practices are connected with the increased vulnerability of the continent to the adverse impacts of climate change, significantly hampering food security**

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**The issue is not only  
about who owns  
stolen artefacts but  
also who decides  
who sees them, how  
they are displayed,  
how they are  
documented**

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# Reparations in Action: The Evanston Model, California Land Return, and Tulsa's Quest for Justice

This paper explores contemporary reparations movements for African Americans in the United States, focusing on three pivotal examples: the Evanston, Illinois reparations program, the return of Bruce's Beach to the descendants of its original African American owners in California, and the ongoing legal battles for reparations related to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. These cases demonstrate the growing recognition of reparative justice and the potential for localized initiatives to address historical racial injustices. The analysis connects these cases to the African Union's Agenda 2063, which advocates for reparations and restorative justice for Africans and people of African descent. The paper emphasizes that reparations are not just about financial compensation but encompass economic, cultural, and social restoration.

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## INTRODUCTION

The issue of reparations for African Americans has gained new momentum in recent years, with local and state-level initiatives demonstrating that meaningful reparative justice is possible. While federal reparations efforts in the United States remain limited,

In an aerial view, Bruce's Beach (C) is wedged between expensive real estate. The beachfront property was once a seaside resort owned by Charles and Willa Bruce, a Black couple, which catered to African Americans. Amid the Jim Crow era, the city claimed the property in 1924 through eminent domain while vastly underpaying the couple for the land

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specific cases such as the Evanston, Illinois reparations program, the return of Bruce's Beach in California, and the ongoing fight for reparations for the Tulsa Race Massacre are setting precedents for future efforts (Coates, 2014; Darity & Mullen, 2020).

These cases are part of a larger global movement for reparations, including those outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063, which seeks to address the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racial violence. This paper examines the specific examples of reparations in Evanston, California, and Tulsa, connecting them to the global discourse on reparations and restorative justice

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON REPARATIONS

The global call for reparations is grounded in historical injustices that date back to the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, segregation, and systemic racial violence. Reparations are not a new demand. They have been a part of international discussions on racial justice for decades, as exemplified by the 2001 Durban Declaration and the African Union's Abuja Proclamation (United Nations, 2001; African Union, n.d.).

In the United States, reparations have primarily been discussed in relation to slavery, but they

also encompass restitution for discriminatory policies, land theft, and violent racial attacks. The cases of Evanston, Bruce's Beach, and Tulsa illustrate how localized efforts can address specific historical injustices while contributing to the broader movement for reparative justice.

### THE EVANSTON REPARATIONS PROGRAM

In 2021, Evanston, Illinois, became the first U.S. city to officially implement a reparations program for African Americans (City of Evanston, 2021). The program is designed to address the wealth gap caused by historical housing discrimination, such as redlining, which prevented Black residents from purchasing homes in predominantly white neighborhoods. Eligible black residents in Evanston can receive grants of up to \$25,000 for home repairs, down payments, or mortgage payments.

Evanston's reparations program represents a significant step toward acknowledging and addressing the economic disparities caused by systemic racism. By focusing on housing, the program directly tackles one of the primary drivers of the racial wealth gap in the United States (Darity & Mullen, 2020). This model of reparations offers a practical framework for other municipalities seeking to redress historical wrongs at the local level.

**In 1912, the Bruce family purchased a beach front property in California and developed a thriving beach resort for African Americans during a time of racial segregation. However, in 1924, the local government seized the property under the guise of eminent domain, displacing the family and effectively erasing their wealth. Over 100 years later, in 2023, the state of California returned the land to the descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce marking a rare case of land restitution in the United States and a landmark moment in the reparations movement**



### **THE BRUCE FAMILY CASE IN CALIFORNIA**

The return of Bruce's Beach, a beachfront property in California, to the descendants of Willa and Charles Bruce is another landmark moment in the reparations movement (Eligon, 2023). In 1912, the Bruce family purchased the land and developed a thriving beach resort for African Americans during a time of racial segregation. However, in 1924, the local government seized the property under the guise of eminent domain, displacing the family and effectively erasing their wealth.

Nearly 100 years later, in 2023, the state of California returned the land to the Bruce family's descendants, marking a rare case of land restitution in the United States (Eligon, 2023). This case demonstrates how reparations can involve the return of stolen land, offering a model for other families whose property was unjustly seized. The return of Bruce's Beach not only restores lost wealth but also restores the cultural and historical legacy of the Bruce family.

### **THE TULSA RACE MASSACRE AND THE QUEST FOR REPARATIONS**

The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre is one of the most notorious examples of racial violence in American history. During the massacre, white mobs destroyed the prosperous black community of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma—known as "Black Wall Street"—killing hundreds of African Americans and leaving thousands homeless (Johnson, 2022). The community lost millions in property and generational wealth, and the survivors and their descendants have long sought reparations.

In 2023, an Oklahoma judge dismissed the latest reparations case brought by survivors of the massacre, continuing a long history of legal obstacles in the pursuit of justice (AP News, 2023). Despite this setback, the Tulsa case remains a crucial part of the broader reparations movement, illustrating both the scale of the injustices committed and the challenges in securing reparations through the courts.

The Tulsa case highlights the need for both financial compensation and the restoration of historical memory. Reparations for the destruction of Black Wall Street would not only address the financial losses suffered by the community but also help restore the cultural and historical significance of the Greenwood district (NPR, 2023). This case underscores the complexity of reparations and the need for comprehensive solutions that address both economic and cultural harm.

### **CONTEMPORARY REPARATIONS MOVEMENTS**

The reparations initiatives in Evanston, California, and Tulsa demonstrate the increasing recognition of the need to address historical racial injustices at local and state levels. While each case is unique, they all share a common goal: to restore the wealth, dignity, and opportunities that were unjustly taken from African Americans. These efforts are part of a broader global trend toward reparative justice, reflecting the goals outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063 (African Union, n.d.).

Reparations are not just about financial compensation. They also involve the restoration of cultural heritage, historical recognition, and the rebuilding of communities. The return of Bruce's Beach and Evanston's reparations program, for example, are as much about restoring the cultural and social fabric of African American communities as they are about economic restitution.

### **ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF REPARATIONS**

The economic impact of reparations is perhaps the most immediate, as programs like those in Evanston and California aim to close the racial wealth gap that has persisted for generations. Homeownership has long been a cornerstone of wealth accumulation in the U.S., and both the Evanston housing grants, and the return of Bruce's Beach are designed to restore economic opportunities to African Americans who were systematically denied them (Coates, 2014).

However, the social and cultural implications of

reparations are equally important. Reparations provide an opportunity for healing, for reclaiming the cultural legacies that have been eroded by systemic racism, and for validating the experiences of African Americans. In Tulsa, for instance, reparations would serve not only to compensate for financial losses but also to restore the historical legacy of "Black Wall Street" (NPR, 2023).

Reparations are, in many ways, about more than money—they are about restoring a sense of identity and place that was violently stripped away. These cases demonstrate that reparations can play a critical role in addressing both economic and cultural harms inflicted on African Americans.

### REPARATIONS AND THE AFRICAN UNION'S AGENDA 2063

The African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions a united, prosperous Africa free from the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racial oppression. Reparations are a key part of this vision, as they aim to address the economic, social, and cultural damage inflicted on Africans and people of African descent (African Union, n.d.).

The reparations initiatives in Evanston, California, and Tulsa align with the goals of Agenda 2063 by addressing the historical injustices faced by

African Americans. These local efforts provide models for how reparations can be implemented on a global scale, demonstrating the interconnectedness of justice efforts across the African diaspora. Reparations are not just about compensating for past wrongs—they are about building a future that honors the contributions and experiences of African people worldwide.

### CONCLUSION

The reparations movements in Evanston, California, and Tulsa are critical steps toward justice for African Americans. These initiatives demonstrate that localized reparations efforts can have a significant impact, not only in terms of financial compensation but also in terms of restoring cultural legacies and healing historical wounds. By connecting these examples to the African Union's Agenda 2063, this paper highlights the potential for reparations to contribute to a global movement for restorative justice.

The path to comprehensive reparations remains long and difficult, but these cases offer hope and direction for future efforts. They show that reparative justice is possible and that reparations can play a crucial role in addressing the historical and ongoing harm inflicted on African Americans and people of African descent. ■

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# Reparations Reimagined:

## Why Reparations could be the smartest economic play for former colonisers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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Reparation/  
,rɛpə'reɪʃn/ Noun  
'The action of making amends for a wrong one has done, by providing payment or other assistance to those who have been wronged'.

Simplified definitions of complex concepts, like the one above, often fail to capture their full essence. Nuance is essential; the world is not black and white, neither are the ideas that shape modern society. For this reason, this paper boldly pushes the boundaries of the concept of reparations.

What if reparations were not merely about paying a debt but also about making a strategic investment? Rather than viewing them solely as a means of settling old accounts, we can see them as opportunities to open new chapters—ones in which economic renewal and global stability take centre stage. For former colonising nations, reparations present a unique potential to transform historical injustices into contemporary opportunities, paving the way for growth, new partnerships, and shared prosperity. In a world increasingly marked by inequality and uncertainty, reparations could transition from being perceived as a cost of the past to becoming the smartest investment in our

collective future.

As the African Union (AU) spearheads initiatives under its 2025 theme, "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations," it becomes crucial to rethink reparations not as a punitive measure, but as a proactive economic policy. By transforming reparations into a pathway for economic partnership, former colonising nations have the chance to redress centuries of exploitation while securing their own future in a rapidly shifting global economy. This article argues that reparations, when viewed through this lens, could be one of the smartest economic and geopolitical plays for former colonisers in the 21st century, catalysing growth, fostering stability, and building a more just global order.

A high view of parabolic trough collectors at the Xina solar energy generation plant in the desert near Keimoes in the Northern Cape, South Africa

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**Partnerships in sectors such as renewable energy offer a particularly promising avenue for reparations. Investment in solar power and other green technologies could create jobs, reduce energy poverty, and address climate change—issues that disproportionately affect African nations. By collaborating on sustainable development projects, former colonisers and former colonies can create a future where both benefit from economic growth and technological advancement.**

**INTRODUCTION: THE ECONOMIC COST OF INACTION**

The economic consequences of colonialism and enslavement are far-reaching. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonial resource extraction, and systemic underdevelopment left lasting scars on the African continent and its diaspora, exacerbating global inequalities that persist today. Former colonising nations, having built their modern economies on the backs of exploited labour and resources, continue to reap the benefits, while former colonies struggle with the legacies of poverty, economic stagnation, and social unrest.

The failure to address these historical injustices has come at a high cost, even for the former colonisers themselves. For instance, Europe’s ongoing migration crisis is deeply tied to the destabilisation and economic hardships in



Africa, many of which traced their roots to colonial exploitation. Thousands of Africans risk perilous journeys to Europe each year, seeking economic opportunities denied to them in their own countries. These migration flows have fuelled political tensions, particularly in the wake of Brexit, which was partly driven by rising anti-immigration sentiment. The costs of inaction—social strain, political unrest, and economic instability—are already manifesting, and they are likely to grow unless the root causes are addressed.

Ignoring the need for reparations not only perpetuates inequality but also risks future geopolitical instability. As the African Union continues to advocate for reparatory justice through historical frameworks such as the Abuja Proclamation and the Durban Declaration, it is evident that former colonisers can no longer afford to overlook the economic, social, and moral dimensions of their colonial past. Failing to take bold action now could undermine long-term global stability and prosperity.

### **REPARATIONS AS A CATALYST FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Reparations, when framed as a strategic investment rather than a mere compensation for past wrongs, offer immense potential for both former colonisers and former colonies. Historical precedents demonstrate how reparatory efforts can stimulate economic growth and foster lasting international partnerships. One of the most striking examples is the Marshall Plan, a post-World War II initiative by the United States to rebuild Europe. Though not officially framed as reparations, the Marshall Plan served a similar function—transforming former adversaries into strong economic allies and stabilising a continent that might otherwise have descended into further conflict.

Similarly, reparations to Africa could serve as a foundation for a new era of economic cooperation. Investment in infrastructure, education, and technology transfer could unlock the immense potential of African economies,

creating new markets and fostering innovation. With Africa on track to become one of the fastest-growing regions in the world, the continent represents a vast untapped resource for global economic growth. By investing in Africa's future, former colonisers could not only rectify the imbalances created by colonialism but also secure their own places in an increasingly competitive global economy.

The African Union's Agenda 2063, which envisions a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful Africa, provides a framework for how reparations could be structured to promote sustainable development. Reparatory investments in areas such as education, healthcare, and renewable energy would not only address historical wrongs but also enhance Africa's capacity to participate fully in the global economy. For former colonisers, this presents an opportunity to gain access to rapidly expanding markets, diversify supply chains, and foster long-term economic partnerships.

### **GEOPOLITICAL BENEFITS OF REPARATIONS**

In addition to the economic advantages, reparations offer significant geopolitical benefits for former colonisers. As global power dynamics shift with the rise of new superpowers, ethical leadership and soft power are becoming increasingly important. By embracing reparations, former colonisers can reposition themselves as leaders in global justice, human rights, and sustainable development.

This shift would do more than strengthen relations with former colonies; it would enhance the global standing of these nations in international forums such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. Countries that lead on reparations could gain moral authority, influence global policy-making, and strengthen alliances with developing nations. This would allow them to influence international trade agreements and foster multilateral cooperation on pressing issues such as climate

change, migration, and global security.

Africa's growing geopolitical significance further underscores the strategic value of reparations. As the continent continues to rise as an economic and political force, countries that invest in Africa's development through reparations will be well-positioned to benefit from its growth. The AU's push for reparations through initiatives such as the 2021 Dakar Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage highlights the continent's determination to reclaim its heritage and assert its influence on the global stage. Former colonisers that support these efforts will not only restore trust but also gain valuable partners in shaping the future of international relations.

### **A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO REPARATIONS**

For reparations to be truly transformative, they must be implemented in a way that ensures long-term sustainability and mutual benefit. One-off payments or symbolic gestures are insufficient to address the deep structural inequalities that colonialism has left behind. Instead, reparations should be integrated into comprehensive development strategies that focus on human capital, technological innovation, and infrastructure development.

Partnerships in sectors such as renewable energy offer a particularly promising avenue for reparations. Investment in solar power and other green technologies could create jobs, reduce energy poverty, and address climate change—issues that disproportionately affect African nations. By collaborating on sustainable development projects, former colonisers and former colonies can create a future where both benefit from economic growth and technological advancement.

The same applies to education. By investing in higher education, vocational training, and research collaborations, former colonisers can help build a skilled workforce in Africa, sparking innovation and entrepreneurship. This approach

not only raises living standards in African countries but also fosters opportunities for collaborative research and development, benefiting all parties involved.

### **CONCLUSION: REPARATIONS AS A GLOBAL GAME-CHANGER**

Reparations represent more than a moral obligation to address the injustices of colonialism—they are a strategic investment in the future of the global economy and international relations. As the African Union continues to champion the cause of reparations, former colonisers have a unique opportunity to transform the legacies of exploitation into pathways for shared prosperity. By reimagining reparations as a catalyst for economic growth and geopolitical stability, former colonisers can lead the way toward a more equitable, peaceful, and prosperous world.

In a time of growing inequality, migration crises, and geopolitical uncertainty, the cost of inaction is too high. Reparations offer a powerful solution—not only to rectify historical wrongs but also to build a more just and inclusive global order for future generations. ■

# Reparations—seeking justice, not guilt, for Africans and their descendants’ historic injustices.

By **Annina van Neel**,

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The African Union declared 2025 the Year of Reparations, aiming to achieve justice for Africans and their descendants through reparations for the harm caused by enslavement, colonisation, and neocolonialism. The 1993 Abuja Proclamation set the agenda, recognising that the damage inflicted on African peoples is not merely a "thing of the past."

The Abuja Proclamation stresses seeking responsibility, not guilt, from states and nations whose economic growth once relied on slave labour and colonialism.

Compensation for historic injustices is not a new idea: Germany’s restitution to Jews for the Nazi Holocaust stands as a key example of reparation for immense human suffering.

As the founder and CEO of the Tiekie Box Project, I lead an organisation dedicated to transforming how African descendant communities and the diaspora engage with their cultural heritage. We amplify the work of global cultural rights activists and preservationists protecting this legacy. The project was inspired by a chance encounter with one of the darkest tragedies: an unmarked mass grave of around 9,000 formerly enslaved Africans in Rupert’s Valley on the Island of St Helena. Ironically, the enslaved Africans "rescued" from Portuguese illegal slave ships by the British navy were instead abandoned on the island in poor conditions.

To lay the foundation for meaningful reparations, preserving cultural heritage is essential. "Memorialization isn’t limited to

**On St. Helena, archaeological excavations of an African burial ground were conducted to make way for the island’s first airport. The ancestral remains were packed in boxes, and their possessions were sent to museum exhibitions in the UK without the knowledge or consent of their global descendants. The ancestral remains were stored in inappropriate, undignified conditions for 14 years. These acts, whether willful or not, further dehumanise black bodies, reducing them to commodities.**



▲▲  
 A memorial stone in honor of the OvaHerero/ OvaMbanderu and Nama people that were victims of the genocide by German colonial forces on the beginning of the 20th century stands at the Swakopmund Concentration Camp Memorial, in Swakopmund, Namibia  
 ©Christian Ender/  
 Getty Images

buildings or statues - it's shaped by how people occupy a place, bearing witness to its historical and cultural significance. Gathering to reflect where ancestors once worked, suffered, and perished is a powerful act of remembrance and memorialization. People give places their meaning".

This paper argues that reparations must go hand in hand with preserving heritage, such as burial grounds. It emphasises empowering marginalised African descendant communities in memorialising sites of trauma—African burial grounds linked to enslavement, colonialism, and apartheid. This is through the lens of the African Union's Charter for African Renaissance: the Protection of African Cultural Heritage, Agenda 2063, and the Abuja Proclamation.

African Burial Grounds, their rites and rituals, connect us to each other, to our brief existence, the land, time, and memory. They are a powerful and precious gift from our ancestors and the land in which they rest to not only heal the past, but to connect and heal humanity in the present.

Memorialisation of our shared past rooted in the 'Maafa' - the great trauma of the African people - provides a gateway through which the African Union can realise three pillars of the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance: envisioning Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics.

I am a product of colonialism. In my birth country, Namibia, I am called "coloured" - a label inherited from the apartheid system's legacy. Namibia, too, bears the scars of genocide under German colonisation, yet it still awaits reparations for the immense suffering endured.

What matters is not guilt, but the responsibility of states and nations whose economic evolution once depended on slave labor and colonialism. Across the globe, African-descendant communities remain vulnerable to predatory systems that devalue African cultural heritage. Their experiences - rooted in colonialism, enslavement, and apartheid - are now compounded by globalisation, which threatens to erase African memory from both the land and its people at an alarming rate. In

such instances, the Abuja Proclamation calls on those states in Europe and the Americas “still engaged in racism and neocolonialism to desist from any further damage”

The islands of Saint Helena and Saint Eustatius, the overseas territories of Britain and the Netherlands, exemplify destructive colonial legacies continuing into the last decade as well as the agency of civil society. Both islands are linked to the Middle Passage of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The AU’s 2025 goal is to address these ongoing injustices and build multi-stakeholder relationships .

### **A Story of Bones**

St. Helena Island, a United Kingdom Overseas Territory, served as a Middle Passage pit stop during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Between 1840 and 1872, over 25,000 enslaved Africans were transported there during the abolition phase. Though “liberated”, most of them were then sent to the British West Indies as indentured laborers; many perished and were buried on the island. Their unmarked burial grounds are the most significant physical remnants of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, a haunting testament to forgotten lives.

Since the mid-20th century, sacred and globally significant African burial grounds have faced neglect and destruction due to state-led economic developments. These range from small-scale buildings and roads, to large-scale industrial projects, including power stations, highways, airports, and fuel depots. On St. Helena, archaeological excavations of an African burial ground were conducted to make way for the island’s first airport. The ancestral remains were packed in boxes, and their possessions were sent to museum exhibitions in the UK without the knowledge or consent of their global descendants. The ancestral remains

were stored in inappropriate, undignified conditions for 14 years. These acts, whether willful or not, further dehumanise black bodies, reducing them to commodities. With local and global support, the ongoing fight for their proper reburial and memorialisation is chronicled in the documentary “ A Story of Bones 2022”.

### **The St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground Alliance**

Our next project was on St. Eustatius, the small Dutch Caribbean island near St. Maarten and St. Kitts with a rich and yet painful colonial history. During the 17th and 18th centuries, it changed hands 22 times between the Dutch, Spanish, English, and French. Known as the Golden Rock, it became a major trading hub and free port, where taxes were not charged, including on the trade of enslaved Africans, who were sold to work on Caribbean plantations. Although the island’s population is mostly of African descent, its historiography still largely centers on its colonial past.

In response to government authorised, unethical excavations of an 18th-century burial ground of enslaved Africans during airport construction, the grassroots organisation Saint Eustatius Afrikan Burial Grounds was formed in 2021. Their mission focuses on preserving African history, spirituality, culture, education, and consciousness. They launched an online petition, “Stop the Excavations at St. Eustatius African Burial Ground”, advocating for the protection of this sacred site.

The St. Eustatius African Burial Ground Alliance has empowered and educated local, regional, and global African descendant communities while challenging institutions and systems that perpetuate the legacies of slavery and colonialism. The job at hand is to preserve and

**The memorialisation and preservation of African burial grounds as a form of reparations by former and current colonial powers, as well as ancestral African states, represents a rare and powerful act of restitution and healing.**

memorialize African history with a focus on community empowerment.

The Alliance and the descendant community's collective efforts have led to the successful return of 69 ancestral remains to St. Eustatius and secured government funding for their respectful and dignified reburial.

Their campaign demonstrates that the path to reparations begins with involving a global network of stakeholders such as the Tiekie Box project from Namibia. Our collective efforts can effectively liberate the narrative from colonial structures controlled by an elite few and restore it to the rightful authorities - the global African Diaspora and people of African descent. To advance reparations, the Alliance has engaged with a diverse group of global leaders, including: The State of the African Diaspora International Commission of Cultural Heritage; the Royal Chamber of SOAD (representing Kings, Queens, other royalties and Chiefs of the African continent; National and international human rights lawyers; University researchers and professors specialising in decolonisation; and archaeologists, activists, and global cultural heritage preservation experts.

In its first year, the Alliance initiated and completed an application for UNESCO site recognition to protect the burial grounds. A UNESCO delegation visited St. Eustatius in 2022, despite stark discrimination between the well-maintained colonial heritage and the neglected African burial sites. UNESCO awarded official recognition in October 2024, marking the island's first-ever UNESCO designation led by the local community.

### Concluding Remarks

Over the past decade, people of African descent have increasingly reclaimed their narratives and occupied spaces worldwide. The global Black Lives Matter movement during the COVID-19 pandemic and the diaspora's powerful response to the Netherlands' national apology for its colonial past are clear examples of this growing movement for justice and recognition.

More needs to be done. With 2025 declared the African Union Year of Reparation: Justice for Africans and People of African Descent, it offers a unique opportunity for the AU and global African descendant communities to unite in their fight for reparations and assert their right to preserve and protect their cultural heritage.

The global African diaspora is vast and dispersed yet connected through a robust network of relationships rooted in ancestral cultural heritage. It could significantly strengthen efforts to achieve an African cultural renaissance. This would require a firm commitment from higher institutions; museums, archaeologists, governments, and other stakeholders, to provide unfettered access to cultural heritage knowledge and resources to grassroots communities and activists.

The memorialisation and preservation of African burial grounds as a form of reparations by former and current colonial powers, as well as ancestral African states, represents a rare and powerful act of restitution and healing. It engages individuals and communities through a holistic and universal tradition of remembrance that can lead to meaningful reparations for Africans and their descendants. ■

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- **Petition · Stop the Excavations at St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground** - Netherlands · Change.org
- **PRESS RELEASE: Afrikan Burial Grounds St. Eustatius recognized by UNESCO** – St. Eustatius Afrikan Burial Ground

# Africa's Mineral Wealth: Addressing Colonial Exploitation through the African Union's Reparations Frameworks

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This article discusses Africa's mineral wealth and the historical context of its exploitation, particularly during and after colonialism. It highlights the impact of colonial practices on indigenous mining techniques, which were more sustainable and community-focused compared to modern exploitative methods. The text emphasises the ongoing consequences of colonialism, including economic underdevelopment and environmental degradation, known as the "resource curse," where resource-rich countries experience slower growth and higher poverty rates and also examines international legal frameworks aimed at addressing historical injustices, including the Berlin West Africa Convention and the Anti-Slavery Convention, which set early standards for protecting indigenous peoples. It calls for a contemporary reparations approach within the African Union's legal framework, focusing on justice and accountability for the exploitation of Africa's resources. The article concludes by advocating for a networked approach to reparations, emphasising a holistic, networked system that includes human rights and environmental considerations in addressing historical injustices.



## INTRODUCTION

The African continent has abundant natural resources, particularly minerals, which have attracted global attention for centuries. These mineral resources have historically played critical roles in driving industrialisation and modernisation globally. However, this wealth has also brought immense suffering to the African people through international law violations, leading to severe hardship for African descendants, and environmental degradation.

various metals, using traditional mining techniques that balanced resource extraction with environmental preservation. In Southern Africa, indigenous miners primarily exploited iron, copper, and tin using surface collection, shallow digging, and open-pit mining techniques. Some underground mines had shafts and galleries reaching 40 meters, utilising tools like stone hammers and iron chisels (Green, 2013)—similarly, West African communities specialised in gold and copper

**Africa’s long-standing expertise in mining, which was respectful of both the environment and indigenous cultures. The colonial encounter undermined this expertise, introducing exploitative systems focused on profit...**

**... The legacy of colonial mining continues to influence the African continent, contributing to corruption and human rights violations in the modern era..**

Today, Africa’s mineral wealth offers hope for a sustainable global future, particularly as the world transitions towards green energy and relies on critical minerals for this transformation. However, without justice and accountability for the historical and ongoing extraction of these resources, there is a high risk of repeating the atrocities and abuses of the past.

This article explores the connection between Africa’s mineral wealth, the historical legacy of international law violations in the extractive industries, and the contemporary need for reparations, drawing from ongoing African legal frameworks.

## PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY OF MINING IN AFRICA

Before colonisation, mining was a significant economic activity in many parts of Africa. Indigenous communities engaged in extracting

mining. In Akyem Abuakwa, Ghana, traditional mining practices were carefully managed to prevent environmental destruction. Chiefs designated mining areas far from towns and villages, and rituals were performed to ensure safe and clean mining practices (Botchway, 1995). These practices illustrate Africa’s long-standing expertise in mining, which was respectful of both the environment and indigenous cultures. The colonial encounter undermined this expertise, introducing exploitative systems focused on profit.

## MINERAL EXPLOITATION DURING COLONIALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL LAW

Colonialism in Africa was driven primarily by European powers’ desire to exploit the continent’s rich mineral resources. Beginning with the Scramble for Africa in 1881, European nations invaded, dispossessed, and occupied African territories, formalising their claims

through the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which partitioned Africa among colonial powers without African representation.

The primary objective of colonial mineral exploitation was to fuel European industrialisation. For example, the Congo's rubber was critical for producing pneumatic tyres, hoses, and insulation for electrical wiring (Johnson, 2014). However, the methods used to extract these resources were marked by extreme violence. In the Belgian Congo, under King Leopold II, forced labour and brutal punishments, such as the amputation of hands, were used to enforce rubber quotas. These atrocities resulted in the deaths of millions caused by murder, famine, disease, and exhaustion from forced labour (Johnson, 2014; Rochat, 2022).

Across Africa, the colonial legacy of mineral exploitation left a profound and lasting impact, including environmental degradation, economic underdevelopment, and social injustices. This period established the framework for the resource curse, a paradox in which countries rich in natural resources often experience slower economic growth and higher rates of poverty (Bush, 2008). Additionally, extracting gold and other minerals during colonial times alienated valuable land with minimal compensation for local populations, with the profits repatriated mainly to foreign companies (Ofosu-Mensah, 2016).

The legacy of colonial mining continues to influence the African continent, contributing to corruption and human rights violations in the modern era. For example, multinational mining companies operating in post-colonial Africa have been accused of environmental destruction, human rights abuses, and failure to provide adequate compensation to affected communities (Bush, 2008; Mekoa, 2019).

### **POST-COLONIAL ERA: CONTINUATION OF EXPLOITATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLATIONS**

Despite gaining political independence, many African nations retained the economic structures established during colonialism. The

mining industry, in particular, continued to be dominated by foreign interests, with little regard for environmental or human rights concerns. Multinational corporations, often operating under favourable terms negotiated with corrupt regimes, continued to exploit Africa's mineral wealth with minimal benefits for local populations (Mekoa, 2019).

The post-colonial era has witnessed numerous environmental violations linked to the mining industry. In Ghana, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), large-scale mining operations have led to deforestation, water pollution, and the destruction of ecosystems essential to local communities. For example, in the Niger Delta, oil extraction has caused severe environmental degradation, further marginalising local populations (Botchway, 1995).

These environmental violations are often linked to human rights abuses, including forced displacement, unsafe working conditions, and violence against protestors. The tragic Marikana Massacre in South Africa exemplifies the intersection of labour exploitation, human rights abuses, and the extractive industry, as it resulted in the deaths of striking platinum miners. (Stewart & Dam, 2017).

### **INTERNATIONAL VIOLATIONS AND THE AFRICAN UNION'S FRAMEWORK FOR REPARATIONS**

Recognising the historical injustices and international law violations related to exploiting Africa's mineral wealth, the AU has adopted several legal frameworks calling for reparations. These frameworks seek to address environmental and human rights abuses that occurred during and after colonisation.

Early international efforts to protect indigenous Africans from exploitation include the Berlin West Africa Convention of 1885 and the Anti-Slavery Convention of 1890. These treaties obligated European powers to protect indigenous communities and improve their living conditions. For instance, Article VI of the Berlin Convention mandated European nations to safeguard indigenous tribes and prevent their annihilation. Similarly, Article VIII of the Anti-



A 10-year-old child collects cobalt and copper stones by hand at an artisanal mine site in Kolwezi, Democratic Republic of Congo.

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Getty Images



Slavery Convention limited the use of certain weapons to protect indigenous populations (Anderson, 2005). However, despite these early international standards, colonial powers committed widespread atrocities, including mass killings, forced labour, and the destruction of indigenous cultures. These actions amounted to crimes against humanity, with colonisers using violence and terror to subjugate African populations.

In the modern context, the AU's Agenda 2063 outlines a comprehensive vision for reparations and sustainable development. Aspiration 3 emphasises the need for justice and the rule of law, while Aspiration 1 focuses on sustainable development through the equitable management of Africa's resources (African Union, 2024). The African Charter on Human

and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), particularly Articles 21 and 22, asserts Africa's right to dispose of its wealth and natural resources freely and calls for reparations for exploitation (ACHPR, 1981).

The Durban Declaration (2001) and Abuja Proclamation also emphasise the need for reparations, advocating for the return of stolen wealth and compensation for colonial injustices. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the African Committee of Experts on Reparations works to address the legacies of slavery and colonialism, advocating for reparations from former colonial powers (African Union, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

Africa's mineral wealth holds immense potential for a just and sustainable transition to a green economy. However, to avoid repeating the atrocities of the past, it is crucial to address the historical legacy of exploitation through reparations. This requires a networked approach that considers not only the human actors but also colonialism's environmental and material legacies.

The AU's Agenda 2063 and other legal frameworks provide a foundation for pursuing reparations and ensuring that Africa benefits equitably from its natural resources. By reframing the reparations process to include social and environmental justice, Africa can move towards a future prioritising development, fairness, and restoring relationships between its people and the land.

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The call for reparations for Africans and people of African descent is rooted in centuries of exploitation, oppression, and racial injustice. The transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and systemic racism have left enduring scars on the African continent and its diaspora, significantly impacting their socio-economic and political realities. Reparations are viewed as a necessary step toward justice, addressing historical wrongs, and promoting healing and development. The African Union (AU) has been a key advocate in this global movement, with various decisions and declarations underscoring the importance of reparations.

# Assessing the Investments, Revenues, Incomes, and Wages from the Trafficking of African Males, Females, and Children Over 500 Years

By **Kojo Brew Acquaisie**, Civilian Chief of Staff, African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)

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## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The legacy of slavery and colonialism has profoundly impacted Africa and its diaspora. The transatlantic slave trade, which spanned from the 16th to the 19th centuries, forcibly removed millions of Africans from their homelands, subjecting them to brutal, dehumanizing conditions. The wealth generated from this trade was foundational in the economic development of Europe and the Americas, but it came at an immeasurable human cost to Africa.

Colonialism further entrenched the exploitation of African people and resources. European powers partitioned Africa in the late 19th century, imposing foreign rule that prioritized extraction and subjugation. This period saw the deliberate underdevelopment of African societies, the destruction of indigenous governance systems, and the imposition of artificial borders that continue to fuel conflict today.

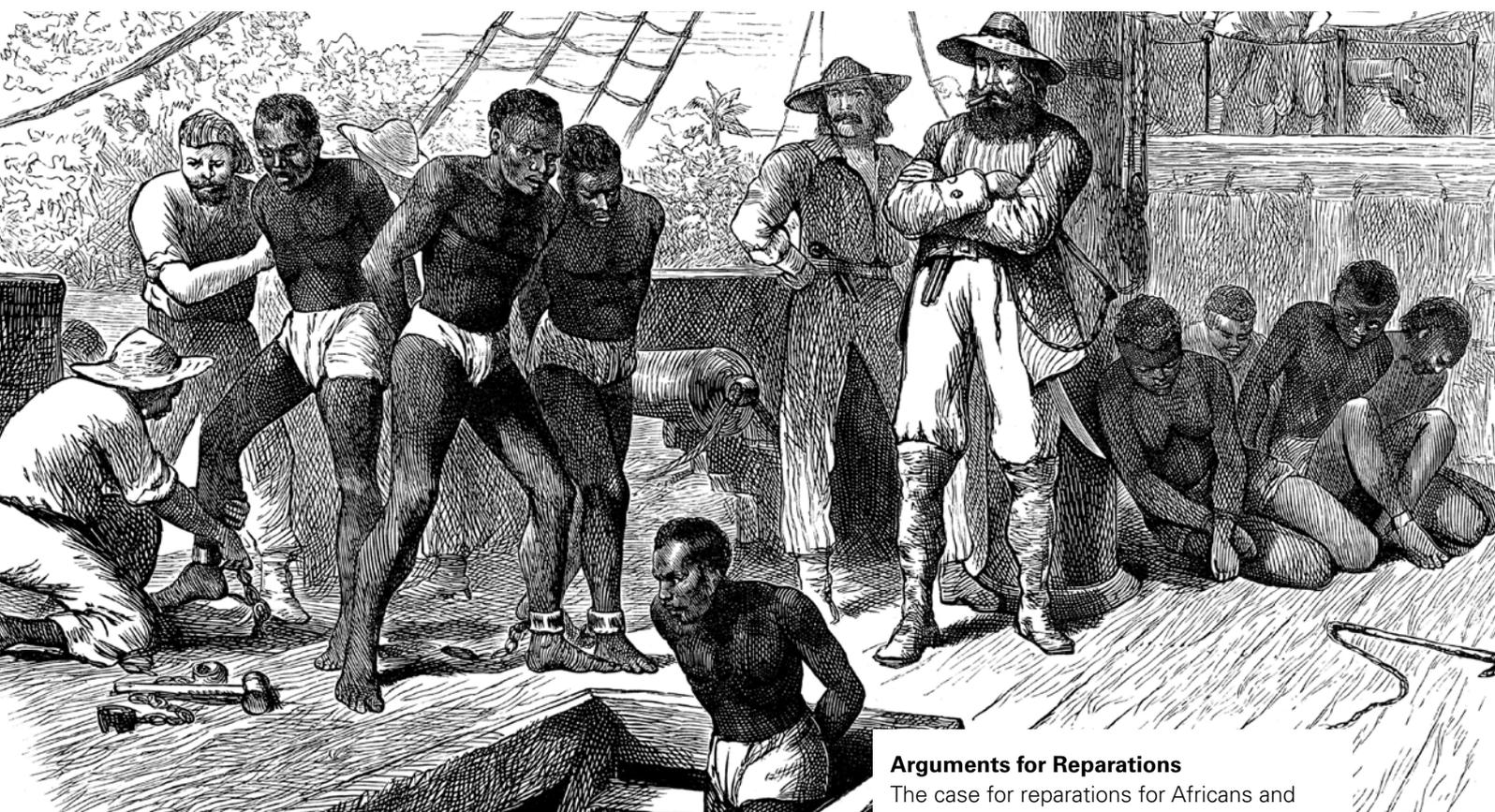
The abolition of slavery and the end of formal colonialism did not end these injustices. Instead, new forms of economic and political domination emerged, often supported by global systems that maintained inequalities. The continued marginalization and impoverishment of African communities globally underscore the need for reparative justice.

## **THE AFRICAN UNION'S POSITION ON REPARATIONS**

The African Union (AU), representing African states, has consistently advocated for reparations to address the historical injustices suffered by Africans and people of African descent. The AU believes reparations are vital for justice and development.

### **Key Actions by the African Union:**

- ***Ouagadougou Declaration of 2000:*** Emerging from the first Pan-African Conference on Reparations, this declaration stressed reparations for slavery, colonialism, and racism, and called for international recognition of these wrongs.



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 Captives being brought on board a slave ship on the West Coast of Africa (Slave Coast), c1880. Although Britain outlawed slavery in 1833 and it was abolished in the USA after the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War in 1865, the transatlantic trade in African slaves continued. The main market for the slaves was Brazil, where slavery was not abolished until 1888. ©Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images

- **Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) of 2001:** Recognized slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity and supported reparations to address the ensuing injustices.
- **African Union Summit in Durban (2002):** Reaffirmed the commitment to reparations and proposed a global reparations fund for the development of African nations and communities worldwide.
- **African Union Agenda 2063 (2013):** Envisioned an Africa free from the historical injustices of slavery, colonialism, and racism, with reparative justice as a cornerstone for the continent's future prosperity.
- **Niamey Declaration (2014):** Reiterated the AU's commitment to reparations, advocating for a collective African approach involving both African states and the diaspora, and called for a Pan-African Commission on Reparations.

### Arguments for Reparations

The case for reparations for Africans and people of African descent is grounded in several key arguments:

1. **Moral Argument:** Reparations provide justice for the suffering caused by slavery, colonialism, and racism, which continue to result in economic inequality, social marginalization, and racial discrimination today.
2. **Economic Argument:** The exploitation of African people and resources underpinned the economic growth of Europe and the Americas while leaving Africa and its diaspora impoverished. Reparations aim to address this imbalance and support sustainable development and improved conditions for people of African descent.
3. **Legal Argument:** International law supports reparations for gross human rights violations. The African Union and other advocates view reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism as a legal obligation, not just a moral one.
4. **Political Argument:** Reparations help heal historical wounds, promote social cohesion, and affirm Africa's role in global discussions, demanding recognition and redress for its historical suffering.

## A FORENSIC GLOBAL AUDIT: A CRUCIAL STEP TOWARD REPARATIONS

Central to the AU's call for reparations is the need for a forensic global audit to estimate the revenues generated from the trafficking of Africans, as well as the value of unpaid wages for centuries of forced labor. This audit would provide a critical foundation for understanding the scale of the exploitation and quantifying the financial dimensions of reparations.

The transatlantic slave trade was not only a profound moral atrocity but also a significant economic enterprise that fueled the wealth of European and American powers. The profits generated from the forced labor of millions of Africans were vast, and these profits continue to benefit the descendants of those who perpetrated and profited from the slave trade. Similarly, the unpaid wages for the generations of Africans who labored under colonial rule represent an enormous debt owed to the continent and its diaspora.

A comprehensive forensic audit would involve analyzing historical records, economic data, and other relevant sources to estimate the total value of the wealth extracted from Africa and its people. This audit would not only provide a basis for determining the appropriate level of reparations but also serve as a powerful tool for raising awareness about the true cost of these historical injustices.

The African Union has called for this audit to be conducted by an independent, international body, with input from African states, historians, economists, and legal experts. The results of this audit would be used to inform negotiations with former

colonial powers and other stakeholders, ensuring that reparations are grounded in a rigorous and transparent assessment of the harm caused.

## CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS

Despite the strong case for reparations, several challenges and criticisms must be addressed:

- 1. Implementation:** Determining who would be responsible for paying reparations and how they would be distributed are complex questions that require careful consideration and negotiation.
- 2. Political Will:** Securing the commitment of the international community has been difficult. Many former colonial powers have been reluctant to engage in reparations discussions, citing concerns about legal liability and potential costs.
- 3. Quantification:** Critics argue that it is challenging to quantify the harm caused by historical injustices, making it difficult to determine the appropriate level of compensation. They also worry that reparations could exacerbate racial tensions if perceived as unfair by those not eligible for compensation.

However, supporters of reparations counter that these challenges should not be used as an excuse to avoid addressing the issue. They argue that reparations are not just about financial compensation but about recognizing the humanity of those who suffered and taking concrete steps to rectify historical wrongs

## THE WAY FORWARD

The African Union has outlined several steps to advance the reparations agenda:

- **Establishment of a Pan-African Reparations Commission:** This body would coordinate reparations efforts at the continental level, engage with international partners, and advocate for the rights of Africans and people of African descent.
- **Creation of a Global Reparations Fund:** This fund would provide resources for development projects in Africa and support initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of people of African descent globally. The fund could be financed through contributions from former colonial powers, international organizations, and private sector partners
- **Education and Awareness-Raising:** The AU emphasizes the need to educate both Africans and the global community about the history of slavery, colonialism, and racism, as well as the ongoing impact of these injustices. This education should be integrated into school curricula, public discourse, and media campaigns.
- **Independent Forensic Audit:** Establishing a comprehensive audit to track investments, revenues, wages, profits, and incomes derived from the trafficking of African males, females, and children to accurately assess the financial dimensions of reparations. ■



**2025**  
**YEAR OF**  
**REPARATIONS:**

**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

# Reparations

are not just about money—they are about justice, recognition, and the restoration of dignity to African people worldwide. It is about repairing the past to build a better future.

ESTHER  
STANFORD-XOSEI

This paper underlines the scale of the damages and losses afflicting African populations following enslavement and colonization, and considers the effort the African Union has engaged in to enable these events to be acknowledged internationally. The decisions of the continental organization in adopting the right to demand reparations, which are espoused in various texts adopted since 2009, represent crucial first steps. Racism, impoverishment and economic underdevelopment are linked to the longstanding consequences of the transatlantic slave trade.

# Assessing the progress and challenges in implementing AU decisions regarding reparations for enslavement and colonization. A path to African Justice.

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## BACKGROUND

According to Hansford and Phillips (2023), it is believed that from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, at least 12.5 million enslaved Africans were forcibly transported by mainly European but also U.S. and Brazilian-flagged ships and sold into slavery. Before pushing for the abolition of slavery, Britain transported an estimated 3.2 million people, the most active European country after Portugal, which enslaved nearly 6 million. Those who survived the brutal voyage ended up toiling on plantations under inhumane conditions in the Americas, mostly in Brazil, the Caribbean and the United States, while others profited from their labour. Calls for reparations started with enslaved people themselves. They ran away, they raised their voices in songs of protests, they fought wars of resistance. The movement later garnered support from quarters as varied as U.S. civil rights leader

Martin Luther King Jr. and the Caribbean's Rastafarians. In more recent times, some of the world's largest institutions have added their voices. Ghana led efforts to get African support for formally pursuing reparations, with Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa also taking up the cause.

Most discussions have focused on transatlantic trafficking rather than the older trans-Saharan trade to the Islamic world, estimated to have transported several million enslaved Africans.

## PROGRESS BY THE AU

Since the inception of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) now the African Union (AU) in 1963, it has prioritised the payment of reparations, including reparatory justice, for historical crimes and mass atrocities committed against Africans and people of African descent. On 28 June 1992 in Abuja, Nigeria, the OAU inaugurated a 12-Member Group of Eminent

Persons (GEP) to develop a political agenda and review the issue of reparations in relation to the damage done to Africa and its Diaspora by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

This was followed by the Pan-African Conference on Reparations held from 27-29th April 1993 in Abuja, Nigeria. The conference gave birth to the first common position document, the “Abuja Proclamation on Reparations”.

The 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action acknowledged that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade are crimes against humanity. It was agreed that these were among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. As such, Africans and people of African descent were victims of these acts and of their consequences which culminated in colonization, apartheid, and genocide. The declaration called for justice and the right to adequate reparation.

In 2021, the AU Commission in collaboration with the Government of Senegal and the Open

from the Continent. The workshop pondered on restitution policies for cultural property in Africa, and the establishment of networks of African cultural experts, policy makers, dealers, auctioneers, museum curators among others, working in combating illicit trafficking in cultural property and heritage.

The workshop was followed by an online Regional Economic Communities (RECs) Consultation on Restitution of Cultural Property on 29th November 2021 that brought review continental and regional initiatives on the restitution of cultural property and heritage.

In 2022, the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) passed a Resolution on Africa’s Reparations Agenda and the Human Rights of Africans in the Diaspora and People of African Descent Worldwide (ACHPR/Res.543 (LXXIII) 2022). The resolution, among others, reaffirmed the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action as a comprehensive framework addressing racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. It is worth acknowledging the significance of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) in advancing the recognition, justice and development of people of African descent worldwide. In 2023, AU member states, pursuant to the Assembly Decision (Assembly/AU/Dec.847 (XXXVI)) endorsed a proposal by the Republic of Ghana to co-organize with relevant stakeholders, and host an international conference in 2023 on the theme: “Building a United Front to Advance the Cause of Justice and the Payment of Reparations to Africans.”

A tribunal, modelled on other ad-hoc courts such as the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals after World War Two, was proposed last year. It has now gained traction within a broader slavery reparations movement. It was formally recommended in June by the U.N. Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, the idea of a special tribunal has been explored further at African and Caribbean regional bodies.

## **Calls for reparations started with enslaved people themselves. They ran away, they raised their voices in songs of protests, they fought wars of resistance**

Society Initiative in West Africa (OSIWA), held a Continental Experts Workshop in Dakar, Senegal to develop a Common African Position Paper on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage, and to produce a Framework for Action on the Negotiations for the Return/ Restitution of Illicitly Trafficked Cultural Property

## **CHALLENGES**

- What reparations would consist of in practice is debated. Some, including in the United States, have pushed for individual payments to descendants of enslaved people. CARICOM, in a 2014 plan, called for debt cancellation and support from European nations to tackle public health and economic crises.
- The scope of any tribunal has not been determined but the U.N. Forum recommended in a preliminary report that it should address reparations for enslavement, apartheid, genocide, and colonialism. A special U.N. tribunal would help establish legal norms for complex international and historical reparations claims, its supporters say. Opponents of reparations argue, among other things, that contemporary states and institutions should not be held responsible for historical slavery.
- Advocates, including within CARICOM and the African Union (AU), which groups 55 nations across the continent, are working to build wider backing for the idea among U.N. members. But, even its supporters recognise that establishing an international tribunal for slavery will not be easy.
- The work to establish a tribunal would have to take place through the United Nations system and include conversations with countries, including Portugal, Britain, France, Spain, Netherlands and Denmark that were involved in trading enslaved people to the Caribbean and other regions.
- There are huge obstacles; the hurdles include obtaining the cooperation of nations that were involved in the trade of enslaved people and the legal complexities of finding responsible parties and determining remedies.
- These things happened many years ago and historical records and evidence can be challenging to access and even verify.
- A spokesperson for the British Foreign Office acknowledged the country's role in transatlantic slavery, but said it had no plan to pay reparations. Instead, it feels that past

wrongs should be tackled by learning lessons from history and tackling today's challenges.

- However, advocates say Western countries and institutions that continue to benefit from the wealth generated by slavery should be held accountable, particularly given ongoing legacies of racial discrimination.
- No country with a legacy of enslavement, the trade in enslaved Africans, or colonialism has fully reckoned with the past, nor comprehensively accounted for the impact on the lives of people of African descent today.

## **NOTABLE PROGRESS TOWARDS PAYMENT OF REPARATIONS**

- The United Nations (UN) has now come out in support of reparations, which have been used in other circumstances to offset large moral and economic debts, such as to Japanese Americans interned by the United States during World War Two and to families of Holocaust survivors.
- The Netherlands apologised for its role in transatlantic slavery in 2023 and announced a roughly \$200 million fund to address that past.
- The Rwanda and Yugoslavia tribunals were established by the U.N. Security Council. The International Criminal Court, another international U.N. tribunal, was founded through a General Assembly resolution, a possible route for a slavery reparations tribunal.
- At a summit of Caribbean countries in February 2024, the gathered heads of state and governments proposed working with the AU to request an ICJ advisory legal opinion on reparations through the U.N. General Assembly.
- The AU decision to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with CARICOM has given new heft to the campaign.
- The AU is now developing Africa's own position paper on what reparations might look like. ■

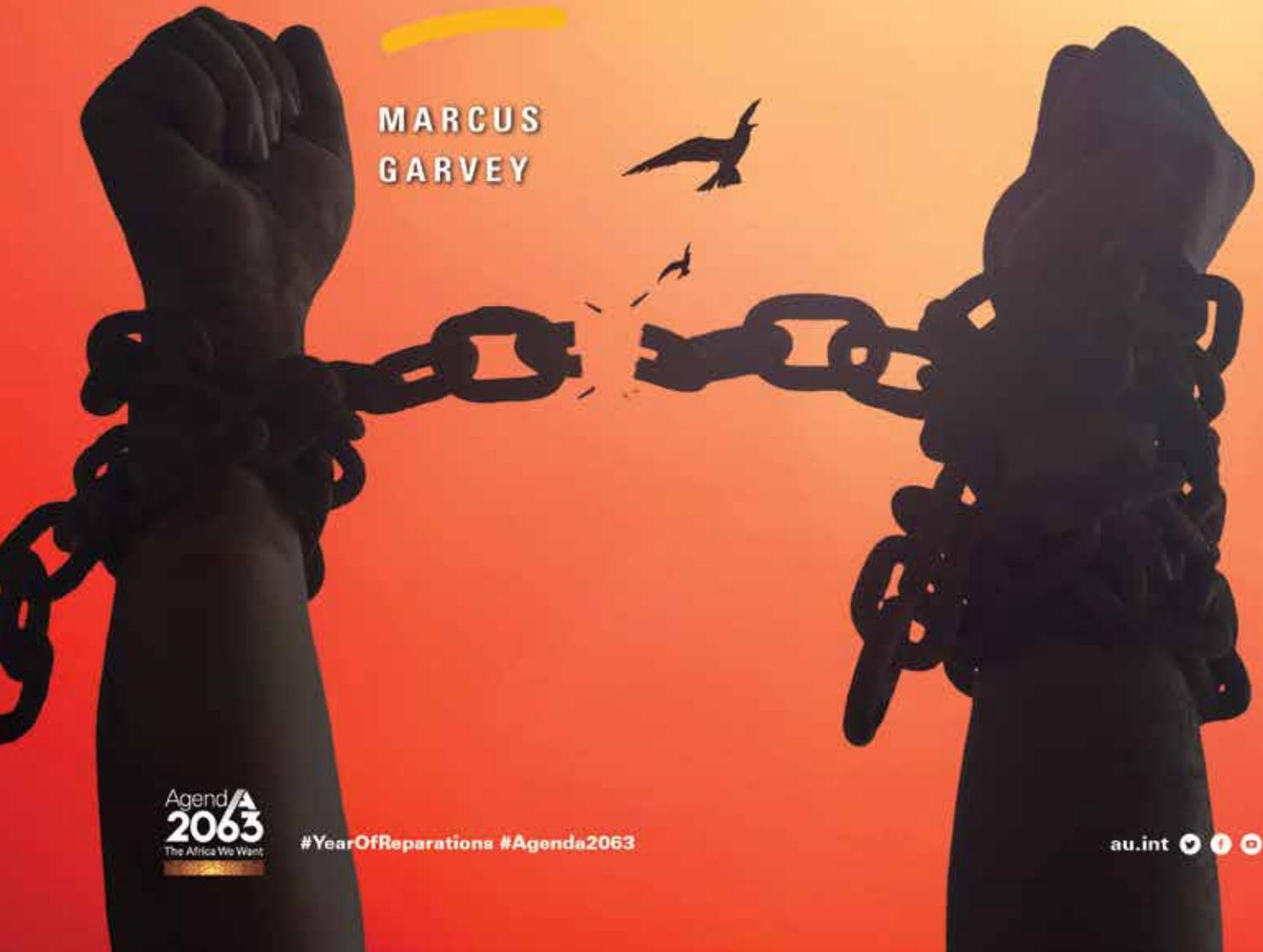


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**If you enslave a man, rob him of the fruits of his labour, and then expect him to applaud your 'generosity' in giving him a portion of what he himself produced, then you are foolish. Reparations are not a gift; they are a right.**

**MARCUS  
GARVEY**



# From Proclamation to Action: Assessing the African Union's Reparations Agenda in Pursuit of Justice

By **Takudzwa Wayne Mhaka**, M.A. in Governance and Regional Integration.  
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This paper critiques the African Union's (AU) efforts under its 2025 reparations agenda, under the theme "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations." Aligned with Agenda 2063, the AU's framework for cultural restitution and socio-economic equity, the research traces the historical development of restorative justice from the 1993 Abuja Proclamation to the 2023 Accra Proclamation, alongside guiding instruments such as Assembly/AU/Dec.847/XXXVII. Employing a qualitative methodology that integrates document analysis with case studies, such as Ghana's 2023 Pan-African Conference on Reparations and Senegal's handling of the cultural restitutions, the study documents increased capacities and the widening of political debate among 45 member states. However, problems are still present due to several factors, such as varying national priorities, the absence of enforcement mechanisms, and a lack of finances as US\$12 million has been pledged against an estimated US\$500 billion that is needed. The recommendations encompass the formation of a **US\$1 billion reparation fund** at the continental level, the authority of the AU to cooperate with CARICOM, and the integration of reparations in national development programs that are in harmony with robust public awareness campaigns. The article concludes that the AU, while having built a good base, should now act continuously if it is to pave the way for a more just African future.

The African Union's designation of 2025 as the year to advance "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations" represents a timely and resolute effort to confront slavery, colonialism, and systemic exploitation, which have been deeply engraved in our societies. This topic is a beacon that lights up all over the continent, as every country aspires to redress the history of trauma and lay the foundation for a future deep-rooted in equality and respect for all people. The paper evaluates whether the AU has successfully

implemented its compensation schemes, and as a result, it provides a window into both the gains and failures of this enterprise. The ethical dimension of the said act parallels Agenda 2063, a directive by the AU that formulates a new identity for Africa with cultural restitution, social justice, and unity, prosperity and peace as the main points. Through an analysis of historical precedents, current initiatives, and persistent challenges, this document aims to give a holistic evaluation of countries in Africa and what needs to be done to reach the gap between the promise and practice.





▲▲  
 The AU-EU collaboration has been very important in the return of 1,200 cultural artifacts since 2021. EU High Representative and AU Representatives pose for a family photo during 3rd European Union and African Union ministerial meeting in Brussels, Belgium  
 © Dursun Aydemir/ Anadolu via Getty Images

The reparations movement in Africa has a rich and evolving history. The journey of reparations began in earnest with the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) formation of the Group of Eminent Persons in 1992, a body assigned the role articulating the African community's demand for accountability of the transatlantic slave trade. As a result of this initiative, the 1993 Abuja Proclamation, a document that demanded reparations from the former colonial powers (Organization of African Unity, 1993), became the first of its kind in the world. Building on this foundation, the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action clearly defined slavery and colonialism as crimes against humanity, thus establishing a legal and moral basis for the African cause (United Nations, 2001).

Over the last few years, the AU has intensified its efforts. The 2021 Dakar Workshop provided a platform for policymakers and experts to

develop actionable strategies for reparations (African Union, 2021). In the Accra Proclamation, the countries confirmed their determination to focus on justice for historical wrongs (African Union, 2023a). To this end, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) also took the critical step of adopting Resolution 525 in 2022, challenging nations to integrate restorative measures into their legal systems (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2022). The prerequisites of these developments are to be found in key AU frameworks, such as Assembly/AU/Dec.847/XXXVII, which validates reparations as a central component of continental policy (African Union, 2023b). The main concern that has to be addressed is: how efficiently have these commitments been put to practice?

To address this, this paper used a strong qualitative method that blended document analysis with in-depth case studies. The methodological design opens with a critical examination of the most important texts, among which are the Abuja Proclamation, the Durban Declaration, and Agenda 2063 reports, to represent the optimization of the AU policy (African Union, 2013). The analysis is based on the implementation of key policy decisions by looking at concrete projects. The study, through comparison, identifies the extent to which national efforts align with the broad objectives of AU frameworks. This method is purposefully selected for its ability to interrelate theoretical rigor with pragmatic insight, thus ensuring the results are derived from both empirical data and the diversity of experiences on the continent. The paper, in its argument, tries to bridge the background legislation texts with real-life examples and aims to document both the strengths and the weaknesses of the AU's reparations agenda.

### **Institutional and National Contributions**

At the institutional level, the African Committee of Experts on Reparations has shown itself as the all-important coordinating body which is responsible for harmonising strategies and amplifying Africa's voice on the global stage. One of its most remarkable accomplishments is its collaboration with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a partnership which was formalized through the 2023 African Caribbean Joint Mechanism. This initiative brings African and Caribbean nations together, to achieve justice through reparations by using the already existing CARICOM reparations framework to enhance advocacy efforts (CARICOM, 2023).

In 2023, Ghana hosted the Pan-African Conference on Reparations in Accra, an event that was attended by more than 500 delegates from 30 nation. The conference not only enabled the people to talk but also collected pledges amounting to \$50 million for restitution purposes; proof of Ghana's proactive position (Government of Ghana, 2023). Nigeria has also made tremendous strides, especially

in the domains of culture and heritage. In the year 2022, the country recovered 22 Benin Bronzes from Germany, a win that gave impetus to an additional 15 artifacts coming back to the country in 2024 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022).

At the continental level, the AU-EU collaboration has been very important in the return of 1,200 cultural artifacts since 2021. The case of Senegal is a good example, as the country brought back 34 objects from France in 2023, a feat accomplished with the support of UNESCO's restitution programs (UNESCO, 2023).

### **Evaluating Progress and Obstacles**

As of 2024, 45 of the AU's 55 member states had endorsed the Accra Proclamation, driven by political consensus across the different regions (African Union, 2023a). Moreover, UNESCO data also confirms the impact of this momentum, as more than 5000 artifacts were returned to African nations between 2020 and 2024—a 300% increase from the 1,250 artifacts returned in the previous decade (UNESCO, 2024). Financial commitments of \$120 million pledged continentally since 2023 mark the beginning of broader reparative work (World Bank, 2024).

However, these achievements are tempered by significant obstacles. Member states frequently follow different agendas. While Ghana is pushing for the financial compensations to be directed to redressing economic disparities, Nigeria is concerned with cultural restitution and eventual return of its cultural heritage. This disparity dilutes the AU's collective impact. Furthermore, the lack of enforcement mechanisms is a serious drawback. Measures like Assembly/AU/Dec.847/XXXVII are normative, and do not enforce adherence. Thus, consistent implementation is not assured (African Union, 2023b).

Inadequate finance is another strong barrier. On the one hand, the World Bank estimates the total cost of reparations to be \$500 billion—a figure that greatly exceeds the current pledge

of \$120 million, indicating a major deficit (World Bank, 2024). In the face of these stumbling blocks, perfect alignment with the 2063 Agenda of the African Union is difficult to attain.

### Charting a Course Forward

Moving ahead with these ideas, a mix of practicability and willingness to take a risk would be the most ideal course of action. Strengthening the AU-CARICOM partnership to enhance global advocacy and hold former colonial powers accountable aligns with the partnership's objectives (CARICOM, 2023). A continental reparations fund, established with about US\$1 billion from the governments, private donors, and diaspora donations would provide the necessary funding to back up restoration and development projects. On the other hand, this funding may be used to scale up demonstrable projects like those in Ghana and Senegal, which could be best practices for other member states. Mainstreaming reparations in national development plans and frameworks is another option.

Public involvement is also important. For instance, Nigeria's "Return Our Heritage" drive of 2023, was mobilised at the grass roots level, utilising radio and TV channels as well as social media to reach 10 million people. Thus, winning the support of the public and applying pressure on politicians are seen as benefits of the process (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). In

addition to the aforesaid action points, the AU may consider litigation as a means of seeking redress through collaboration with international courts to enforce reparation claims. This would give real weight to its resolutions. A key initiative to implement is the infusion of reparations history into school curricula.

The pursuit of reparations is critical in redressing historical wrongs against Africans and their descendants worldwide. It is not just about reclaiming lost artifacts or securing funds; it is also about the restoration of dignity, healing intergenerational wounds and the creation of an Africa that is fully reflective of its potential. The AU has the opportunity to select the direction the continent will follow. The organisation has a history of adopting forward looking policies and declarations, such as at Abuja in 1993 to Accra in 2023, and a clear mission supported by Agenda 2063. The bright examples in Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal are evidence of scalable progress on the ground. However, for the reparations agenda to be successful, the African Union should rally member states to the cause, provide resources, and boost public morale and participation. The stakes demand decisive action.

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# Economic, Social & Cultural Implications of Reparations

The Europe Pan-African Forum for People of African Descent (EPAFPAD)

The imposition of colonialism altered African history and natural development forever. African modes of thought, patterns of cultural development, and ways of life were forever impacted by the change in economic and political structure<sup>1</sup>. Foreign laws, languages, religions, and cultural practices were imposed by Europeans while they demonized and ridiculed Africa's civilisation; all the while extracting its resources, cultural heritage and wealth for their own benefit.

Prior to the "Scramble for Africa"<sup>2</sup> by the major European nations, African economies were advancing in every area, particularly around trade, but these significantly changed through economic policies that encouraged the development of a trade network to link the total economic output of the African countries to the demands and enrichment of the Europeans nations. Colonial African economies focused on the production of one or two agricultural products or single cash crop production for consumption in the world markets<sup>3</sup>, while Africans were impoverished. Economic exploitation was accompanied with human exploitation and violence which involved forced labour and slavery. One key example of this was the Belgian Congo under King Leopold II's rule from 1885-1908. The extraction of rubber from Congolese forests led to widespread violence against local populations including mutilation and murder, with millions of Africans dying during this period due to starvation or disease resulting from forced labour. These acts were genocidal extermination, and the unfortunate result of a highly lethal form of economic exploitation<sup>4</sup>.

The social structure of many African societies was irrevocably altered by colonialism and its economic demands, which set the stage for the future problems in Africa's economic development. While economic policies were designed to keep prices low, under colonialism, agriculture and land became increasingly commercialized. Thus, colonialism caused the rise of a large, landless class of labourers who travelled from place to place in search of work and changed patterns of work and gender roles. The demands of the cash crop economy forced many women and children into the production system. These women and children performed the bulk of the labour in farming enterprises that considerably enriched many owners. However, colonialism completed the process of fully integrating Africa into the world economic system, but like the slave trade system, Africans were unequal partners in the arena of international trade and economics. West African countries were made to pay the bill of colonialism through the taxation on trade<sup>5</sup>.

The Transatlantic Chattel Slave Trade of African people is one of the unique tragedies in the history of humanity. It is a crime against humanity which is unparalleled". In the transatlantic slavery, Africans were sold into slavery like animals. This process is known as the chattelization of Africans by Europeans slave traders that included the following phases: capture and sale of Africans in Africa; the forced trek to the slave dungeons on the coast and to ships in the harbours; their internment in the slave dungeons and ships; the notorious Middle Passage, as well as the traffic between Brazil and Africa; their sale in the Americas and the Caribbean; and their

**White Economic Advantage + Black Economic Suppression = Modern Vectors of Economic Racism**  
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forced and unpaid labour on the plantations. This form of trafficking in humans was supported throughout its duration by a well-organised and systematic trade in slaves.<sup>6</sup>

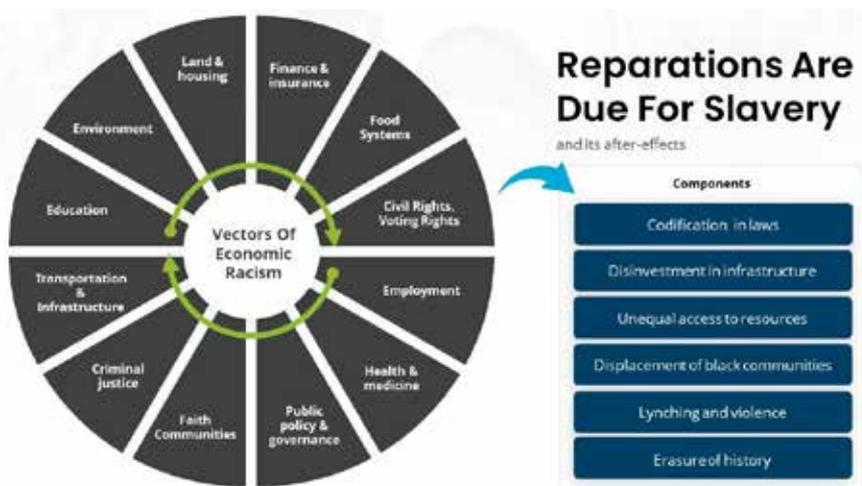
European States promoted the establishment of companies to trade in the practice of transatlantic chattel slavery. In his book, Britain's Black Debt, Professor Beckles asserts that "the King and the Parliament combined to establish England as the premier slave trading nation." This was done through for example, 'the Company of Royal Adventurers'

(established in 1663), a name that was changed to 'the Royal African Company' (in 1672), which became the premier trading entity in transatlantic chattel slavery. The King's brother, the Duke of York, and himself were investors in this company; in fact, the Duke of York managed the company.<sup>7</sup>

In a book that deals with forms of institutional racism, reference is made to the Resolution of the Dutch States General (12/11/1789) in which it is established that "The Negro trade ought to be regarded as inseparable from the prosperity and prosperity of the colonies, and from the whole commerce which derives its life from the colonies, except that the Negro trade is to be kept in itself for one of the most advantageous branches of commerce, in as much as it spreads its influence over a multitude of manufactures and manufacturers. whose flow is thereby increased." (Biekman 2018)

Even after the abolition of slavery, Africans who were freed in the American and Caribbean colonies still suffered racial prejudice. In January of 1865, an order to divide land into forty-acre tracts and distribute them to "freed men" was given. By June of 1865, about 40,000 freedmen had been allocated 400,000 acres of land. However, by September of 1865, President Andrew Johnson began the process of rescinding title to the land and returning it to the previous owners. The acres of land as compensation for slavery that was distributed to the freed Africans as reparation were all reclaimed by the federal government and routed to the white slave owners (who had lost the Civil War, fought for the Confederacy, and had already benefited unjustly from the unpaid labour of Africans). These actions caused the loss of reparations for the injustices suffered by African Americans.<sup>8</sup>

## For 500 years, Africans suffered the “Maangamizi” a term to define the holocaust of enslavement and economic exploitation, and thus are entitled to the same compensation and repeated apologies received by different countries for the historical and contemporary injustices they suffered



The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America define reparation as payment of a debt owed; the act of repairing a wrong or injury; to atone for wrongdoings; to make amends; to make one whole again; the payment of damages; to repair a nation; compensation in money, land or materials for damages<sup>9</sup>.

In 1953, Germany paid \$845 million to holocaust victims as compensation for injustices they suffered. The compensation was to be paid in annual instalments over a period of 14 years, between April 1, 1953, and March 31, 1966. In 1988, the German government allocated another \$125 million for reparations, enabling the remaining holocaust survivors to receive monthly payments of \$290 for the rest of their lives. In return for the dismissal of all such lawsuits and guaranteeing German industry “legal peace” from any such further litigation, the German government created a foundation – “Remembrance, Responsibility and the Future.” In 2019, the funding was increased to \$564 million, allowing survivors to receive more frequent and better-quality home care, food support, transportation and medical services.<sup>10</sup>

For 500 years, Africans suffered the “Maangamizi” a term to define the holocaust of enslavement and economic exploitation, and thus are entitled to the same compensation and repeated apologies received by different countries for the historical and contemporary injustices they suffered. For the African nations, the past transatlantic slave trade and colonialism are direct causes of Africa’s underdevelopment. This tragedy has resulted in substantial and lasting economic, political and cultural damage to people of African descent. So, reparations for Africans should not just be the mere recognition of, or apologies for the suffering that Africa and African peoples including the Diaspora have had to endure, but a call for full compensation (e.g. money transfer and debt cancellation), restoration, restitution, repatriation and non-repetition aspects as established in international law, as well as the re-ordering of international relations and geopolitical power to give Africa more representation in the “highest decision-making bodies” and, in particular, a permanent seat on the United Nations’ Security Council. These should be the pathways.

The Europe Pan-African Forum for People of African Descent (EPAFPAD) demands for reparations from those European countries that were involved in the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism in Africa, the Roman Catholic Church and all those involved. The church owes

the descendants of enslaved Africans the “moral debt” for the vital role it played in providing the so-called moral justification for invasion of Africa through the Papal Bull (Dum Diversas)<sup>11</sup> issued in June 1452 by Pope Nicholas V.

The EPAFPAD calls on European countries to sign and adopt the 2001 Durban Declaration Program of Action against Racism<sup>12</sup> as part of its moral debt for reparations towards the African people, to eliminate the legacy of slavery and colonialism. Slavery is more than theft and the loss of freedom, it deprived Africans of their dreams and stripped them of their civilization, and produced collective psychological trauma that have influenced all succeeding generations of African descent.

The African Union’s 2063 Agenda<sup>13</sup>, the Declaration Program of Action against Racism, and the Accra Proclamation on Reparations<sup>14</sup> have provided the Guidelines for Reparations for African people and the establishment of a trust fund for reparations. Reparations for African people should promote a better understanding and recognition of the culture, history and heritage of people of African descent, and should be recognized in school curricula to end the falsification of African histories; to recognize the memory of the victims of these tragedies and their descendants through the establishment of sites of memory testifying to this past by the Western countries; to encourage the international community to honour this memory; and to fight discrimination against people of African descent.

In this regard, we propose the Ubuntunomics strategy.<sup>15</sup> This is based on an economic philosophy and framework inspired by the African concept of “Ubuntu,” which emphasizes community, mutual care, and interconnectedness. Ubuntu, often translated as “I am because we are,” reflects a world view where the well-being of the individual is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the community. Ubuntunomics seeks to create a more humane and just economic system by integrating these principles into economic policies and practices, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collective prosperity.

## Ubutunomics Key Principles

- 1. Community-Cantered Economics:** Prioritizing the needs and well-being of the community over individual profit. This approach encourages collective ownership, cooperation, and sharing of resources.
- 2. Sustainability:** Promoting sustainable practices that ensure the long-term health of both the environment and the community. This includes responsible resource management and environmental stewardship.
- 3. Equity and Inclusion:** Ensuring that economic benefits are distributed equitably and inclusively, addressing disparities and providing opportunities for all members of society.
- 4. Ethical Governance:** Emphasizing transparent, accountable, and ethical leadership and governance in economic activities. This involves fair practices, anti-corruption measures, and respect for human rights.
- 5. Social Capital:** Valuing social relationships and networks as vital components of economic systems. This recognizes the importance of trust, reciprocity, and collaboration in building strong, resilient communities

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# Building a Common Front for Healing Historical Injustices: Reparations for Africa: The African Union's Path to Justice and Restoration

By **Reem Wagdy**

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The AU's declaration of 2025 as the "Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations" represents a transformative opportunity to address historical injustices while creating pathways for sustainable development, global accountability, and equity. By linking reparations to socio-economic empowerment, cultural restitution, and systemic reforms, the AU is reframing reparations as a forward-looking initiative that can reshape Africa's future. While the 2025 theme revives historical initiatives, it also aligns with the broader objectives of Agenda 2063, the continent's 50-year development blueprint focused on liberation and unity. It also represents a bold, unified effort to address the legacies of enslavement, colonialism, and systemic racism and discrimination, explicitly prioritising reparations as a flagship

theme. This underscores a formal acknowledgment of the profound harm caused by transatlantic slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonial exploitation. By addressing the expected challenges of political resistance, legal complexities, and socio-economic disparities through a unified framework, the AU can translate its initiative into actionable steps toward justice for Africans and people of African descent worldwide. As Ghana's leadership emphasised at the Accra Conference on Reparations: "This is not just about repairing the past; it is about building a more equitable future."

## **Reviving Historical Discussions:**

The 2025 theme revives historical discussions initiated over 30 years ago in the Abuja Proclamation and recently reinvigorated by the Accra Proclamation (2023) and its Declaration. The Abuja

Proclamation, adopted in 1993 during the First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, is a pivotal moment in the contemporary history of African reparations efforts. It unified African nations and diaspora communities around the shared goal of calling for reparations for the historical injustices of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid, setting a precedent for future pan-African initiatives. The proclamation outlined a holistic approach with a comprehensive framework - including financial compensation, return of cultural artifacts, and acknowledgment of historical wrongs. It also stressed that reparations should be multi-dimensional and not limited to financial compensation but also include psychological, cultural, and educational components. The Abuja Proclamation helped raise global awareness about the need for reparations, contributing to a broader



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 Kwame Akoto-Bamfo's 'Nkyinkim' sculpture... dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Transatlantic slave trade is on display at The National Memorial For Peace And Justice in Montgomery, Alabama  
 © Raymond Boyd/Getty Images

international dialogue on historical injustices. It also influenced other regional reparations movements, such as CARICOM's (Caribbean Community) efforts, by providing a model for organised advocacy.

**Agenda 2063: A Forward-Looking Vision**

With a forward-looking vision, reparations for enslavement and colonisation are also deeply embedded in the AU's broader vision of Agenda 2063: "The Africa We Want". By linking reparative justice to the 2063 goals of economic development, cultural restoration, justice, and continental integration aspirations, the AU sees reparations as representing more than compensation—

they are an opportunity to repair fractured relationships, restore dignity, and foster systemic change.

The AU argues that Africa's current debt burden - estimated at \$836 billion - is a direct legacy of colonial exploitation and resource extraction. By framing debt cancellation as a form of reparations, the AU connects historical injustices to contemporary economic challenges. The AU, thus, aims to negotiate debt restructuring or cancellation with international financial institutions and former colonial powers, linking these efforts to broader development objectives like poverty reduction and infrastructure investment. At the 38th Ordinary AU Summit in

February 2024, African leaders emphasised that debt relief should not be seen as charity but as a moral obligation stemming from centuries of exploitation. This aligns with calls for structural changes in global financial systems that perpetuate inequality.

Cultural restitution is another path to healing, especially as over 90% of sub-Saharan Africa's cultural artifacts remain in Western museums. The AU prioritises their return as part of reparative justice, arguing that cultural heritage is essential for restoring dignity and identity. This has even broader economic implications that can boost tourism and cultural industries, and foster economic empowerment in Africa. The return of the Benin Bronzes to

Nigeria and the Maqdala Treasures to Ethiopia demonstrates this progress in cultural restitution efforts and sustained advocacy by the AU and its member states. This aligns with Agenda 2063's vision of an African Renaissance rooted in cultural pride and unity.

The AU links reparations to redistributive justice by advocating for investment in healthcare, education, and infrastructure and addressing structural inequalities that persist due to colonial legacies. South Africa's post-apartheid reparations model (\$348 million for 21,000 victims) is a reference. In that respect, the proposed Global Reparations Fund would pool resources for targeted development projects across the continent, focusing on the most affected and marginalized communities. Grassroots mobilization and partnerships with NGOs will further ensure community-driven solutions.

Reparations are also linked to self-reliance and sovereignty on one hand, and to structural change and systemic reform on the other. Besides, reparations can help challenge global trade imbalances, governance inequities, and systemic racism in multilateral institutions. For example, Africa accounts for only 3% of global trade despite holding 30% of the world's mineral reserves—a disparity rooted in colonial exploitation.

Good governance, democracy, justice, and legal advocacy are Agenda 2063 pillars of Africa's transformation. Reparations feature prominently in this context through the Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) as it integrates reparative justice into governance frameworks, advocating accountability for historical crimes. As for legal advocacy, the AU is developing a Common African Position on Reparations to unify member states' demands, enhancing Africa's negotiating power globally. Reparations also advance the 2063 vision of a "United Africa" through political integration and solidarity across borders. African Diaspora engagement - as the "sixth region" - in reparations initiatives strengthens ties between Africa and its global communities, fostering solidarity around shared historical experiences.

#### **How Much Is Africa Owed?**

While estimating the compensation Africa is owed for historical injustices is complex and varies widely depending on the source and methodology used, all different approaches highlight the vast scale of historical injustices and the challenges in quantifying them. Besides, all estimates serve as a basis for ongoing discussions and negotiations regarding reparations. Ghanaian political scientist Daniel T. Osabu-Kle estimates that Africa is owed approximately \$100 trillion in compensation for historical



injustices - including slavery and colonialism - based on the economic impacts of these injustices. The Battle Report - which analysed the global cost of the transatlantic slave trade - estimates that the total cost could be as high as \$131 trillion (including harm during the slave era and post-enslavement). The same report suggests that individual countries owe significant sums: the USA is estimated to owe nearly \$27 trillion, Britain \$24 trillion, and Portugal \$21 trillion. Another approach values the loss of human life during slavery and colonialism. Using the Warsaw Convention's valuation of \$75,000 per life, the estimated cost for one billion lives lost could be \$75 trillion, with additional trillions for resource plundering and labour exploitation.

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Markers display the names and locations of individuals killed by lynching at the National Memorial For Peace And Justice. The memorial is dedicated to the legacy of enslaved black people and those terrorized by lynching and Jim Crow segregation in America. Conceived by the Equal Justice Initiative, the physical environment is intended to foster reflection on America's history of racial inequality. Montgomery, Alabama  
© Bob Miller/Getty Images)



**Challenges:**

The challenges that the AU faces in advancing its reparations agenda for historical injustices linked to enslavement and colonisation include political, legal, socio-economic, and institutional dimensions. Resistance from former colonial powers is a significant obstacle. European countries like France, the United Kingdom (UK), and Germany resist binding reparations frameworks, fearing financial liability and litigation risks. Former colonial powers fear that reparations claims could trigger lawsuits akin to Kenya’s Mau Mau case. The EU lacks a unified stance, deferring to member states, which weakens Africa’s negotiating power, while some African Legal frameworks like the AU’s Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) remain underutilised in addressing colonial-era crimes. Internal fragmentation is equally challenging. AU member states prioritise immediate development over historical redress, leading to divergent interests. For example, Francophone nations dependent on French aid hesitate to demand reparations. Added to this is geopolitical exploitation, where external actors like Russia exploit anti-Western sentiment in Africa - like West African military regimes - to politicise reparations, risking agenda co-option for destabilisation. Added to these are the lack of binding mechanisms and data gaps. For instance, the

proposed Common African Position on Reparations and Global Reparations Fund lack enforceability, and the AU’s reliance on voluntary cooperation limits accountability. Besides, inconsistent methodologies for quantifying harm (e.g., valuing stolen labour vs. cultural theft) complicate claims. Only 32 of 238 Inter-American Court cases tracked reparations, highlighting systemic underreporting.

Socio-economic barriers also warrant consideration, including debt dependency, economic asymmetry, and cultural restitution. Africa’s \$836 billion debt burden, rooted in colonial exploitation, is framed as reparations. However, debt relief negotiations face resistance from international financial institutions and Western creditors. Former colonies remain economically dependent on former colonial powers, deterring unilateral advocacy. For instance, 14 Francophone nations rely on France’s financial systems. Additional limitations include weak bargaining power as Africa holds 30% of global mineral reserves but accounts for 3% of trade—a legacy of colonial extraction. This imbalance undermines AU leverage in multilateral forums.

**Conclusion**

The AU’s 2025 reparations agenda marks a historic shift from symbolic gestures to actionable policy. By building

on previous efforts and expanding its scope, the AU’s reparations agenda represents a significant step forward in the pursuit of justice and equity for Africans and people of African descent. While challenges like political resistance and data gaps persist, the AU’s institutional coordination, grassroots mobilisation, and global partnerships offer transformative potential. By linking reparations to debt relief, cultural restitution, and systemic reforms, the AU is positioning reparations as a catalyst for Africa’s equitable future. The AU’s decision to develop a Common African Position on Reparations also signals unprecedented coordination among African states.

As Ghana’s Foreign Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa noted: “Reparations are about closing the door on cycles of harm spanning generations.”



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# Exploring the Nexus between Reparations and Budgeting for Children's Rights

By **Hon. Wilson Almedia Adão**

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This article explores the intersection of the African Union (AU) 2025 theme on reparations and the annual commemoration of the Day of the African Child which is held on 16 June and the 2025 theme on budgeting for children's rights. While former colonial powers bear responsibility, Member States also play an active role in restructuring budgets to correct past and present injustices. Despite some progress, children remain under-prioritised in most national budgets. A child rights-based approach to public finance is key to achieving intergenerational justice and transforming national systems in line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.



### Introduction

The 2025 Day of the African Child (DAC) held under the theme Planning and Budgeting for Children's Rights: Progress Since 2010; converged with the AU theme of the year, Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations, providing an opportunity to view public investment in children as a matter of development and a foundational element of reparative justice. The 2025 DAC theme rightly positioned budgeting as a central component of the broader reflection on reparations. In the African context, reparations include more than financial compensation; they encompass the reconstruction of institutions, the rectification of historical exclusion, and the restoration of the dignity of all Africans, including children. Budgeting and planning for children's rights must therefore be understood not as an administrative task, but as foundational instruments in the broader project of reparative justice. These processes reflect whether Member States are willing to invest in transforming the conditions that continue to deny children their full entitlement to their rights under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

### Day of the African Child 2025

The 2025 DAC theme built on the foundational commitments articulated in DAC 2010, which called for collective responsibility in budgeting for children. Fifteen years on, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) has proposed a return to these commitments, not only to take stock of progress but to address the enduring gaps that

continue to frustrate the realisation of children's rights through public finance. As outlined in the Concept Note for DAC 2025, the objectives of this year's commemoration include evaluating measures undertaken since 2010; identifying best practices and persistent obstacles;

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Hon. Wilson Almedia Adão, Chairperson, African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. (ACERWC)

encouraging national assessments of budgetary frameworks; advocating for legislative reform of budget laws to incorporate child rights perspectives; ensure children's participation in planning processes; advocate for increased allocations and child-sensitive fiscal policies.

While the Committee acknowledges progress in a few areas, it also observes that challenges remain pervasive. In most Member States, national budgets continue to reflect adult-centric priorities. Child-related allocations are often diluted within the broad social sector expenditures, with limited visibility, no dedicated budget lines, and a lack of accountability mechanisms for effective execution. Ministries mandated to promote children's rights are frequently under-resourced, and this issue is compounded by weak statistical systems. Many States lack disaggregated data that would enable planners to identify and respond to the needs of children in vulnerable situations, children with disabilities, children in street situations, children separated from parents, and children from marginalised and remote areas.

Furthermore, only some Member States have embedded child participation within fiscal governance structures, such as budget

consultations, planning commissions, or local governance forums. This is despite the inclusion of child participation as one of the four guiding principles of the Charter, enshrined in Article 4(2) and Article 7, and further in the ACERWC Guidelines on Child Participation. The 2025 DAC theme was, therefore, not simply commemorative; it was corrective. It underscored the need to shift from rhetorical commitments to structural reforms that reconfigure national budgets into tools of transformation for children.

### **Situating the Reparations discourse in the context of DAC2025**

The 2025 AU Theme of the Year Concept note asserts that reparations must be understood as ‘a critical and transformative dialogue’ requiring ‘collective attention and action’ that extends ‘beyond historical injustices and into the current fabric of societies’. In this framing, public budgets emerge not merely as economic instruments, but as political statements which reflect national priorities. The structures of public finance, particularly how resources are mobilised, allocated, and spent, either contribute to the reproduction of inequality or serve as tools for structural repair. It is important to consider the enduring legacy of colonisation on the state of budgeting in many Member States. As Thomas Sankara stated during the 23rd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African Unity, “Debt’s origins come from colonialism’s origins. Those who lend us money are those who colonised us. They are the same ones who used to manage our states and economies. These are the colonisers who indebted Africa.”:

This historical context remains relevant today. As Dr Akinwumi Adesina, former President of the African Development Bank, observed at the 2024 International Monetary Fund and World Bank Spring Meetings, many African countries now face unsustainable debt burdens, with some allocating 65% of their GDP to debt servicing. In 2021, Africa’s external debt stood at \$824 billion, and in 2024, the debt service payments were projected to increase from \$71



billion, more than four times the amount in 2010. In this regard, when children remain peripheral in budgetary decisions despite representing over 40% of the population, it reflects a missed opportunity for inclusive development and raises concerns about the fulfilment of justice and equality commitments. As the DAC 2025 Concept Note affirms, many African States still lack dedicated budget lines for children, with child-focused allocations remaining marginal.

Therefore, a child rights-based approach to budgeting assumes a reparative function and becomes a means for Member States to correct historical underinvestment, address present-day disparities, and build the foundations for intergenerational equity. As the AU asserts, reparatory justice must involve ‘transformative change to the systems, structures and institutions that have perpetrated harm. While much of the global reparations discourse rightly emphasises the obligations of former colonial powers, Member States are not merely passive recipients of reparations. They also hold the power and responsibility to



Day of the African Child Celebrations, 2025, Blantyre, Malawi



pursue internal forms of reparation, including through how they allocate and prioritise national budgets.

Article 3 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provides for the principle of non-discrimination to encompass formal equality, as well as the obligation to adopt targeted, corrective measures to address systemic disadvantages. In the context of budgeting and planning, this requires States to prioritise children who are marginalised or in vulnerable situations, such as children with disabilities, children in street situations, and children affected by conflict. A child rights-based approach to national budgets must inform Member States' engagement with global reparations discourse, reinforcing that justice for Africans and people of African descent also includes how States invest in children.

Given that national budgets are among the most consequential structures through which harm is perpetuated or addressed, ensuring that children are explicitly included in planning and budgeting is critical for all Member States, particularly the 51 out of 55 State Parties to the Charter.

The nexus between child rights-based budgeting and reparative justice is two-fold. First, States must assume responsibility for addressing the historical and structural exclusion of children through adequate, sustained and proportional budgetary allocations. Second, it is imperative to adopt a child rights-based approach to the allocation and oversight of external resources, including donor

funding and reparatory claims. Accordingly, the DAC 2025 theme not only reflected on progress since 2010; it embedded children within the notion of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations. Ensuring that children's rights are visible, prioritised, and budgeted for is not only an obligation under the Charter but a necessary precondition in the discussions on reparations.

### Conclusion

The convergence between the AU 2025 theme of the year and the 2025 DAC theme offered an opportunity to reconceptualise justice in intergenerational terms. It invited recognition that reparations are not solely about redressing historical wrongs, but also about how the present is organised and how the future is imagined. Nowhere is this more urgent or impactful than in how we invest in children. An intentional, rights-based, and equitable investment in children constitutes one of the most powerful and enduring forms of reparation that any Member State can undertake. Only through such deliberate investment can Africa begin to realise its vision of a continent that is not only just but truly fit for its children.

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# Peace as a transformative lever for sustainable reparations for global African descendants

By **Dagmawit Moges Bekele**

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This article underscores peace as a necessary foundation for achieving reparatory justice for Africans and people of African descent. By examining the intersection of peacebuilding and reparations and spotlighting the role of the African Union Peace Fund, it highlights how sustainable peace creates an enabling environment for justice, redress, and socio-economic equity. Anchored in key AU instruments and decisions, the article advocates for the practical integration of reparations within peace frameworks to ensure lasting recovery and inclusive development.

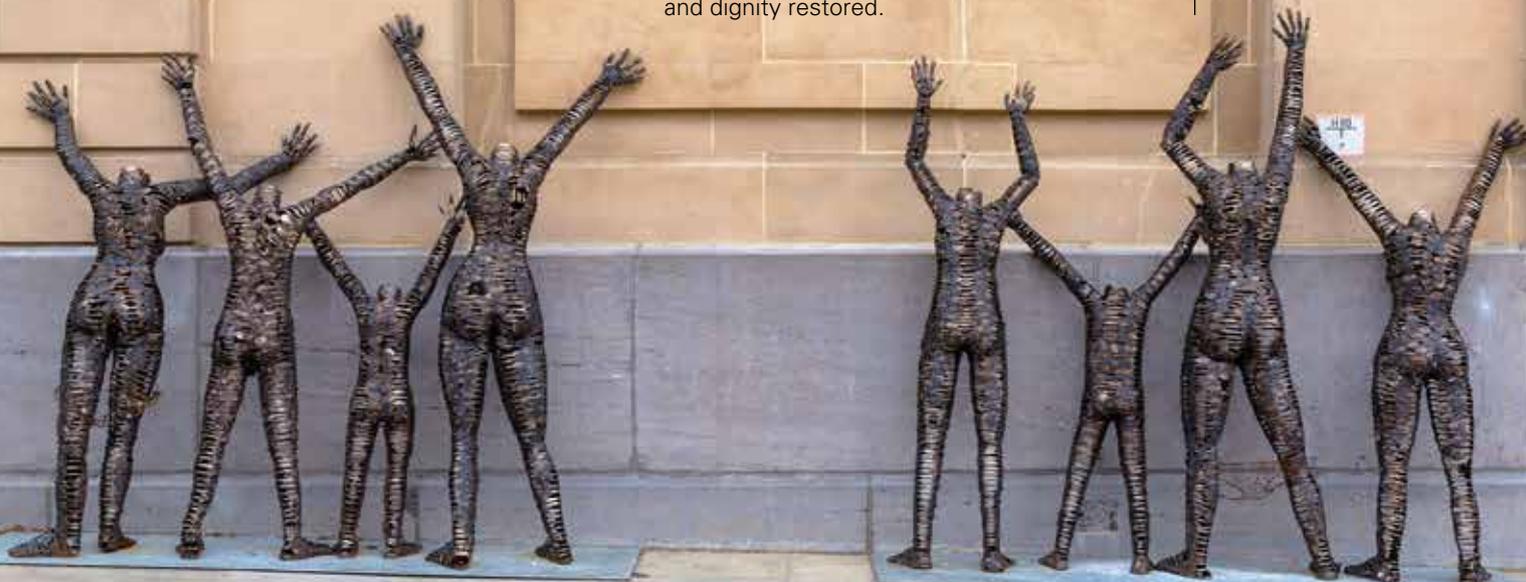
The call for reparations for Africans and people of African descent arises from centuries of systemic injustices: the transatlantic slave trade, colonisation, apartheid, and the persistence of racial discrimination. These legacies have left indelible marks on societies and continue to shape socio-economic disparities both on the African continent and across the diaspora. Reparations, therefore, go beyond financial restitution—they encompass recognition, restoration, and redress. Central to realising these aspirations is the presence of peace. Without sustained peace, reparative efforts remain fragile. Conflict and instability undermine healing and perpetuate inequality. In

this context, peace becomes both a precondition and a catalyst for reparatory justice.

## **Peacebuilding as a prerequisite for reparations**

The AU Peace Fund, a strategic financial mechanism supporting African-led peace operations, plays a pivotal role in creating the conditions necessary for reparations. Through its investments in early warning systems, mediation, and stabilisation missions, the AU Peace Fund fosters environments where historical grievances can be addressed, memories preserved, looted heritage returned, and dignity restored.

The sculpture "Centres fermes, rêves ouverts" by the Congolese artist Freddy Tsimba on the outer facade of the African Museum; Tervuren, Belgium  
© abine Glaubitz/picture alliance via Getty Images)



In post-conflict settings, AU-supported peacebuilding initiatives have facilitated community reconciliation and contributed to the establishment of reparations commissions. These efforts reflect the vision of the Abuja Proclamation (1993) and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (2001), both of which affirmed that slavery and colonialism were crimes against humanity and that victims are entitled to just and adequate reparations.

Integrating reparatory justice into continental peace strategies requires the alignment of justice mechanisms with broader development and stability goals. Besides, reparation-focused initiatives can be embedded into ongoing peace and security frameworks, many of which are already supported by the AU Peace Fund. This approach ensures that the pursuit of justice is not treated as separate from peacebuilding but rather as a vital component of Africa's recovery architecture.

### Role of the African diaspora

The African diaspora continues to be a driving force in the global movement for reparatory justice. From advocacy at the United Nations and national parliaments to direct investment in African development, diaspora communities bring critical resources, political capital, and unique perspectives to the conversation. Their contributions - ranging from remittances to strategic partnerships - play an essential role in addressing inequality and fostering societal resilience.

Furthermore, diaspora-led initiatives in education, economic empowerment, and historical memory have helped reframe international narratives around reparations, holding institutions and governments accountable. Solidarity between continental Africa and its global diaspora remains a cornerstone of the reparation's agenda.

Through its funding and facilitation of grassroots peace and reconciliation projects, the AU Peace Fund actively supports this solidarity. Community-driven healing and policy dialogues co-developed with diaspora organisations and civil society actors have shown how reparations can be integrated into broader peace frameworks, empowering communities to define and lead their own journeys to justice.

### Progress and emerging challenges

Progress is visible. Efforts such as the restitution of cultural artifacts, the formation of national reparations commissions, and successful community reintegration projects underscore the viability of reparatory pathways. Yet, significant challenges remain.

Quantifying reparations, reconciling divergent stakeholder interests, and securing consistent international support require sustained innovation and coordination. Dedicated legal frameworks, public awareness campaigns, and expanded funding models are needed to build consensus and ensure long-term impact.

The AU Peace Fund is well positioned to meet these needs. Its flexible, Africa-owned structure enables it to support diverse initiatives and respond effectively to complex peace and justice demands.

### Pathways forward

To strengthen the synergy between peacebuilding and reparatory justice, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Expand diaspora engagement platforms to ensure inclusive participation in the design and financing of reparations-related projects.
2. Systematically and gradually integrate reparations into AU-funded peace efforts, positioning justice as a foundational pillar of conflict prevention and recovery.

Peace is not simply the absence of conflict—it is the presence of justice, dignity, and healing. By strategically aligning peacebuilding with reparatory goals, the African Union, through mechanisms like the AU Peace Fund, can chart a transformative path forward. Africa is not only leading the conversation on reparations but offering a model rooted in resilience, solidarity, and sovereignty. In doing so, it advances a just, inclusive, and prosperous future for all Africans and their descendants across the globe.

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# Reparations for Justice: Reclaiming African Identity and Power

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Africa's heartbeat echoes across generations—loud, resilient, unwavering. It pulses with stories of dignity stripped away, of cultures torn from their roots, and of identities suppressed by foreign hands. Yet, this heartbeat also speaks of resilience of African communities and individuals, pushing against structures of oppression, rising and reclaiming what was once forcefully taken. Reparations are a key part of this reclamation—a movement not just for justice but for dignity, empowerment, and the future that generations of Africans have fought to create.

In my thesis, *“Understanding the Search for the African Identity through Soft Power and its Role in Development Endeavours,”* I explore how African identity has been systematically fragmented, molded, and at times erased by external forces, yet how soft power—the ability

to influence through culture, diplomacy, and shared values—remains an anchor. Reparations, in this context, are not simply financial transactions. They are acts of restoration, tools to reclaim Africa's identity and challenge the ongoing realities of neo-colonialism.

This article argues for reparations as both material restitution and cultural reclamation, examining how the return of artifacts and economic justice can rebuild African identity. Grounded in AU frameworks like the Abuja Proclamation and Agenda 2063, it highlights feminist and diaspora perspectives in the reparations movement. This essay argues that reparations, especially cultural restitution and economic empowerment, are essential to Africa's decolonization and development.



Visitors view exhibits at the National Museum of African American History and Culture © *Kayla Bartkowski/Getty Images*

**The Neo-Colonial Shadow:  
Reclaiming True Independence**

Colonialism may have formally ended, but its shadow remains—a lingering influence felt in Africa’s economics, politics, and society. Kwame Nkrumah, the architect of Ghana’s independence, prophetically warned, “The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.” Today, Africa’s continued reliance on external economic structures and its struggle against debt bondage are clear examples of how neo-colonialism still constrains true autonomy.

Neo-colonialism, the invisible chain, is felt most acutely by those whom colonialism affected the most—African women, whose communities have suffered the severest of injustices, from the forced labor of their ancestors to the exploitation of their land and resources today. Reparations, therefore, cannot simply be an apology. They must dismantle these

In my research, I argue that reparations—particularly financial and structural reparations—are essential in addressing Africa’s historical and current economic imbalances. This vision aligns with Agenda 2063, which calls for a prosperous and self-reliant Africa. Reparations represent a break in the cycle, an opportunity to reconstruct an economic foundation that supports Africa’s people, rather than reinforcing old, unjust systems.

**Cultural Restitution: Reclaiming Our Stories, Rewriting Our Narratives**

Colonialism did not just steal Africa’s resources; it sought to erase its essence, its stories, and its soul. The looting of African cultural artifacts, still displayed in museums far from home, speaks of a deep injustice. To reclaim Africa’s heritage is to reclaim the narrative that colonial powers sought to destroy. Frantz Fanon aptly stated, “To fight for culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation.” Culture, after all, is a people’s heart and spirit, and without it, we are incomplete.

to their past and give strength to the next generation. The Abuja Proclamation calls for reparations that include cultural restitution, recognizing that true reparations must restore the dignity of Africa by returning what was taken.

This call for cultural restitution is personal, too. As a feminist, I recognize that women’s stories have often been the ones most erased, diminished, or ignored. When cultural artifacts are returned, when our histories are retold by us, Africa’s women and girls can see themselves in these narratives, not as footnotes but as protagonists. Reparations through cultural restitution allow for a renaissance of African identity, where young Africans, particularly women, can grow with a sense of pride in their heritage.

**Economic Reparations: Building a Future, Not Just Fixing the Past**

Reparations are not only about righting past wrongs; they are about equipping Africa for its future. Africa has been bled of its resources, and this theft has left scars. Financial reparations and investment in African infrastructure, education, and health care are essential to building the foundation for generations to come. W.E.B. Du Bois, the American sociologist, socialist, historian, and Pan-Africanist civil rights activist, warned, “A system cannot fail those it was never meant to protect.” And indeed, the global economic systems were never designed to support Africa’s self-sufficiency; they were designed to extract from it.

**Reparations, therefore, cannot simply be an apology. They must dismantle these economic dependencies and restore the autonomy that women, and Africa at large, have been denied.**

economic dependencies and restore the autonomy that women, and Africa at large, have been denied. Economic empowerment, made possible by reparations, would directly challenge the structures that continue to economically subjugate Africa, empowering communities to create opportunities on their terms.

In my thesis, I explore how soft power—our culture, our stories, our shared history—empowers us, giving us the influence to assert our place in a global community. The restitution of African artifacts, therefore, goes beyond symbolic gesture. It is an act of decolonization, a necessary reclamation of the stories, artifacts, and spirits that connect African people

Economic reparations can help dismantle these legacies of dependency. They can support communities in breaking free from exploitative systems that have long drained Africa’s potential. As part of the reparations movement, debt cancellation and fair trade practices are not just beneficial—they are necessary steps in deconstructing the economic

hierarchies that have kept Africa impoverished. Reparations are not a handout. They are a payment for a debt that is long overdue.

For African women, who are often at the forefront of local economies, economic reparations would mean opportunities for community-driven development, where women lead and shape the futures of their villages, towns, and cities. The Durban Declaration reminds us that those who have suffered most should be prioritized in reparations. Economic reparations can transform African societies by directly supporting those who have been impacted the most, including women who drive economic activity at the grassroots level.

### **The Role of the Diaspora: A Global Sisterhood for Reparative Justice**

Africa's call for reparations is not a cry of isolation but a call for solidarity, especially with the African diaspora whose ancestors were stolen, enslaved, and scattered across the world. The diaspora carries the memory of these injustices and has the potential to amplify Africa's demand for justice. Marcus Garvey famously said, "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots." The African diaspora is rooted in the same soil as those who remain on the continent, connected through the pain of shared history and the hope for a united future.

The Accra Proclamation on Reparations emphasizes the importance of solidarity between Africa and the Caribbean, illustrating the power of a united African voice in the quest for reparative justice. For African women, this global sisterhood is a source of strength. We look to the women of the diaspora, from Harlem to Haiti, from Jamaica to Johannesburg,

who have championed the cause of justice, and we find inspiration in their resilience.

Reparations are not just about the past—they are about rewriting the future, one where African people, particularly African women, hold power over their narratives, resources, and destinies. The voices of African women across the diaspora call for an end to neo-colonial structures, for an Africa that is whole and empowered.

### **Reparations: A Path Toward Empowerment and Justice**

Reparations are a testament to the courage, resilience, and strength of African people. They are a recognition of the historical and ongoing injustices endured and a commitment to righting these wrongs. Reparations mean that Africa's voice, suppressed for so long, will finally be heard, that its dignity will be restored, and that its future will be authored by its own people.

As Nelson Mandela reminded us, "It always seems impossible until it's done." The journey toward reparations is not an easy one, but it is one that must be pursued with strength and unity. African women, at the heart of this journey, carry with them the stories of generations, the wisdom of ancestors, and the determination to create a future where Africa's potential is realized, where its people live in dignity, and where its daughters lead with pride.

Reparations are more than a payment; they are an act of liberation—a reclaiming of identity, of power, and of the future. They are Africa's path to freedom, not just from the past but for the future we deserve to shape ourselves.

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**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

# Audit of Slavery Profits!!!

**There is the need for a forensic global audit to estimate the revenues generated from the trafficking of Africans, as well as the value of unpaid wages for centuries of forced labour.**



# From colonial legacies to reparatory justice

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Studying historical events from antiquity to the present provides proof that slavery, apartheid, colonialism, inter alia, subjected on the African continent and its people can still be felt in the contemporary world. With the roots of colonialism still deep, this article evaluates the attempts of the AU in providing reparations to the victims of the abhorrent colonial events and attempts to rebuild African nations inclusive of the declarations made in 1993 up to the recent declarations in 2023. The article further recognizes the challenges faced by the AU, in seeking reparations for Africans and gives recommendations on how the reparations can be more effective to promote not only reparations but internal healing of the African victims.

## Introduction

In 1993, the Organization of the African Union (OAU), which is now the African Union (AU), held the first pan African conference in Abuja, Nigeria as the first initiative to address reparations for the victims of the effects of colonialism in Africa. The outcome of the conference, the Abuja Proclamation of 1993, acknowledged the damage caused to African states and the fact that there were no reparations at time.

The Abuja Proclamation acted as the first step in seeking reparations for African victims, as the effort was later ignited when the AU, joined the UN conference in 2001 under which the global recognition of reparations was made, not only in regards to the African states but also in recognition of migrants and indigenous victims. The 2001 Durban declaration and programme of action against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related violations, had two parts, one containing the declarations and the other on the programme of action to implement these declarations. Among the declarations was taking a victim approach, in order to offer reparations and use of both public and private resources to assist the affected communities.

In 2023, the AU 's general assembly that consists of the heads of states, endorsed the proposal by the republic of Ghana to co-organize with relevant stakeholders and hosted the conference that led to the Accra declaration. And of course, not to forget the 2022, African commission on human and people's rights' agenda that reaffirmed the 2001 Durban declaration.

The AU does not only seek to get financial compensation but also seeks to have a holistic approach to the entire situation. This involves truth seeking and as the 2001 Durban declaration stated, there should be collective and adequate data on the violations and more than financial compensation by establishing legal institutions and committees that could be used to address and research on such violations.

The reparations that are being offered are more of transitional forms of justice. Since they aim at having a victim approach rather than just accepting financial compensation. Furthermore, the 2021 AU Commission and the government of Senegal initiative, involved the restoration of the cultural property and heritage rather than

the financial side of the reparations provided to the victims, which further reiterates the transitional justice method implied by the AU.

### Challenges

Although the AU has attempted to have reparations for the African victims of colonization and slavery regime, by inclusively making declarations and involving the states to act nationally based on the provisions of the declarations, there are still challenges including neocolonialism that still affects the ability of the victims to get reparations since the colonists still seem to have the upper hand.

Neocolonialism in this context is presented mostly when there is financial assistance given to the victim states and this brings about the quid pro quo. The provisions under the global 2001 declaration provides that there is a need for financial assistance by states and UN agencies, but in most cases the assistance offered is conditional. For example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which is a part of the UN although it acts as an independent organ, tends to give financial loans to developing countries, with the conditions of controlling part of their economic sectors and dictatorship on the use of funds by the governments. The example is relevant given the 2001 Durban global declaration which mandated the states to support the victims of colonialism specifically acknowledging the African states. Skeptics question climate finance on whether the finances are complementary or further worsening the economies of victim nations by encouraging dependency and increasing debt.

The other issue that can hinder the provision of reparations is the sovereignty of the colonialist states. States being independent bodies cannot be forced or coerced to give reparations to the victim states or individuals who have not been

given reparations to date. Most of them still live with the scars and the mental agony of the atrocities that occurred in the colonial period.

### Recommendations

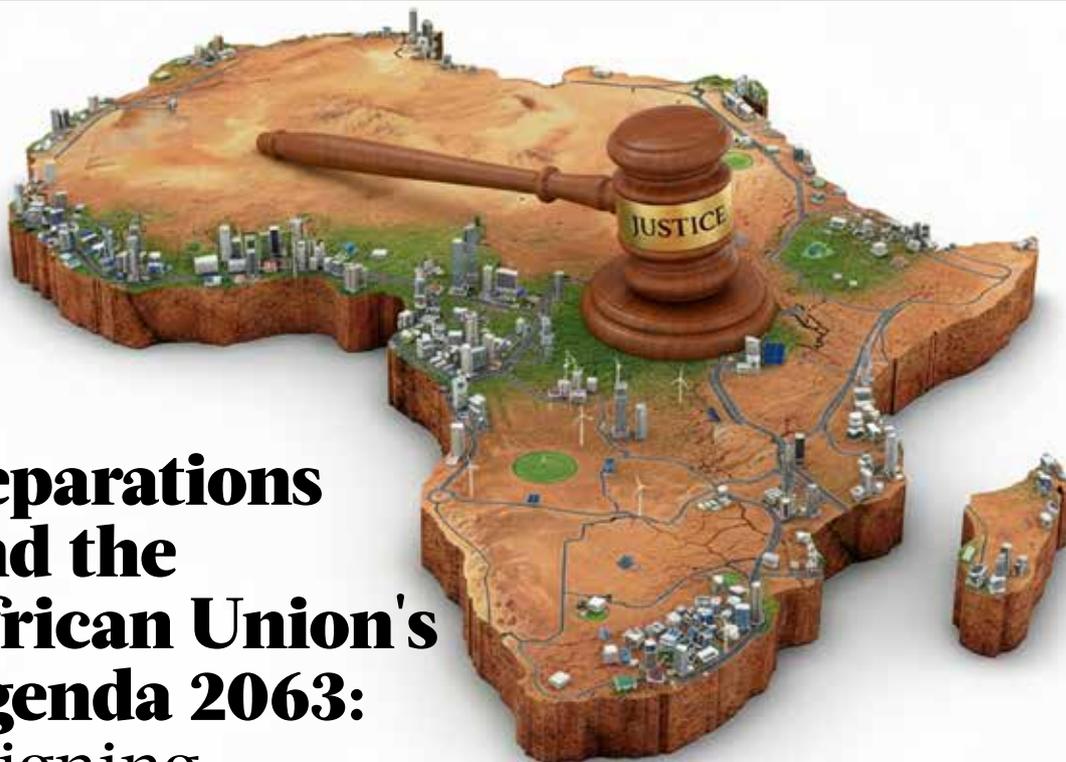
The AU should establish actively working specialized institutions to address the victims of the slavery and torture of the colonialism period and related offences. This will implement the victim approach way of seeking reparations and it will give the victims the platform to find not only redress and financial compensation but also truth seeking that will enable the internal healing process similar to the Gacaca courts in Rwanda.

### Conclusion

Seeking justice involves bringing action against offenders and making them legally responsible for their action and providing remedies for the aggrieved party. The AU in seeking to promote reparations for the victims promotes justice. From the first 1993 declaration to the 2023 Accra in Ghana declaration the AU has made progress to push the agenda although it still faces many obstacles of implementation; and in order to achieve full healing of the victims, the AU should emphasize and focus more on achieving the transitional justice form of justice as a means to seeking reparations given that the atrocities committed were massive and affected the whole continent with the effect being felt to date, both mentally and even in the economic status quo of the victims and victim states. ■

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# Reparations and the African Union's Agenda 2063: Aligning Historical Justice with Future Development Goals

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This paper explores the intersection of reparations for historical injustices and the African Union's Agenda 2063, which outlines a vision for Africa's socio-economic transformation by 2063. Reparations addressing colonial exploitation and the transatlantic slave trade, are critical for rectifying past wrongs and fostering historical justice. However, integrating these

reparations within the AU's ambitious development goals presents challenges and opportunities. This study examines how Agenda 2063's focus on economic growth, infrastructure development, and social cohesion can be aligned with reparations initiatives. It highlights case studies from countries such as Kenya and South Africa, where reparations efforts are underway, and assesses their impact on development objectives. The paper identifies key challenges, such as political resistance and financial constraints, and explores potential solutions, including targeted funding mechanisms and international partnerships. By analysing these dynamics, the paper provides policy recommendations for harmonising reparations with Agenda 2063's goals, emphasising the need for cohesive strategies that address historical injustices while advancing Africa's developmental aspirations. Ultimately, it argues that aligning reparations with future development goals can enhance regional integration and social equity across the continent.

Former South African president F. W. de Klerk (R), leader of the National Party, hands over the party's submission to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) during the National Party's submission before the TRC in Cape Town.

© ANNA ZIEMINSKI/  
AFP via Getty Images



### Integration of Reparations with Development Goals

Integrating reparations with the development goals outlined in the African Union's Agenda 2063 presents a complex yet crucial endeavour. Agenda 2063 envisions a transformed Africa, characterised by economic growth, infrastructural development, and social cohesion. Reparations aimed at addressing historical injustices such as colonial exploitation and the transatlantic slave trade provide an opportunity to rectify past wrongs and foster a sense of justice and equality. The challenge lies in aligning these reparative measures with the forward-looking development objectives of Agenda 2063.

socioeconomic disparities and political challenges. Similarly, Kenya's reparations framework, which includes measures for victims of historical injustices and land disputes, intersects with its developmental objectives by addressing the underlying causes of instability and inequality. The government's efforts to incorporate reparations into its development plans, such as land reform and community development projects, illustrate a proactive approach to integrating historical justice with contemporary needs. Yet, the success of these initiatives is often impeded by bureaucratic inefficiencies and resistance from vested interests.



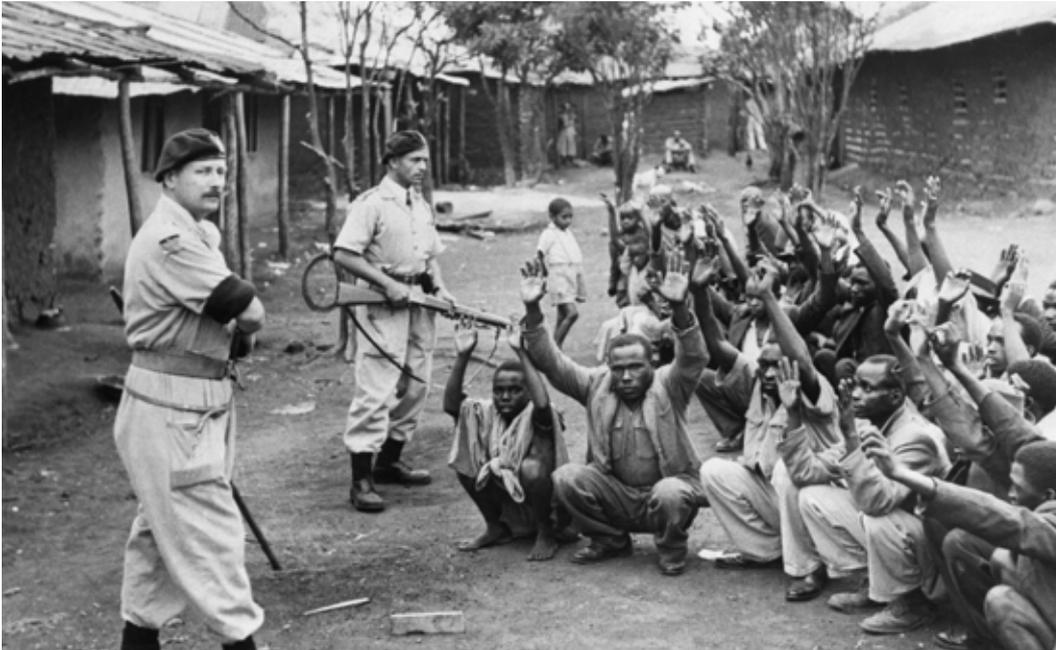
These examples underscore the potential benefits of integrating reparations with development goals, as they can promote social justice and contribute to long-term stability. However, achieving this integration requires overcoming significant challenges. The alignment of reparations with Agenda 2063 necessitates a holistic approach that not only addresses historical grievances but also fosters inclusive economic growth and social cohesion. Effective implementation demands a coordinated effort involving policymakers, civil society, and international partners to ensure that

For instance, South Africa's post-apartheid reparations initiatives, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have sought to address historical injustices while also contributing to social and economic reform. These efforts have provided financial compensation and facilitated broader societal healing and reconciliation, aligning with the AU's goal of social cohesion and human development. However, the effectiveness of these reparations in advancing economic growth has been limited by persistent

reparations contribute meaningfully to the broader development agenda.

### Case Studies and Practical Implications

Case studies of reparations efforts in various African countries offer valuable insights into the practical implications of integrating historical justice with contemporary development goals. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) represents a landmark case in addressing historical injustices and their implications for social cohesion and economic



▶ British policemen  
▶ hold men from  
the village of  
Kariobangi at  
gunpoint while  
their huts are  
searched for  
evidence that  
they participated  
in the Mau Mau  
Rebellion of 1952.  
© Getty Images

development. Established in the wake of apartheid, the TRC aimed to uncover the truth about human rights violations and provide reparations to victims. While the TRC contributed to national healing and provided a platform for victims to share their stories, its impact on economic development has been mixed. The reparations were often criticised for being insufficient in addressing the deep-seated economic inequalities that persist today. The TRC's limited success in bridging the socioeconomic divide highlights the challenge of translating reparative justice into tangible development outcomes.

Similarly, Kenya's approach to reparations, particularly concerning land disputes and historical injustices, illustrates both the potential and the limitations of integrating reparations with development objectives. The Kenyan government has implemented various initiatives to compensate victims of historical injustices and address land grievances. These efforts include land reform programs and community development projects designed to mitigate the adverse effects of historical injustices on current socioeconomic conditions. While these measures have provided some relief and contributed to social stability, the process has faced significant hurdles, including corruption, bureaucratic delays, and resistance

from powerful landowners. These challenges underscore the difficulties in ensuring that reparations lead to meaningful and sustainable development.

The practical implications of these case studies reveal that while reparations can play a critical role in addressing historical injustices, their integration into development goals requires careful consideration and robust implementation strategies. The success of reparations in contributing to development depends on factors such as political will, effective governance, and the ability to address underlying socioeconomic disparities. For reparations to align effectively with development objectives, a comprehensive approach that considers the long-term impact of historical injustices on economic and social structures must be adopted. By learning from these case studies, policymakers can better understand how to design and implement reparations programs that provide justice and contribute to the broader development goals of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

### **Challenges and Policy Recommendations**

The integration of reparations with the African Union's Agenda 2063 faces several challenges, each of which must be addressed to ensure that historical justice can effectively contribute

to contemporary development goals.

One of the primary challenges is political resistance. Governments and political elites in various African countries may resist reparations initiatives due to fears of destabilising the existing power structures or the perceived financial burden of implementing such programs. For instance, calls for reparations in Nigeria related to the Biafran War have encountered significant political resistance. The government has been hesitant to fully address the demands for reparations, partly due to concerns about exacerbating regional tensions and the potential financial implications of large-scale compensation.

Financial constraints also pose a significant obstacle. Implementing reparations programs requires substantial financial resources, which many African nations struggle to allocate given their competing development priorities. The inadequacy of funds can undermine the effectiveness of reparations initiatives. In Zimbabwe, efforts to address land reform and compensate dispossessed farmers have been hampered by economic instability and insufficient funding, resulting in incomplete and often unsatisfactory reparative measures. Furthermore, bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption can severely impact the effectiveness of reparations programs. In countries like Kenya, bureaucratic delays and corruption have impeded the timely and equitable distribution of reparations. These challenges highlight the need for transparent and accountable mechanisms to manage

reparations effectively.

To address these challenges, several policy recommendations can be proposed. First, fostering political will through dialogue and negotiation is crucial. Engaging stakeholders, including affected communities and civil society organisations, can help build consensus and support for reparations initiatives. Second, establishing innovative funding mechanisms, such as international partnerships or development aid specifically earmarked for reparations, can help mitigate financial constraints. For example, creating a dedicated reparations fund with contributions from international donors and private sector actors could provide a sustainable source of funding.

Additionally, enhancing transparency and accountability in the administration of reparations programs is essential. Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation systems can help ensure that reparations are distributed fairly and effectively. By addressing these challenges and implementing targeted policy recommendations, African countries can better align reparations with the development goals of Agenda 2063, ultimately contributing to both historical justice and sustainable development. ■

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# Reclaiming Dignity: Reparations for Africans and Their Descendants

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The article discusses the pursuit of justice for Africans and people of African descent through reparations, focusing on the efforts led by the African Union (AU). It highlights key initiatives like the Abuja Proclamation (1993), the Durban Declaration (2001), and Agenda 2063, which emphasise reparations as a means to address the historical crimes of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism. The paper underscores the need for reparations that go beyond financial compensation, advocating for cultural restitution, structural reforms, and socio-economic empowerment. It explores the AU's work on reclaiming stolen cultural heritage, such as through the 2021 Dakar Workshop, and acknowledges the challenges faced, including resistance from former colonial powers and legal complexities. The article calls for a unified African reparations agenda, international collaborations, and transformative measures to achieve equity, dignity, and sustainable development for Africans and their descendants.

This paper explores the historical foundations of reparations, evaluates institutional progress led by the AU, and identifies pathways for advancing this critical agenda. It advocates for an expansive approach to reparations, encompassing cultural restitution, structural reforms, and socioeconomic empowerment. The article explores the multifaceted pursuit of justice for Africans and people of African descent through reparations. From the historical underpinnings of exploitation to modern efforts driven by the African Union (AU), it outlines the significance, progress, and challenges of reparative justice. The paper examines pathways for addressing historic injustices by analysing key frameworks such as the Abuja Proclamation, the Durban Declaration, and Agenda 2063. It also emphasises the importance of reclaiming stolen cultural heritage and fostering economic and social transformation, arguing that reparations must go beyond monetary compensation to achieve equity and dignity.



January 1896: After taking the city of Kumasi in Ashanti, (in present-day Ghana), Governor Maxwell compels King Prempeh and the Queen Mother to make an act of submission to him in accordance with Ashanti custom - they accordingly bend down in front of him and Sir Francis Scott and Colonel Kempster and clasp their legs. Original Publication: The Graphic. © Hulton Archive/Getty Images



## INTRODUCTION

The call for reparations for historical crimes against Africans and people of African descent resonates as a compelling demand for justice, recognition, and restoration. Reparations address the enduring impact of trans-Atlantic slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and racial discrimination. These historical injustices created systemic inequities that continue to shape global power dynamics and perpetuate socio-economic disparities.

Reparations extend beyond financial restitution—they signify a moral reckoning, an acknowledgement of past wrongs, and a commitment to dismantling the systems of oppression that persist. The African Union (AU) has taken a leading role in this endeavour, building upon the foundation laid by its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Drawing upon pivotal initiatives such as the Abuja Proclamation and the Durban Declaration, the AU has championed the reparations agenda as a critical tool for achieving dignity, equity, and development for Africans and their descendants.

## Historical Context: A Legacy of Injustice

The trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism inflicted profound harm on African nations and their descendants. The slave trade forcibly displaced millions of Africans, stripping them of their freedoms, cultural identities, and humanity. Colonisation followed, systematically exploiting African resources, undermining local governance, and imposing foreign cultural paradigms. These historical crimes created intergenerational scars that remain evident in the socioeconomic disparities, cultural marginalization, and systemic racism faced by Africans and people of African descent today.

The Pan-African movement emerged as a collective response to these injustices, advocating for unity, liberation, and reparations. Early Pan-African leaders like Marcus Garvey,

W.E.B. Du Bois, and Kwame Nkrumah recognised the inseparability of reparative justice from the broader struggle for African emancipation. Reparations became a vital component of Africa's post-independence agenda, symbolising both the rectification of historical wrongs and the reclamation of African dignity and sovereignty.

## **INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND MILESTONES**

### **1. Establishment of the Group of Eminent Persons (GEP)**

In 1992, the OAU inaugurated the Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) in Abuja, Nigeria. Comprising 12 distinguished members, the GEP was tasked with advancing the reparations agenda by assessing the damages inflicted by slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. This initiative culminated in the First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, held in April 1993, which produced the historic Abuja Proclamation. The Abuja Proclamation was a landmark in the reparations movement. It asserted Africa's right to seek reparations for historical crimes, called for restorative measures, and united African leadership around a common position. Its influence extended beyond Africa, galvanising global discourse on reparations and justice.

### **2. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

The 2001 Durban Declaration, adopted at the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, elevated the reparations movement to an international platform. The declaration unequivocally recognised the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slavery, and colonialism as crimes against humanity and affirmed the rights of victims to seek reparations. The Durban Declaration's acknowledgment of the enduring impact of these crimes underscored the need for comprehensive reparative measures. It emphasised the importance of addressing systemic racism, promoting social inclusion, and providing access to justice and remedies for victims.

### **3. Advancing Reparations under Agenda 2063**

Agenda 2063, the AU's strategic framework for Africa's development and transformation, integrates reparations as a means of addressing historical injustices and advancing sustainable development. It envisions a prosperous, united, and self-reliant Africa that has fully reclaimed its dignity, cultural heritage, and global standing. Reparations are integral to achieving these goals, providing a foundation for socioeconomic empowerment and cultural renewal.

### **Restitution of Cultural Heritage**

The looting of Africa's cultural artifacts during colonisation represents a significant dimension of historical injustice. These artifacts, now housed in museums and private collections worldwide, embody the history, identity, and resilience of African societies. Their removal not only deprived African nations of their cultural heritage but also reinforced colonial narratives of dominance and superiority.

In 2021, the AU convened a Continental Experts Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage in Dakar, Senegal, in collaboration with the Government of Senegal and the Open Society Initiative in West Africa (OSIWA). The workshop produced a Common African Position Paper and a Framework for Action on negotiating the return of stolen artifacts.

Restitution efforts, while challenging, represent more than legal victories—they symbolize the reclamation of African identity and dignity. By fostering networks of cultural experts, policymakers, and museum curators, the AU is advancing a collective effort to restore Africa's cultural sovereignty.

### **Challenges and Barriers**

- **Global Resistance to Reparations** The call for reparations has faced resistance from former colonial powers and international institutions. Opponents argue that reparations are impractical, citing the passage of time and the complexity of quantifying historical damages. This resistance undermines the moral and legal foundations of the reparations movement, delaying justice for victims.

- **Legal and Ethical Complexities** The pursuit of reparative justice is complicated by the lack of binding international legal mechanisms. While historical crimes like slavery and colonisation are widely acknowledged, they often fall outside the jurisdiction of contemporary legal frameworks. This leaves victims without effective recourse and perpetuates the systemic inequities rooted in these crimes.
- **Contention over Cultural Artifacts** Efforts to recover stolen cultural artifacts have been met with resistance from institutions that claim ownership or question the legitimacy of restitution demands. These challenges underscore the need for comprehensive and enforceable international agreements on cultural restitution.

- **Expanding the Scope of Reparative Justice** Reparations should extend beyond financial compensation to encompass structural interventions addressing systemic inequities. Initiatives such as educational scholarships, infrastructure development, and cultural preservation can transform reparations into instruments of empowerment and self-determination.

By integrating reparative justice into broader development strategies, African nations can address deep-rooted disparities while fostering resilience and self-reliance.

## CONCLUSION

Reparations for Africans and people of African descent represent a transformative journey toward equity, dignity, and empowerment. The African Union’s unwavering commitment, as demonstrated through the Abuja Proclamation, the Durban Declaration, and Agenda 2063, provides a solid foundation for advancing this cause.

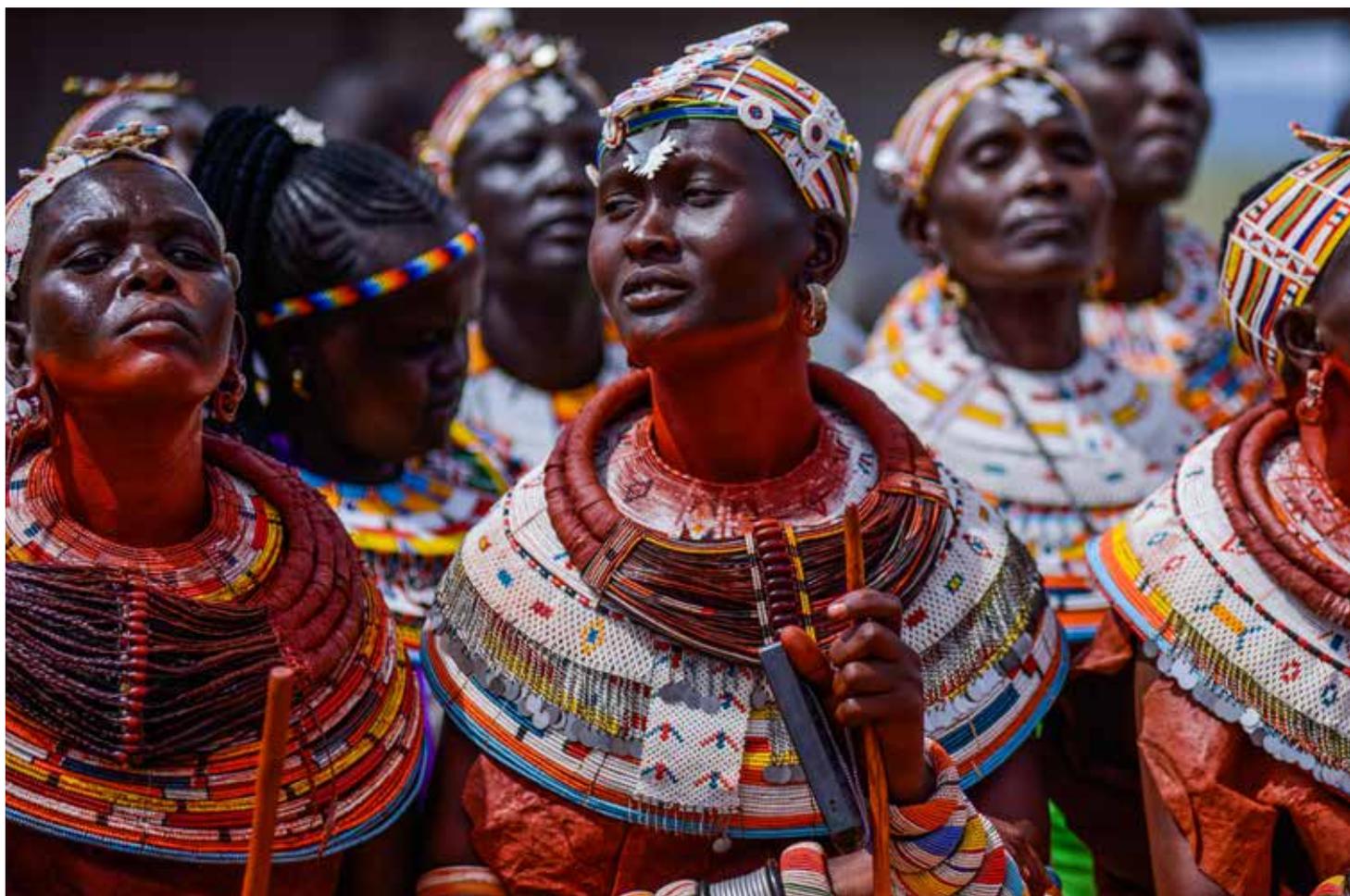
Achieving justice requires collective action, political will, and innovative approaches that transcend financial restitution. Reparations must address the structural roots of inequality and create pathways for sustainable development. They are not merely a response to historical wrongs but a catalyst for healing and building a future rooted in justice and equity. ■

### Pathways for Progress

- **Developing a Unified African Reparations Agenda** A Common African Position on Reparations is essential for amplifying Africa’s voice on the global stage. The AU’s decision at the 2023 Accra Proclamation on Reparations reflects a growing commitment to achieving consensus and solidarity among Member States. A unified agenda enhances the continent’s ability to negotiate effectively and advocate for justice.
- **Strengthening International Collaborations** Partnerships with global allies, such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), offer a model for collective advocacy. The proposed African Caribbean Joint Mechanism on Reparative Justice demonstrates the potential for transcontinental collaboration based on shared histories and aspirations.

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# Restitution in Africa: Reclaiming Heritage, Reclaiming Identity

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## The Imperative of Restitution: Context and Foundations

The demand for cultural restitution in Africa has surged, driven by a profound understanding of the historical injustices that resulted in the displacement of invaluable cultural artifacts. This movement, rooted in the mandates of UNESCO and the African Union (AU), seeks to rectify past wrongs and restore the cultural integrity of the continent.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property serves as a crucial legal foundation for global efforts against the illicit trafficking of cultural heritage. With 147 member states, this landmark agreement provides a framework for international cooperation.



The tribes living in the Samburu region of northern Kenya are among the few that have successfully preserved their ancestral customs and way of life. A crucial aspect of the Samburu's survival and identity is their livestock, which includes cattle, sheep, goats and camels and is a symbol of wealth, resilience and social status. Through such festivals, the community not only celebrate their heritage, but also showcase their customs to younger generations and visitors alike, fostering a deeper appreciation of their unique culture



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Images

However, the challenge extends beyond legal structures. Illicit trafficking jeopardizes diverse forms of cultural heritage, including underwater treasures, World Heritage sites, and artifacts from conflict zones. Every effort to curb these illegal transactions contributes not only to the return of looted objects but also to preventing conflict escalation and safeguarding humanity's shared heritage.

This stance is firmly embedded within Agenda 2063, the AU's strategic framework for socio-economic transformation. Agenda 2063 recognizes the reclamation of cultural heritage as vital for Africa's development, identity, and sovereignty. It emphasizes that culture and heritage are central to nation-building, sustainable development, and fostering continental unity.

Recognizing the urgent need for action, the African Union, in collaboration with UNESCO, has taken a leading role in advocating for the restitution of African cultural property. The AU's Common African Position on the Restitution of Cultural Property is a powerful testament to the continent's unified stance on this critical issue.

As the global discourse on restitution evolves, there is an increasing emphasis on actionable, cooperative mechanisms that transcend mere legal obligations. The AU-UNESCO partnership is pivotal in promoting dialogue between African states and former colonial powers, facilitating museum-to-museum collaborations, and building capacity for cultural institutions across Africa.

### **From Policy to Praxis: Concrete Actions and Evolving Momentum**

In January 2025, UNESCO, UNECA, and the AUC convened a pivotal Regional Dialogue on "New Types of Cooperation and Agreements for the Return and Restitution of Cultural Property to Africa," accelerating efforts to reclaim African cultural heritage. This dialogue underscored a crucial shift: from aspiration to an urgent global responsibility regarding cultural restitution. Experts and policymakers explored

strengthened legal and diplomatic avenues, recognizing cultural restitution as a fundamental aspect of social justice. The focus extended beyond the mere return of objects to encompass the rebuilding of cultural identities and the restoration of historical integrity, aligning with the AU's Agenda 2063.

Recent restitution cases, including the return of Namibian artifacts from Berlin and the "Green Sarcophagus" to Egypt, demonstrate a clear and accelerating trend towards the repatriation of culturally and historically significant objects. These examples, alongside the Power Stone fragments' return (Namibia-Finland), the Moroccan fossils from Chile, and the Vigango artifacts' repatriation to Kenya, illustrate the increasing success of legal and diplomatic efforts in facilitating restitution. These successes highlight a growing global recognition of the imperative to right historical wrongs.

### **The Transformative Power of Restitution**

In conclusion, restitution in Africa transcends the mere return of objects—it is a profound act of restoring dignity, healing historical wounds, and reaffirming Africa's central role in the global cultural narrative. Guided by the 1970 UNESCO Convention and championed by the African Union's Common African Position, the movement for restitution reflects a growing global consensus: that cultural heritage must be protected, preserved, and returned with the urgency and respect it deserves.

As the world continues to grapple with questions of justice, history, and identity, Africa's leadership—bolstered by robust international partnerships—signals a transformative shift. Cultural restitution is no longer a peripheral issue; it is a fundamental pillar of global heritage governance and a powerful testament to the potential of international solidarity. The return of these artifacts is not just about the past; it is about building a future where cultural integrity and historical justice prevail. ■



**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

**Debt's origins come from colonialism's origins. Those who lend us money are those who colonised us. They are the same ones who used to manage our states and economies. These are the colonisers who indebted Africa.**

**THOMAS SANKARA**

**BANK**

# Pan-Africanism and Reparations: Bridging the Gap between Africa and Its Diaspora

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This article critically examines the role of Pan-Africanism in bridging the gap between Africa and its diaspora, focusing on reparations for enslavement and colonisation. It explores how shared histories of oppression have shaped collective identities and inspired movements for justice among African-descended peoples globally. Pan-Africanism, as a unifying ideology, provides a framework for mobilising transnational efforts towards reparative justice. The study analyses four strategic frameworks: historical memory and restitution, economic justice, cultural reconnection, and institutional partnerships. These frameworks highlight ongoing initiatives by African nations and diaspora communities to address historical injustices while fostering solidarity. By integrating academic insights and practical examples, the article argues that reparations must transcend monetary compensation to include cultural restoration, systemic change, and economic equity. The conclusion emphasises the need for grassroots-driven Pan-Africanism to ensure that reparations achieve tangible outcomes that honour history while advancing global equity.

Members of the Nigerian community in New York celebrate Nigerian Independence Day at a festival in New York City  
© Andrew Lichtenstein/Corbis via Getty Images



## **Introduction**

The legacies of slavery and colonisation have profoundly impacted Africa and its diaspora, creating enduring inequalities in wealth distribution, cultural identity, and systemic discrimination (Rodney, 1972). Reparations have emerged as a critical agenda to address these injustices; however, achieving meaningful reparative justice requires more than financial compensation—it demands unity and shared responsibility (Mazrui, 1986).

Pan-Africanism offers an ideological foundation for bridging the gap between Africa and its diaspora in this pursuit. Historically rooted in anti-colonial resistance, Pan-Africanism seeks to unite African-descended peoples globally under a shared vision of liberation and justice (Nkrumah, 1963). Today, it remains relevant in mobilising transnational efforts towards reparations by fostering collaboration across geographical and cultural divides (Adi, 2018).

This article explores how Pan-Africanism can serve as a catalyst for reparative justice through four strategic frameworks: historical memory and restitution, economic justice, cultural reconnection, and institutional partnerships. By analysing these approaches, the study aims to provide actionable insights into strengthening Africa-diaspora ties for a more equitable future.

## **Framework 1: Historical Memory and Restitution**

Historical memory is essential for mobilising reparations efforts. The transatlantic slave trade and colonial exploitation are not merely historical events but ongoing sources of inequity (UNESCO Slave Route Project Report, 1994). Restitution involves acknowledging these histories through education, memorialisation, and public apologies from former colonial powers (Bennett et al., 2018). Pan-Africanism emphasises collective memory as a foundation for unity. Initiatives like UNESCO's Slave Route Project highlight how preserving historical narratives fosters solidarity among African nations and their diaspora (UNESCO Slave Route Project Report, 1994). Memorials such as Ghana's Cape Coast Castle serve as powerful reminders of shared suffering and resilience (Mensah et al., 2020). These efforts must extend to diaspora-led

projects documenting cultural losses experienced in the Americas and Europe (Gates Jr., 2011).

Restitution also includes returning stolen artefacts to African nations. Efforts like the Benin Dialogue Group's repatriation of looted artefacts affirm cultural dignity while strengthening Africa-diaspora ties (Hicks, 2020). Such actions demonstrate that historical memory is not static but is central to reparative justice.

## **Framework 2: Economic Justice**

Economic justice addresses centuries of exploitation that left Africa economically disadvantaged while enriching Western nations (Rodney, 1972). Reparations must include debt cancellation, resource restitution, and financial compensation for descendants of enslaved Africans (Mazrui et al., 1998).

Pan-Africanism provides a framework for coordinated economic advocacy. The Abuja Declaration called for reparations to redress economic damage caused by slavery and colonialism (AU Commission, 1993). African nations must leverage regional bodies like the AU to negotiate debt relief tied to reparative agendas (Zezeza et al., 2005).

Diaspora communities play a vital role through remittances, investments, and advocacy. Initiatives like the African Diaspora Investment Fund channel resources into sustainable development projects across Africa (Eze et al., 2022). Strengthening these economic ties creates mutual benefits while addressing historical inequities.

## **Framework 3: Cultural Reconnection**

Cultural reconnection is vital for bridging Africa-diaspora divides. Centuries of enslavement severed familial ties and disrupted cultural identities among African-descended peoples worldwide (Gates Jr., 2011). Reparations must restore these connections through cultural exchange programmes, language revitalisation initiatives, and heritage tourism (Mensah et al., 2020).

Pan-Africanism champions cultural solidarity as empowerment. Ghana's "Year of Return" exemplifies reconnecting diasporic communities with their ancestral roots while boosting local economies through tourism (Mensah et al., 2020). Initiatives promoting African languages among diaspora communities rebuild bonds eroded by colonial assimilation policies (Mazrui et al., 1998).

Diaspora festivals celebrating African heritage—such as Caribana or AfroPunk—serve as platforms for exchange, reinforcing shared identities (Eze et al., 2022). Governments should support such events while creating opportunities for diasporic artists to collaborate with continental counterparts.

#### Framework 4: Institutional Partnerships

Institutional partnerships between African nations and diaspora organisations are crucial for advancing reparative justice agendas. These collaborations facilitate policy advocacy and capacity building on both sides of the Atlantic (Zezeza et al., 2005).

The AU's Sixth Region Initiative recognises the diaspora as integral to Africa's development strategy. Formalising partnerships with CARICOM amplifies demands on platforms like the UN General Assembly (AU Commission

Agenda 2063 Framework Document, n.d.).

Educational institutions also foster collaboration. Exchange programmes between African universities and historically Black colleges strengthen academic ties while promoting research on reparations-related issues (Mazrui et al., 1998).

#### Conclusion

Pan-Africanism remains indispensable in bridging Africa-diaspora gaps for reparative justice. By addressing historical memory, economic disparities, cultural dislocation, and institutional fragmentation through targeted frameworks, it offers actionable solutions to centuries-old injustices.

Grassroots-driven Pan-African movements ensure that reparations achieve tangible outcomes beyond symbolic gestures. In uniting Africa with its global descendants under a shared vision of equity, Pan-Africanism honours history while laying foundations for inclusivity across generations.

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# Restoring Dignity: Pathways to Justice for Africans and the African Diaspora Through Reparations

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This paper examines the historical, legal, and social foundations of reparations for Africans and the diaspora, addressing the impacts of slavery and colonization. It advocates for a comprehensive approach combining financial, social, and symbolic measures to restore dignity, promote justice, and foster sustainable development.

## Background and Significance of Reparations

The history of colonization and the transatlantic slave trade inflicted profound and enduring harm on the African continent, stripping them of autonomy, wealth, and cultural identity. These systemic injustices perpetuated cycles of poverty, discrimination, and inequality that continue to impact African societies and the African diaspora. Reparations, defined as measures to redress historical wrongs through compensation, acknowledgment, and institutional reforms, have historical precedents, such as post-Holocaust restitution, Japanese-American reparations, and most recently the First Nations of Canada.

In the African context, the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 underscores the importance of reparations in advancing African prosperity and justice, calling for the restoration of dignity to Africans (African Union, 2015). The 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action emphasizes the need for reparations to address the legacy of slavery and colonialism (United Nations, 2002). Similarly, the Abuja Proclamation advocates for reparative justice to heal historical injustices. Reparations serve as a crucial pathway toward justice, equality, and restoring dignity to historically marginalized communities.

This paper aims to:

- examine the legal, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of reparations.
- propose actionable pathways for implementing reparative justice.
- analyze the role of reparations in addressing systemic injustices faced by Africans and the African diaspora.

## The Historical and Legal Foundations of Reparations

The transatlantic slave trade and colonization inflicted severe and long-lasting damage on African societies. It forcibly displaced millions of Africans, depriving them of their autonomy, wealth, and cultural heritage, while colonialism systematically

exploited Africa’s human and natural resources. This legacy has contributed to entrenched inequalities, underdevelopment, and social dislocation across Africa and the African diaspora. The impacts of colonialism and slavery continue to manifest in economic disparities, marginalization, and racial discrimination that hinder the progress of African states and their descendants globally (African Union, 2015).

### **Legal Precedents for Reparations**

Several international legal frameworks and precedents support claims for reparations. The 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action explicitly recognizes the historical injustices of slavery and colonialism, calling for reparative measures to address the legacy of exploitation (United Nations, 2002). Historical precedents, such as reparations paid to holocaust survivors and Japanese-Americans interned during World War II, demonstrate that reparations are not only feasible but necessary for restorative justice. These examples highlight the need for recognition, restitution, and compensation for crimes committed against marginalized communities. Agenda 2063 emphasizes the importance of reparations for Africa’s economic independence and development (African Union, 2015).

### **Challenges in Legal Implementation**

Despite the historical and legal precedents, achieving reparations for Africans and their descendants faces significant challenges. One major obstacle is the issue of sovereignty and jurisdiction, as former colonial powers are often reluctant to acknowledge their responsibility or submit to international legal frameworks that support reparations. Legal claims are further complicated by the passage of time, making it difficult to hold states or institutions accountable for past actions. Additionally, the lack of political will and institutional mechanisms for enforcing reparations continues to be a significant barrier. The Abuja Proclamation calls for continued advocacy and legal reform to overcome these obstacles and advance the reparations movement (African Union, 1993).

## **ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF REPARATIONS**

### **Economic Exploitation and Wealth Disparities**

lavery and colonization played pivotal roles in extracting immense wealth from Africa while leaving its societies underdeveloped. Enslaved Africans generated enormous wealth for European economies through forced labor in plantations and industries, while colonization stripped Africa of its resources, including gold,

minerals, and human capital (Adebajo, 2020). This systematic exploitation created a significant wealth gap between Africa, its diaspora, and former colonizing powers. Today, Africa continues to experience the effects of this historical exploitation, with significant economic inequalities such as lower GDP per capita, reduced access to education and healthcare, and systemic poverty that contrasts sharply with the wealth amassed by former colonial powers (Browne, 2020).

### **The Potential for Economic Empowerment Through Reparations**

Reparations can serve as a powerful tool to address these economic disparities by redistributing wealth and fostering long-term development. Financial reparations could take various forms, including direct payments to descendants of enslaved people, investments in education and healthcare systems, or debt relief for African nations. These mechanisms can rectify past injustices while empowering African nations to chart their economic futures (Menakhem, 2022). Investments in education, infrastructure, and healthcare could create a strong foundation for economic growth and human development, leading to improved standards of living and more equitable global economic relations. Reparations could help

reverse the historic exploitation and enable Africa to thrive in a competitive global economy.

### **The Debate on Forms of Economic Compensation**

The question of how best to structure reparations remains contested. Cash payments directly to individuals may offer immediate relief to descendants of enslaved people but risk being short-term solutions. Community-based investments, such as funding education, healthcare, and infrastructure, can provide more sustainable, long-term benefits (Darity & Mullen, 2020). Advocates for reparations often argue that a combination of direct payments and community investments is needed to balance immediate relief with sustainable development (Menakhem, 2022). Ultimately, reparations should be seen not just as compensation, but as a foundation for future development and justice.

## **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF REPARATIONS**

### **Psychological and Emotional Impact of Historical Injustices**

The transatlantic slave trade and colonization inflicted profound psychological harm on Africans and created inter-generational trauma. The legacies of dehumanization, violence, and cultural erasure continue to manifest in the psychological scars carried by

contemporary African and African diaspora communities (Sambo, 2021). This trauma is often expressed in collective memories of oppression, dislocation, and loss of identity. Reparations serve as a means to restore dignity by acknowledging these injustices and offering reparative justice. Recognition and compensation can facilitate healing and offer a sense of closure, contributing to the emotional recovery of historically marginalized groups (Menakhem, 2022).

### **Reparations as a Cultural and Symbolic Act**

Beyond financial compensation, reparations play a significant role in cultural and symbolic terms. Apologies from former colonizing powers and the creation of memorials and museums could serve as vital aspects of the reparations process. These acts provide historical recognition and validate the experiences of those who suffered under colonial and slave regimes (Darity & Mullen, 2020). Additionally, reparations can lead to cultural revitalization by supporting efforts to reclaim African heritage, languages, and traditions that were systematically eroded. Restoring cultural identity strengthens social cohesion and empowers communities to reconnect with their ancestral roots, fostering a sense of pride and resilience (Sambo, 2021).

### **Education and Public Awareness**

Public education about the history and ongoing effects of colonialism and slavery is essential for ensuring the success of reparations. Raising awareness through educational curricula, public forums, and media platforms can help dispel ignorance about Africa's history and foster global solidarity (Fanon, 2021). Reparations also offer an opportunity for societies to confront the darker aspects of their histories, creating space for greater understanding and empathy across communities. Education is therefore a vital tool for promoting social justice and addressing the legacy of colonialism and slavery, contributing to long-term global peace and solidarity (Menakhem, 2022).

### **Political Pathways to Reparative Justice**

Civil society and grassroots movements, such as the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Reparations Commission and Pan-African initiatives, have been pivotal in advocating for reparations. These movements have achieved important milestones, including formal discussions and acknowledgment of the need for reparations, but have also faced setbacks due to resistance from former colonial powers (Darity & Mullen, 2020).

Achieving reparative justice requires political will and international cooperation.

African states, former colonial powers, and institutions like the African Union and the United Nations must work together to address historical injustices through diplomatic and legal frameworks (Menakhem, 2022).

International cooperation is crucial for reparations to be meaningful and comprehensive.

Diplomatic channels and reparations commissions are key strategies. Negotiations through international bodies, such as reparations commissions in the Caribbean, offer examples of successful models that can inform global efforts (Browne, 2020).

### Future Directions for Reparations and Justice

An ideal reparations policy combines financial, social, and symbolic measures, addressing economic harm, cultural erasure, and historical injustices (Menakhem, 2022). African states, diaspora communities, and international partners must collaborate to implement this framework effectively, ensuring reparations are inclusive and transformative. Reparations must extend beyond financial

compensation to include sustainable development initiatives, addressing structural inequalities, and rebuilding institutions (Darity & Mullen, 2020). Long-term justice requires reparations to empower African societies and ensure future economic growth by fostering healing, justice, and a more equitable global order. By addressing historical wrongs, reparations can help bridge divides and create a more just and inclusive global society (Fanon, 2021).

### CONCLUSION

Reparations address historical, economic, legal, social, and political injustices, fostering healing and equity. Actionable steps include advocacy, international cooperation, and implementing comprehensive reparations policies.

Reparations are essential for restoring dignity and achieving long-term justice for Africans and their descendants.

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# Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations:

## The Humanity Pact as a Blueprint for Global Equity

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The conversation around reparations for historical injustices against Africans and people of African descent has reached a pivotal moment, especially in the context of global efforts led by institutions like the African Union (AU). The demand for reparatory justice stems from decades of exploitation, colonialism, and systemic racism, which have left deep economic, social, and cultural scars. The AU's *Agenda 2063*, focused on restorative justice, and the newly introduced *Humanity Pact* offer pathways toward equitable solutions.

This paper explores how the *Humanity Pact*, a transformative global initiative designed to address systemic inequality, supports the AU's reparations agenda by focusing on economic justice, cultural wealth restitution, and sustainable development. We will demonstrate how the Pact aligns with the AU's broader goals, providing a comprehensive blueprint for achieving justice for Africans and their descendants.

### 1. Historical Perspectives on Reparations

Reparations for Africans have long sought to address the legacies of slavery, the transatlantic slave trade, and colonialism. The *Abuja Proclamation* adopted in 1993 marked a critical moment in articulating a Pan-African

**The Humanity Pact's approach mirrors that of many contemporary reparations movements that emphasize a holistic view of reparations. Reparations are seen as a comprehensive package that includes financial compensation, land reform, the restitution of cultural wealth, and systemic reform of discriminatory political and economic systems. By addressing these various facets, contemporary reparations movements seek to dismantle the lingering effects of colonialism and slavery, which still manifest today as social and economic disparities.**

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position on reparations, emphasizing that reparations must not only address economic damage but also restore cultural dignity and heal historical traumas (African Union, 1993). This proclamation laid the groundwork for African nations to demand justice in a collective voice, emphasizing that reparations extend far beyond financial compensation—they involve the restoration of cultural heritage and the rectification of long-standing economic disparities. The *Abuja Proclamation* thus revitalized the global reparations movement by setting a common agenda for African nations and their diaspora.

Following this, the *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action* adopted at the *2001 World Conference against Racism* further emphasized the need for reparations. The declaration acknowledged the transatlantic slave trade as a crime against humanity, which justified reparations for Africans and their descendants. It provided a crucial framework for understanding reparations as not only a form of redress for the past but also a pathway to address the present and ongoing socio-economic inequalities caused by the legacy of slavery and colonialism (African Union, 2001).

Throughout history, other global reparations efforts provide further precedent for the African reparations movement. For instance, reparations paid to holocaust survivors by Germany demonstrated the international community's recognition of historical injustices and the necessity for financial, legal, and cultural redress. Indigenous peoples in various countries have also been recipients of restitution efforts, such as the return of land and financial compensation in Australia and Canada. These examples highlight the global relevance of the reparations conversation and its applicability to the African context.

## 2. Contemporary Reparations Movements

Reparations movements worldwide have gained momentum in recent years, with governments, civil society, and grassroots organizations advocating for justice. The African Union's *Agenda 2063* highlights reparatory justice as fundamental to Africa's long-term development strategy (African Union Commission, 2025). Contemporary movements for reparations are not confined to Africa, they extend globally, driven by the African diaspora. In the Caribbean, for instance, the *CARICOM Reparations Commission* has been a prominent advocate for reparations from former colonial powers. The commission calls for formal apologies, financial compensation, debt cancellation, and cultural restitution to repair the damage caused by slavery and colonialism across the Caribbean region.

In the United States, the conversation around reparations has also gained momentum, with local initiatives like those in Evanston, Illinois, seeking to provide housing grants to African American residents as a form of redress for racial discrimination in housing. Additionally, advocacy efforts led by organizations such as the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC) are calling for federal reparations programs to address the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and systemic racism.

These contemporary movements, along with the African Union's initiatives, highlight a growing recognition of the need for reparations. However, they also illustrate that reparations are not just about financial payments. The *Humanity Pact* embodies this by seeking to transform political and economic frameworks to address historical imbalances. Its *Economic Justice Roadmap* prioritizes redistributive wealth policies, land restitution, and economic empowerment for communities marginalized by slavery and colonialism (Humanity Pact Blueprint, 2024). This includes progressive taxation policies, universal basic income programs, and a focus on wealth redistribution through fair

international trade and investment practices.

The Humanity Pact’s approach mirrors that of many contemporary reparations movements that emphasize a holistic view of reparations. Reparations are seen as a comprehensive package that includes financial compensation, land reform, the restitution of cultural wealth, and systemic reform of discriminatory political and economic systems. By addressing these various facets, contemporary reparations movements seek to dismantle the lingering effects of colonialism and slavery, which still manifest today as social and economic disparities.

### 3. Economic, Social, and Cultural Implications of Reparations

Reparations must address not only the economic harm caused by slavery and colonialism but also the social and cultural ramifications. Historically, the economic exploitation of Africans, through the transatlantic slave trade and the extraction of resources under colonial rule, created vast economic disparities that continue to affect African nations today. Addressing these economic imbalances is essential to ensuring that African countries and their descendants can overcome the legacies of exploitation. For instance, the looting of cultural artifacts, the loss of intellectual heritage, and the dismantling of African economies under colonial rule have left Africa economically vulnerable.

The AU’s efforts to repatriate looted cultural property, including the development of the Common African Position Paper on the Restitution of Cultural Property at the 2021 Dakar workshop, mark significant steps in addressing cultural exploitation (African Union, 2021). This initiative underscores the importance of restoring cultural dignity as a core component of reparatory justice. Countries like France, Belgium, and Germany have recently made strides toward returning cultural artifacts to African nations, a key element in addressing the cultural impacts of colonialism. These restitutions are part of broader efforts to recognize the wrongs of the past and rebuild Africa’s cultural identity.



Aligned with these efforts, the Humanity Pact’s Cultural Roadmap advocates for the preservation and restitution of cultural heritage (Humanity Pact Blueprint, 2024). This includes the repatriation of looted artifacts, the revitalization of cultural identities, and the democratization of cultural experiences through equitable access to the arts. The Pact’s Arts Access & Equity initiative seeks to ensure that marginalized groups reclaim their cultural legacies and have access to their cultural heritage. For example, the Humanity Pact proposes creating public cultural institutions that focus on African art, literature, and history,



The climate action group Fossil Free London joined Amnesty International UK and the Justice For Nigeria coalition to demand Shell clean up and compensate the communities of the Niger Delta who have been devastated by 70 years of oil spills as much of it, they accuse, has been at the hands of Shell. © Kristian Buus/In Pictures via Getty Images



ensuring that African descendants have access to their cultural heritage.

Economically, the Humanity Pact’s Wealth Balance Roadmap focuses on ensuring that African nations are compensated for the historical exploitation of their resources. This includes calls for fairer terms of trade and investment, sustainable debt relief, and the implementation of progressive taxation policies that address income inequality (Humanity Pact Blueprint, 2024). By addressing these economic and cultural disparities, reparations serve as a foundation for rebuilding African societies in a way that acknowledges the past while paving the way for future prosperity.

#### 4. Reparations and the African Union’s Agenda 2063

The AU’s Agenda 2063 envisions a future of unity, prosperity, and justice for Africa, with reparations being central to this vision. Reparations seek to address the historical injustices that continue to hinder the continent’s development. The Humanity Pact directly supports this by providing a blueprint for equity that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Humanity Pact Blueprint, 2024).

One of the key components of the Pact is the Wealth Balance Roadmap, which promotes fair wealth distribution and calls for financial systems that prioritize the needs of the Global South. This includes ensuring that African countries receive compensation for the historical exploitation of their resources. The Pact also echoes the AU’s goal of inclusive governance through its Policy Equity & Inclusion Roadmap, ensuring that historically marginalized voices are at the forefront of reparations discussions (Humanity Pact Blueprint, 2024).

#### 5. Intersectional Approaches to Reparations

The Humanity Pact adopts an intersectional approach that addresses overlapping oppressions faced by Africans and their descendants. Systemic inequality related to race, gender, and economic exploitation are interwoven with other forms of oppression like xenophobia and gender discrimination.

Through its Justice Access & Equity Roadmap, the Pact ensures that reparations address these overlapping inequalities (Humanity Pact Blueprint, 2024). This intersectional approach is especially critical in reparations discussions, as it ensures that women and other marginalized groups within African communities are prioritized, acknowledging the compounded historical disadvantages they face.

#### CONCLUSION

The Humanity Pact offers a comprehensive framework for advancing reparations for Africans and people of African descent. Its alignment with the AU’s Agenda 2063, its focus on justice, economic equity, and cultural restoration, and its intersectional approach make it an invaluable tool in the global reparations movement.

Reparations are not only about rectifying the past but also about creating a more just, equitable, and inclusive future. By embracing the principles of the Humanity Pact, Africa and its diaspora can work toward realizing reparations as a transformative pathway to global justice.

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# Reparations and Racial Healing as a Commitment of the African Union to the Decolonization Process in Africa: From Abuja to Accra

By **Angela Naa Afoley Odai**

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Reparations represent a cornerstone of justice for Africans and people of African descent, aiming to address the deep-seated injustices resulting from colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, and the persisting effects of these historical crimes. During the 2024 Summit held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the African Union (AU) Assembly decided that the 2025 theme of the year would be “Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations.” This decision builds on the recommendations of the Accra Proclamation on Reparations from 2023, which called for the building of a united effort to advance the cause of justice for historical crimes committed against Africans and all people of African descent who are recognized as an essential component of the African diaspora. The reparations agenda for 2025 offers a significant opportunity for the AU to take leadership in addressing these issues and mobilize Member States and the global African diaspora in pursuit of justice and racial healing.

This renewed focus is built upon a multi-dimensional approach that encompasses two main pillars: first, seeking justice and repair for the historical wrongs committed against Africans and the diaspora; and second, promoting racial healing, both among Africans and between Africans and their diaspora

counterparts. The reparations discourse goes beyond historical grievances to address current structural and institutional frameworks that hinder the development of Africa and its diaspora. The focus on reparations in 2025 aims to foster a united movement that tackles the legacy of these crimes while generating momentum for future generations.

This article traces the evolution of reparatory justice from the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the AU's Agenda 2063 and presents a framework for future actions on reparations. It also examines the historical context and decisions made by the AU, along with the operational mechanisms required to realize these objectives.

## **Historical Context: The OAU and Reparations**

The Organization of African Unity (OAU), founded in 1963, was primarily focused on the decolonization and liberation of African nations from colonialism. However, from its inception, the OAU's leadership recognized the importance of addressing the broader consequences of colonial domination, which included the call for reparations. Prominent African leaders and Pan-Africanists like W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey had long championed the need for reparatory justice, arguing that the historical crimes committed



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Los Angeles resident, Walter Foster, 80, holds up a sign as California's Reparations Task Force meets to hear public input on reparations at the California Science Center in Los Angeles  
© Carolyn Cole/ Getty Images

against Africans, including slavery and colonialism, demanded restitution.

In 1992, the OAU established the Group of Eminent Persons on Reparations (GEP), a 12-member body tasked with assessing the damage inflicted upon Africa and its diaspora through enslavement, colonization, and neo-colonialism. The following year, the First Pan-African Conference on Reparations was held in Abuja, Nigeria, culminating in the Abuja Proclamation. This document laid the groundwork for a unified African position on reparations, declaring that the transatlantic slave trade and colonization were crimes against humanity, and called upon the international community to recognize its moral obligation to compensate Africa for these atrocities.

While the Abuja Proclamation marked a historic moment for Africa's reparations movement, the momentum was not sustained during the OAU era, primarily due to a lack of political will and the absence of concrete mechanisms for pursuing reparatory justice. Nonetheless, the seeds of the reparations agenda were sown, and they would later be nurtured by the African Union.

### The Evolution of the AU and the Reparations Agenda

The transition from the OAU to the African Union (AU) in 2002 signaled a renewed vision for Africa's development, integration, and unity. The AU's Constitutive Act enshrined principles of human rights, democratic governance, and socio-economic justice, laying the foundation for addressing historical injustices. In 2015, the AU's Agenda 2063 envisioned "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa," with a specific focus on justice and accountability, as outlined in Aspiration 3.

Another critical moment came in 2001, when the AU participated in the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. The resulting Durban Declaration recognized slavery and the transatlantic slave trade as crimes against humanity and underscored the right of victims, including Africans and people of African descent, to reparations.

Over the years, the AU has hosted several key initiatives to advance the reparations agenda. In 2021, a Continental Experts Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage, held in Dakar, Senegal, reaffirmed Africa's commitment to reclaiming its stolen cultural assets. The workshop developed a "Common African Position Paper on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage," marking another step in Africa's broader pursuit of reparations.

The Accra Declaration on Reparations and Racial Healing, adopted at the Diaspora Summit on Reparations in 2022, emphasized the need for comprehensive reparatory justice that included racial healing. The Declaration called for reparations not only for historical crimes but also for the ongoing structural inequalities and systemic racism faced by Africans and the African diaspora. The inclusion of racial healing in the reparations discourse represented a significant innovation, acknowledging the psychological and emotional trauma endured by African communities globally.

In November 2022, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights adopted a resolution that reaffirmed Africa's reparations agenda, urging the AU to establish a committee to conceptualize reparations from an African perspective and to pursue justice for colonial and neo-colonial crimes. This resolution built on the Durban Declaration and reinforced the need for a global effort to achieve reparatory justice for Africa.

### **AU Decisions on Reparations and Operational Instruments**

The AU's formal involvement in the reparations agenda gained significant traction with the Accra Reparations Conference in November 2023. The conference, held under the auspices of AU Assembly Decision 847, reaffirmed the principles of the Abuja Proclamation and made several key recommendations, including the establishment of a Committee of Experts on Reparations and an AU Global Reparations Fund. These proposed mechanisms are designed to provide a structured approach to reparatory justice, ensuring that Africa's demands for reparations are pursued at both the continental and global levels.

The adoption of AU Assembly Decision 884 at the 2024 Summit, designating reparations as the theme for 2025, marked a turning point. This decision provides a unique opportunity for the AU to institutionalize reparatory justice and racial healing, translating decades of advocacy into tangible outcomes. The focus on reparations in 2025 will also align with the AU's broader agenda of socio-economic justice, as outlined in Agenda 2063.

To operationalize the 2025 theme, the AU's Citizens and Diaspora Organizations Directorate (CIDO) has developed a comprehensive Concept Note and Roadmap, which will guide Member States, AU Organs, and other stakeholders in implementing reparations-related activities. The roadmap includes mechanisms for advocacy, awareness-raising, and policy development, aiming to secure a unified commitment from African countries and the diaspora.

### **Objectives of the Reparations Momentum**

The momentum on reparations seeks to achieve several key objectives:

- 1. Justice and Repair:** The primary goal is to obtain justice for the historical crimes committed against Africans and the African diaspora. This includes seeking compensation for the transatlantic slave trade, colonization, and other forms of exploitation that have had a lasting impact on African communities.
- 2. Racial Healing:** Reparations are also about healing the divisions caused by these historical atrocities. The reparations agenda emphasizes the need for reconciliation among Africans and between Africa and its diaspora, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity.
- 3. Economic and Structural Redress:** The reparations agenda also addresses the economic disparities and structural inequalities that continue to hinder Africa's development. Reparatory justice is seen as a means of addressing the root causes of underdevelopment in Africa, which are directly linked to its colonial past.
- 4. Global Solidarity:** By aligning the reparations movement with global initiatives such as the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), the AU aims to build a broad coalition of support for reparations, engaging international partners and institutions in the fight for justice.

### **CONCLUSION**

The AU's commitment to reparations and racial healing represents a pivotal moment in the decolonization process for Africa. From the Abuja Proclamation in 1993 to the Accra Declaration in 2023, the African continent has laid the groundwork for a global reparations movement. The theme for 2025 signals a new chapter in this journey, providing the AU and its Member States with the opportunity to take concrete steps toward achieving justice for Africans and people of African descent. Through coordinated action with all relevant stakeholders, Africa can secure the reparations it deserves and promote healing, unity, and progress for future generations.



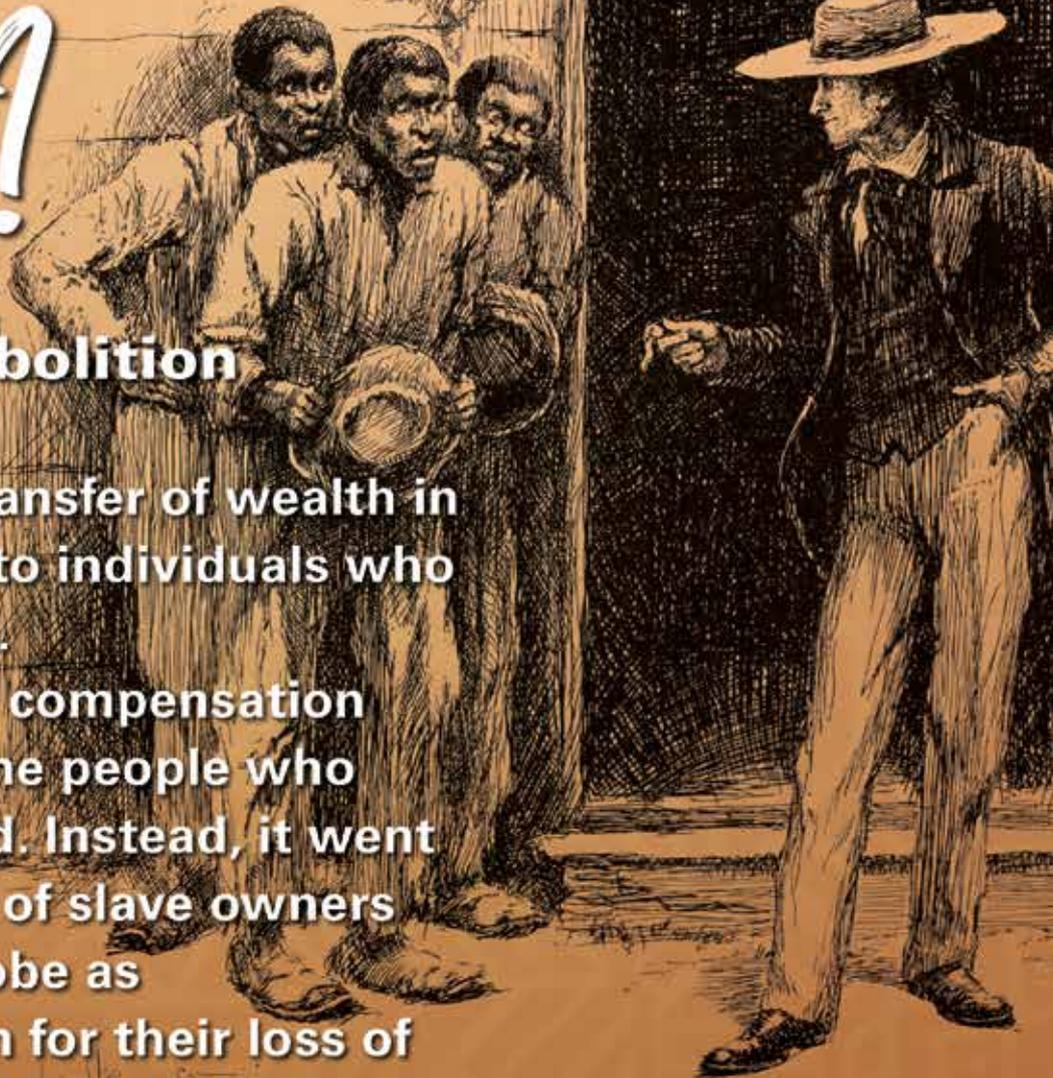
**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

# Did You Know?

## **With the Abolition of Slavery**

The largest transfer of wealth in history went to individuals who owned slaves.

No portion of compensation was paid to the people who were enslaved. Instead, it went to thousands of slave owners across the globe as compensation for their loss of property/ 'assets'.



# The Debt Unpaid: A Case for Reparations for Africans and People of African Descent

By **Beza Esubalew Belay**

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The legacy of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism has inflicted profound, lasting harm on Africans and people of African descent worldwide. This paper argues that justice demands reparations for these historical injustices. It examines the enduring consequences of these crimes against humanity, focusing on the economic, social, political, and psychological ramifications. Furthermore, it explores the multifaceted nature of reparations, encompassing financial compensation, educational and development programs, land restitution, apologies, and systemic reforms aimed at dismantling the structures of inequality that perpetuate the harm. Finally, the paper contends that reparations are not merely about rectifying the past, but also fostering a more just and equitable future for all.

For centuries, the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent colonial exploitation subjected African people and their descendants to unparalleled suffering. Millions were forcibly uprooted from their homelands, brutalised, and stripped of their dignity, culture, and economic agency. Even after emancipation, systemic racism, discriminatory laws, and economic marginalisation continued to perpetuate the trauma and hinder the progress of Africans and people of African descent. This paper posits that the cumulative impact of these historical injustices necessitates a comprehensive program of reparations to address the

persistent inequalities and finally begin to heal the wounds of the past.

## THE ENDURING CONSEQUENCES OF SLAVERY, COLONIALISM, AND SYSTEMIC RACISM:

The consequences of slavery and colonialism are not merely historical artifacts; they continue to manifest in tangible disparities across various domains:

- **Economic Disparities:** Generations of unpaid labor and denial of access to resources have resulted in a significant wealth gap between Africans and people of African descent and their counterparts. This disparity is further exacerbated by discriminatory practices in housing, employment, and access to capital.



- **Educational Inequality:** Historically underfunded schools, biased curricula, and limited access to higher education have created a cycle of educational disadvantage for Africans and people of African descent, hindering their social mobility and economic opportunities.
- **Health Disparities:** The stress and trauma associated with historical oppression, coupled with inadequate access to healthcare and environmental injustices, contribute to higher rates of chronic diseases, mental health issues, and mortality among Africans and people of African descent.
- **Political Disenfranchisement:** Systemic barriers to voting, discriminatory law enforcement practices, and underrepresentation in government continue to limit the political power and influence of Africans and people of African descent, hindering their ability to advocate for their interests.
- **Psychological Trauma:** The intergenerational trauma of slavery and racism has left deep psychological scars on Africans and people of African descent, contributing to feelings of alienation, distrust, and internalised oppression.

### **WHAT CONSTITUTES REPARATIONS? A MULTIFACETED APPROACH:**

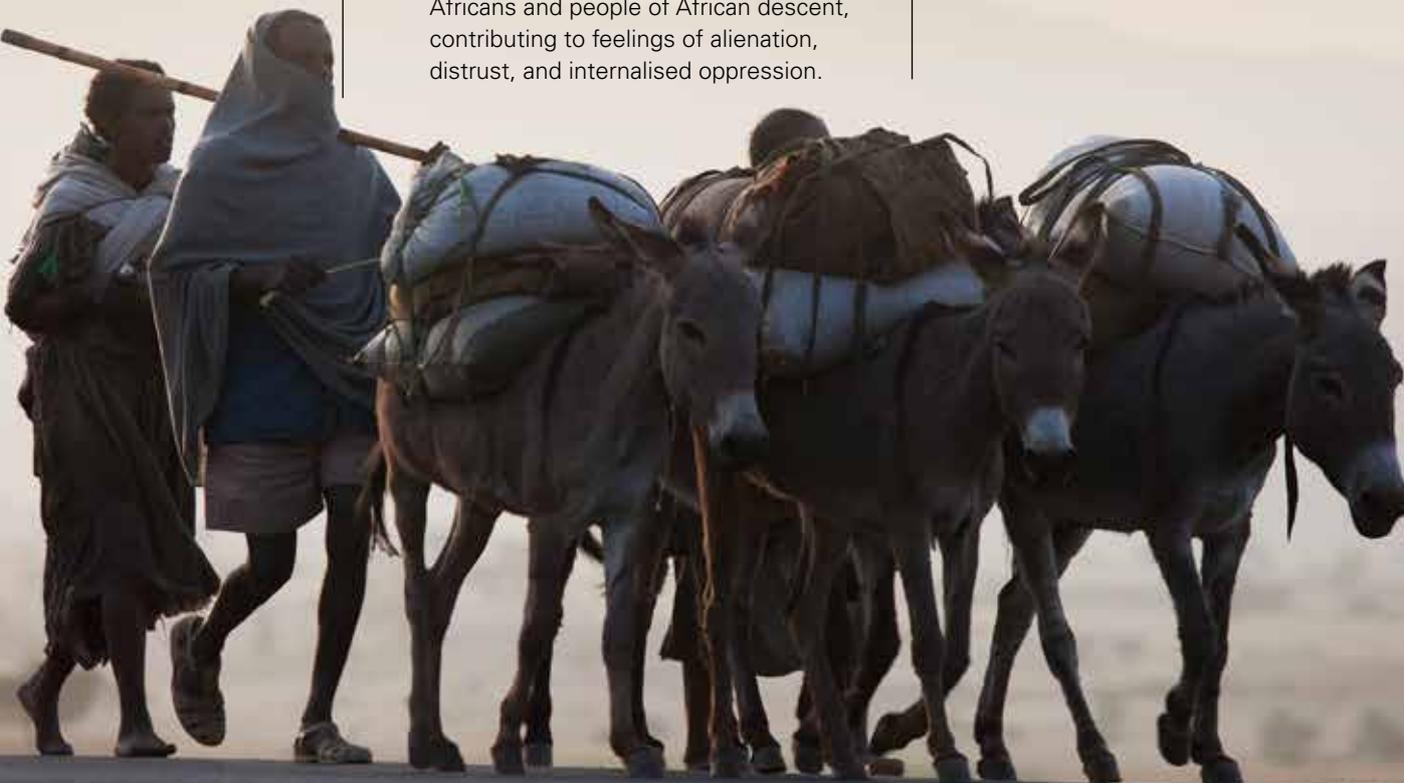
Reparations are not simply about writing a cheque; they represent a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to addressing the harm caused by historical injustices. This includes:

#### **Financial Compensation:**

Providing direct financial payments to descendants of enslaved people and victims of colonial exploitation is a critical step in acknowledging the economic losses and suffering endured by these communities. The amount of compensation should be commensurate with the scale of the harm and the ongoing economic disparities.

#### **Educational and Development Programs:**

Investing in education, job training, and economic development programs targeted at Africans and people of African descent can help address the historical disadvantages they have faced and create pathways to economic empowerment.



**Land Restitution:**

Returning land that was unjustly seized during slavery and colonialism can provide Africans and people of African descent with a foundation for economic self-sufficiency and cultural preservation.

**Apologies and Acknowledgement:**

Formal apologies from governments and institutions that benefited from slavery and colonialism are essential for acknowledging historical injustices and fostering reconciliation.

**Systemic Reforms:** Dismantling the systemic structures of racism and inequality, such as discriminatory laws, policing practices, and housing policies, is crucial for creating a just and equitable society. This includes implementing affirmative action policies, promoting diversity and inclusion, and addressing environmental injustices.

**Cultural Preservation and Recognition:**

Supporting cultural institutions, museums, and historical sites that preserve and celebrate the heritage of Africans and people of African descent is crucial for promoting cultural pride and countering historical erasure.

**ADDRESSING COUNTER ARGUMENTS:**

Opponents of reparations often raise concerns about the logistical challenges of identifying eligible recipients, the potential for divisiveness, and the financial burden on taxpayers.

However, these concerns can be addressed through careful planning, transparent processes, and a commitment to inclusivity.

- **Identifying Eligible Recipients:**

Genealogical research, historical records, and community input can be used to establish clear criteria for eligibility. Furthermore, reparations can be directed towards community-based organisations that serve Africans and people of African descent, ensuring the benefits reach those most in need.

- **Countering Divisiveness:** While reparations may be controversial, they are ultimately about healing and reconciliation. By acknowledging the past and addressing

the ongoing inequalities, reparations can create a more unified and just society.

- **Reducing Financial Burden:** The cost of reparations should be viewed as an investment in a more equitable future. Moreover, the economic benefits of closing the wealth gap and promoting economic empowerment among Africans and people of African descent will ultimately benefit society.

Individual can take action to raise awareness and counter arguments against reparations about reparations by: Supporting organisations working towards reparations; educating yourself and others about the history of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism; advocating for policies that promote racial justice and economic equality; and engaging in conversations about reparations with friends, family, and community members.

**CONCLUSION**

The call for reparations is not about seeking revenge or retribution; it is about seeking justice and healing. By acknowledging the historical injustices of slavery, colonialism, and systemic racism, and by implementing a comprehensive program of reparations, we can begin to repair the damage that has been done and create a more just and equitable society for all. Reparations are not merely about rectifying the past; they are about investing in a future where all people have the opportunity to thrive. The debt is long overdue; it is time to pay it.



**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

# Did You Know?

**Haiti was penalised for the revolution that abolished slavery**

**Former slaves were forced to pay indemnities to former slaveowners in exchange for official recognition as the first black independent nation-state in the Western Hemisphere**



# The Right to Reparations: A World Challenge to the Post-slavery and Colonialism Issues in Africa

By **Samson Ambaye**  
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The impact of the twin scourges of the slave trade and colonialism cannot be overemphasized as they caused pain to Africa through torture, poverty, disruption, and suffering, including human rights violations (African Union, 2015). Impacted and shaped by these historical and contemporary injustices, the continent continues to be beset by social, political, and economic challenges. In this paper, the evaluation of scholarship done regarding the implementation of reparations concerning the crime of slavery and its intricacies as well as colonization is discussed, which is a cause of the AU since it's beginning (African Union, 2015).

The transatlantic slave trade extends over centuries and is an intolerable problem concerning human rights violations. The forcible relocation of African people was hellish, and the journey to America and the Caribbean was disastrous. The process of slavery bruised both the body and the spirit of the people and caused wounds that lasted through generations.

## Cultural Disruption and Ethnic Conflict

Social and structural identities such as traditions, languages, and social ties in which Africans find belonging, were shattered through slavery and colonialism, which found and uprooted millions of people. Imposition and indoctrination were alternative methods used to encourage acceptance of European norms while traditional practices were systematically repressed.

## Breaches of Fundamental Rights

The violence pervasive within enslaving individuals and colonizing nations comprised the violation of the core fundamental human rights to life, personal freedom, and the right to the integrity of one's body. The wounds inflicted by such abuses are, still relevant today, giving rise to, amongst others, discrimination, oppression, and inequality.

## The Enduring Impact

The consequences of slavery and colonialism are still felt up to the

## African countries' demands for slavery reparations grow louder

Sao Tome's plan to seek slavery reparations from Portugal reignites the debate over compensation claims from former colonial powers in Africa



More than 12.5M Africans were traded as slaves by European countries between the 16th and 19th centuries



 <b>UK</b> From the 16th century onwards, began engaging in colonialism and the slave trade Some colonies: - America - India - South Africa - Kenya	 <b>SPAIN</b> Colonized numerous countries between the 16-19th centuries Some colonies: - Cuba - Puerto Rico - Peru - Equatorial Guinea - Western Sahara - Philippines	 <b>PORTUGAL</b> History of slavery in Africa was initiated by Portugal in the late 15th century Some colonies: - Brazil - Angola - Mozambique - Guinea-Bissau	 <b>FRANCE</b> Slave trade centers in Africa: - Senegal - Ivory Coast - Benin In five centuries of colonialism 2M Africans were used in the slave trade	 <b>BELGIUM</b> Left a bloody trail in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi Killed nearly 10M people in Kenya	 <b>NETHERLANDS</b> Some colonies: - Ivory Coast - Ghana - South Africa - Angola - Namibia - Senegal
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May 10, 2024



to the population and medical facilities to eliminate the effects of slavery and colonialism in the long term.

- **Addressing Psychological Effects:** Measures against the trauma caused to generations by such historical injustices.
- **Country's Image Restoration:** Parental laws regarding the repatriation of seized cultural artifacts to Africa.
- **Recent Developments:** Building Momentum for Reparations  
It has been more than a decade since the efforts for reparations officially began within the AU, and some member states have demonstrated continued interest in the reparations agenda:
- **International Collaboration:** Participation in the 2001 Durban Declaration marked a further step forward. Slavery and colonialism were condemned as crimes against humanity, and the right of the victims to seek reparations was enshrined. (The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, 2001). There has been consistent support through the partnership between the CARICOM and the AU, which enhances the voices of the African Diaspora in the reparations struggle.
- **System Constraints:** As per the AU Assembly of 2023, there is an African Committee of Experts on Reparations that has been formed. This committee has the responsibility of preparing a Common African Position and Program of Action on reparations which aims at streamlining the reparations process.
- **Cultural Property Restitution:** Bearing in mind that reparations have a much wider scope, the 2021 Continental Experts Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage focused on the strategies to

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An infographic titled "African countries' demands for slavery reparations grow louder" created in Istanbul, Turkiye on May 10, 2024. Sao Tome's plan to seek slavery reparations from Portugal reignites the debate over compensation claims from former colonial powers in Africa © Ufuk Celal Guzel/ Anadolu via Getty Images

present in Africa. Such economic and social injustice as well as cultural fragmentation, among others, that were caused by such injustices still prevail today. These legacies are not easily forgotten, let alone reversed. They require political will and understanding to address the debt through more than just money in the way of restoration, integration, and prevention of the repeat of such events.

### The AU's Enduring Fight for Reparations

The AU has, in all of its circumstances, supported the call for reparations as a remedy for such injustices as well as justice for Africans and people of African descent. In this regard the most important document was the Abuja Proclamation that defined the issue of reparations from an African perspective (The Abuja Proclamation, 1993). This declaration stressed the importance of including the following aspects:

- **Economic Development:** Implementing economic strategies related to building roads, providing education

recover art works looted during the colonial period. Such activities seek to restore an essential component of Africa's cultural heritage and identity.

### **Barriers Faced in Restoration and Compensation**

Although these issues are welcome developments, there are still looming issues that are inevitable:

- **Measuring the Harm:** An understanding of the legacy from both colonization and slavery is pertinent to studying the harrowing effects of their economy, politics, and psyche. Still, trying to measure long-term impairments to Africa's developmental path and cultural identity is remarkably difficult (African Union, 2015).
- **Mechanism of Providing Solutions:** There is a necessity to provide international organization for developing specific plans for the realization of the reparations. A democratic challenge is the question of what is the most appropriate type of reparations, for example either in the form of development aid, payments to actual victims, or forgiveness of debt.
- **Public Awareness:** Accompanying obligations to educate the public on the historical wrongs and the moral legitimacy on repairing them remains a default option. It is important to inform Africa and the world society about the negative impact of slavery and colonialism, to sustain the promotion of reparations (African Union, n.d.).

### **Looking ahead: Paths for Enforcing the Right to Reparations**

There are nevertheless many possibilities that can be utilized in helping the struggle for reparations to bear fruit:

- **Collected Data:** More work needs to be done on the economic and social aspects of slavery and colonialism in order to fortify claims of reparations. There should be estimates of development that could have been realized, together with the persisting inequities as a result of historical wrongdoing
- **Creating Strategic Partnerships:** Building networks with other territories that have suffered similar outrages, such as indigenous population groups around the globe, can



bolster the reparation movement. More can be done by way of reaching out to erstwhile colonial states and campaigning for awareness on a wider scale.

- **Reconciliation with former Colonisers:** There should be readiness to speak with and negotiate with former colonizers. To want recognition of historical wrongs and looking for ways on how these can be dealt with out is preferable.

### **The Restoration of Justice: A Utopian or Possible Dream**

The quest for reparations for Africa is not a new one; it is a struggle that dates back centuries, and one that has endured into the present. Even though serious challenges remain, the initiatives spearheaded by the AU underscore its steadfast efforts in seeking justice for Africans and Africans in the diaspora (see Treaties of the African Union [AU]). It is important to note that oppression and violence will still linger around the two protagonists (African Union, 2015), but perhaps it is possible, through collective efforts, research, and advocacy, to achieve a reality where even the painful memories of slavery and colonialism would have been dealt with. This resonates with the specific aspiration of Agenda 2063: 'An Africa that is prosperous, developed and peaceful' (The African Union [AU], Agenda 2063). Forming an international coalition and taking a supportive approach towards other



A protester takes part in supporting Reparations March UK & Afrikan Emancipation Day to reclaim Brixton town centre in order to promote their demand of reparations for slavery in London, United Kingdom  
© Ray Tang/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)



nations with a colonial past can assist in achieving feasible conclusions that promote a future free from toxicity.

The initiatives listed below, from institutional to continental, collectively advocate for greater attention to the slavery and colonisation history within Africa, while stressing the importance of international collaboration geared towards reparations and justice.

**Institutional Level:**

***The National Museum of African American History and Culture:*** This is a national museum in Washington D.C. which is managed in the preservation and interpretation of the heritages of African American history. It serves as a prominent icon in racial and reparational struggles since it reinforces the existence of colonialism and slavery.

***The Herero/Nama Genocide Foundation:*** The Herero/Nama Genocide Fund, this entity is seeking to obtain reparations for the people who suffered due to the Herero and Nama genocide in Namibia. This includes lobbying for genocide recognition, historical justice and reparations.

**National Level:**

***The National Reparations Commission of South Africa:*** Established in 2018, this commission seeks to analyse the apartheid history of South Africa to ascertain and recommend reparations where needed. Amongst other things, they conduct public hearings, research, and consultations.

***Reparations Initiatives in the United States:*** In the United States of America, the issue of reparations against the government continues to draw serious arguments as it has done for a long time. Recent developments include the proposed National Commission on Reparatory Justice or legislation such as the National

African American Reparations Commission and the H.R. 40 bill, proposing a commission to examine the possibilities of reparations.

**Continental Level:**

***The Pan-African Reparations Coalition:*** This is a coalition comprising organizations and individuals who are primarily engaged in information sharing, campaigning and advocating for reparations to the descendants of the enslaved Africans. Organizing of conferences, campaigns and other initiatives aimed at the advancement of the reparation's agenda has been their forte.

***The Global Reparations Movement:*** The reparational aspect extends beyond the African continent. There are and will be initiatives and activities promoting reparations in other countries as well. The coalition of regions will make it easier for people to prescribe justice and reparations to agitate for it at a global level.

**Conclusion**

The transatlantic slave trade and colonialism brought untold suffering to the African continent and left it with the terrible legacy of underdevelopment, cultural upheaval and crimes against humanity (The Tide: The African Union [AU], Agenda 2063). Even after the long time that has passed, the continent is still challenged by the resulting social, political and economic effects of these historical injustices.

This paper has analyzed the situations and the measures that are being undertaken to advance the reparations agenda, for the crimes of slavery and colonialism, a cause the AU has championed from its birth. Several developments, including the adoption of the Abuja Proclamation and the Durban Declaration, represent real progress, but there remain many obstacles.

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# The Role of Education and Culture in Reparative Justice for Africans: A Mozambican Case Study



indi Bobb, 6, attends a slavery reparations protest outside New York Life Insurance Company offices August 9, 2002 in New York City. Protesters claim the company benefited from slave labor and wants payments to the descendants of victims of the transatlantic slave trade.  
© Mario Tama/Getty Images

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The debate on reparations for historical injustices against African nations and African descendants has been gaining momentum globally, focusing on the lasting impacts of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and neocolonialism. Addressing these issues requires heightened global awareness and the implementation of reparations rooted in legal, moral, and socioeconomic imperatives.

This article examines the constitutive role of education and culture as foundational pillars of reparative justice, with a particular focus on Mozambique. It emphasises the need for the adoption of a multidimensional reparations framework encompassing economic restitution,

cultural restoration, and institutional reforms to redress systemic inequities stemming from colonial subjugation. The analysis demonstrates how education and culture function not merely as vessels of historical memory but as transformative mechanisms for communal empowerment, enabling Mozambicans to reclaim rights and rebuild collective identities. The study concludes with recommendations for embedding education and cultural revitalisation into reparative frameworks in Mozambique, and as a potential model for broader continental application.



MP Karine Lebon, Guido Fluri, initiator of the Justice Initiative European project, and Marie-Germain Perignon, a survivor and activist from Réunion Island attend the presentation of the bill in the presence of numerous Réunion Island survivors and the Minister of State for Overseas Territories, Mr. Manuel Valls, on Wednesday, March 26, 2025, at the National Assembly in Paris. Lebon's bill is asking for reparations and apologies to be made to the 2150 children who were forcibly taken from their families on Réunion Island between 1962 and 1984 and sent to Creuse

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### Introduction

The African reparations movement emerges from historical grievances tied to slavery, colonialism, and economic exploitation (Beckels, 2018). Reparative justice necessitates a multidimensional approach, transcending financial compensation to restore dignity, advance equity, and reconstructing cultural-historical identities (Howard-Hassmann, 2008; Buford & van der Merwe, 2004). Education and culture serve as pivotal mechanisms for preserving collective memory, confronting historical injustices, and empowering African communities. (Mawere, 2015; Woolman, 2001)

Mozambique's experience of Portuguese colonialism, marked by forced labor and systemic exploitation, positions it as a critical case for reparatory justice debates (Barros et al, 2024; Goulart, 2023). Its legacy in cultural resistance further underscores the potential of education and culture as instruments of redress (Chimbutane, 2024; Sabratnam, 2018). This article analyses Mozambican educational and

cultural initiatives, interrogating their role in addressing colonial legacies, and evaluates how reparations could foster national and social justice.

### Historical Context of Reparations in Africa

The Pan-Africanist and anti-colonial struggles laid the foundation for Africa's reparations movement (Beckels, 2018). The 1993 Abuja Proclamation by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) formalized demands for reparations to address the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and their legacies (AU, 1993). This stance was strengthened by the 2001 Durban Declaration's emphasis on reparative justice (ACHPR, 2022; AU, 2001), while the continent continues to grapple with the socioeconomic and political consequences of colonial subjugation (Goulart, 2023).

### The Role of Education in Reparative Justice

Education serves as a critical mechanism for reparative justice by fostering historical consciousness (Mazula, 1993) and enabling

rights-claiming (Chimbutane, 2024). In Mozambique, educational initiatives have addressed colonial memory through:

- *Education and Historical Memory:* The national education system preserves historical memory by incorporating narratives of colonial oppression and resistance in curricula (Amancio & Pastore, 2020; Mazula, 1993), sustaining intergenerational commitment to justice. (Sabaratnam, 2018).
- *Education as Empowerment:* Civic education initiatives link human rights awareness to justice (Chimbutane, 2024, Luviana, 2019), fostering participatory citizenship (Cahen, 2005).

### **The Role of Culture in Reparative Justice**

Cultural expression in Mozambique functions as both a tool of colonial resistance (Cupane, 2010) and a vehicle for postcolonial identity reformation (Mbembe 2017; Cachat, 2009). The promotion of local culture has been instrumental in preserving historical memory and advancing reparative justice agendas (Sabaratnam, 2018; Agorsah, 1977) from the following perspectives:

- *Culture as Resistance:* Traditional arts and oral traditions served as an anti-colonial resistance mechanism (Isaacman & Isaacman, 1983). The post-1975 independence government institutionalised cultural revival as central to national identity reformation and colonial legacy mitigation (Sabaratnam, 2018).
- *Restitution of Cultural Heritage:* Mozambique's transnational efforts to reclaim looted artifacts during colonial occupation address epistemic violence (Danda, 2024) and promote psychosocial reconciliation (Agorsha, 1977).

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Despite the progress made, substantive obstacles persist in effectively incorporating education and culture within reparative justice frameworks. Key impediments include: (1) systemic resource deficiencies, (2) insufficient public consciousness, and (3) persistent reluctance among former colonial powers to acknowledge historical culpability (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Buford & van der Merwe 2004) *Lack of Resources:* The implementation of educational and cultural programs for reparative



justice demands substantial financial and human capital. In Mozambique, resource constraints have hindered government and civil society capacities to develop comprehensive initiatives (Sabaratnam, 2018)

*Awareness and engagement:* Public understanding of reparative justice imperatives remains limited, necessitating targeted awareness campaigns to highlight the critical role of education and culture in reparations (Magona, 2021; Luviana, 2019, Sabaratnam, 2018; Mawere, 2015).

### **Recommendations**

To advance reparative justice across Africa, the following measures are critical:

- Incorporate education and culture into reparation strategies through programs that foster historical memory and awareness of colonial injustices. (MINEDH, 2019; Batt, 2023; Woolman, 2001)
- Accelerate cultural heritage restitution by claiming looted artifacts, reviving and preserving cultural heritage through international collaboration (Danda, 2024; Mbembe, 2017; Agorsah, 1977)
- Expand civic and human rights education to empower communities in advocating for reparative justice (Chimbutane, 2024; Magona, 2021; UN, 1948)
- Increase funding for educational and cultural initiatives through government and international support (Sabaratnam, 2018;



Memorial march in Berlin in memory of the victims of slavery and colonialism. The demonstration commemorates the victims of the German colonial era and demands both recognition of the genocide and reparations for the damage caused. The return of looted cultural property and the remains of victims from German museums is also demanded.

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UNCTAD, 2011)

- Strengthen international cooperation to facilitate heritage restitution and promote reparative education and culture. (Danda, 2024; Karden, 2024; UN, 2023; Beckles, 2018)

### Conclusion

Reparations for Africa, and Mozambique specifically, constitute both a historical imperative and a pre-requisite for socioeconomic justice. Addressing colonial legacies through comprehensive measures, including financial compensation, cultural restitution, and institutional reform, would foster sustainable development. The AU's reparations framework enables Mozambique to advance its claims within a continental justice movement.

This study demonstrates that education and culture serve as foundational elements of reparative justice. Through their capacity to preserve collective memory, enhance historical consciousness, and facilitate community empowerment, these domains contribute to restoring dignity and equity. Mozambique's distinctive experience of cultural resistance presents a particularly instructive case for implementing reparative justice mechanisms across Africa.

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## The Role of UNILAB in the Formation of Black Female Leadership in the Context of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony: An Afrocentric Analysis

By **Rutte Tavares Cardoso Andrade**  
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Historical reparation and the empowerment of black and quilombola women are fundamental issues in the anti-racist and social justice movements, both in Brazil and in Africa. These movements seek not only material compensation but also the reconstruction of black identities, the valorisation of African culture, and the restoration of the historical dignity lost over centuries of colonialism and slavery-based oppression. In this context, the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB) stands out, adopting an Afrocentric perspective as a crucial articulation point for promoting social justice, historical reparation, and the political empowerment of black women.



▲▲▲  
 Revelers dance at an Afro-Brazilian festival held next to the Valongo slave wharf, entry point in the Americas for nearly one million African slaves, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Valongo site was designated UNESCO heritage status on July 9 and the festival marked the distinction. Brazil is estimated to have received four million African slaves in total, approximately 40 percent of the total enslaved people shipped to the Americas  
 © Mario Tama/Getty Images

This article explores how UNILAB contributes to the formation of black female leadership, focusing on historical reparation through the implementation of an Afrocentric approach. A concrete example of this practice is the VIII International Meeting of Urban and Quilombola Black Women (EIMNUQ 2024), organised by the Society for the Protection of the Dispossessed, and held at the Quilombo dos Palmares in Alagoas, Brazil, in July 2024. The event, which involved professors and students from UNILAB, provided a space to discuss the political empowerment of black women and the challenges they face in accessing and remaining in higher education.

Afrocentricity emerges as a theoretical and practical tool to reverse the dominant colonial narrative, placing Africa and its descendants at the center of world history. Molefi Kete Asante (2003) defines Afrocentricity as a paradigm shift that recognises the centrality of the African experience in the construction of the world and civilisation. This critical approach challenges the Eurocentric view and proposes an education that values the African worldview, allowing Afro-descendant peoples to reconnect with their cultural and spiritual roots.

Along with Afrocentricity, African Womanism emerges as a revolutionary epistemology that addresses the specific experiences of black women. Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) defines African Womanism as an approach that places the black woman at the center of social and political practices, recognising her agency and her fundamental role in rebuilding communities. Womanism transcends gender issues, also addressing racism, patriarchy, and colonisation, proposing a resistance that reconstructs black identities in an affirmative and proactive way.

African Womanism, as an Afrocentric epistemological continuum, seeks to restore political and epistemological sovereignty while offering resistance against colonialist and patriarchal practices. From these perspectives,



Colombia Hosts International Black Women's Meeting © Darwin Salamanca/ colombiaone.com

the Collective of African Women at UNILAB, led by African and Afro-descendant professors and students, creates a political and pedagogical space that allows black women, both Brazilian and African, to reconnect with their cultural roots, strengthening themselves as political and social leaders.

Since its foundation, UNILAB has positioned itself as a platform for integration between Afro-Lusophone countries, enabling students and researchers from Lusophone African countries and Brazil to share knowledge and experiences focused on the struggle for justice and reparation. The university's mission to promote integration and solidarity among Afro-descendant peoples reflects a deep commitment to historical reparation. In the context of UNILAB, this commitment involves not only material compensation but also the reconstruction of cultural identities and the valorization of African histories and knowledge.

The VIII International Meeting of Urban and Quilombola Black Women (EIMNUQ 2024) is a practical example of how these policies are being implemented. During the event, the political empowerment of black women and the challenges they face in higher education were widely discussed. The participation of academics and students from UNILAB, such as

Professor Rutte Tavares Cardoso Andrade (Cape Verde) and students Aminata Djakite (Guinea-Bissau), Hulda Maria Vitória Calala (Angola), and Yolanda Rafael Ofesse (Mozambique), reinforced the university's role as a leader in forming black female leadership.

Despite progress, the challenges of access and retention of black women in higher education remain significant. Many of these women come from low-income families, face cultural difficulties, and have less access to financial resources to sustain their academic trajectories. Therefore, effective public policies are essential to ensure the success of these students, including specific materials, scholarships, and psychological support.

In this regard, public policies for higher education in Brazil still face challenges regarding the access and retention of black women. UNILAB has a political responsibility to implement more effective policies, such as increasing scholarships for black and quilombola women, mentoring programs aimed at strengthening the academic paths of these women, specific psychological support considering the particularities of black women in post-colonial contexts, and greater appreciation of African cultures and ancestral traditions in the academic curriculum. With these measures, UNILAB can contribute significantly to the historical reparation of colonial injustices and the construction of a more just and equal society for black women.

Thus, this political and pedagogical project, born from the resistance of the black and indigenous movement in Brazil, translates into the vital commitment to the formation of black female leadership and the promotion of

historical reparations by integrating Afrocentricity and African Womanism into its educational projects. The university provides a platform for resistance and transformation, enabling black women to recognise themselves as political, social, and academic leaders capable of combating historical and current oppressions.

UNILAB was conceived as an international university with the mission of integrating Afro-Lusophony and establishing ties between Afro-descendant peoples from Lusophone countries. Its mission to promote integration and the valorisation of African cultures has transformative potential for promoting historical reparation. However, this potential will only be fully realised if the university adopts actions that meet the specific needs of black and quilombola women and recognises the moral and material debt that Brazil owes to African countries.

Brazil, as the direct successor of Portuguese colonisation and heir to African slavery, carries a historical and material debt to African countries, especially to quilombola communities. As historian Kabengele Munanga points out, "Brazil has never recognised its historical debt to African peoples, which includes not only economic reparation but also the rescue of African and Afro-Brazilian cultures, and the recognition of their contributions to the formation of Brazilian society" (Munanga, 2020). Therefore, UNILAB has the moral and academic duty to serve as a bridge for this recognition, incorporating the epistemology of reparation and identity reconstruction for black and quilombola women into its programs and academic practices.

However, Brazil's cooperation with African countries, mediated by UNILAB, must be accompanied by a critical analysis of the forms of colonisation that persist. The relationship between Lusophone countries cannot reproduce the colonial dynamics of the past, where Brazil, in partnership with African nations, established an economic and cultural hegemony. In this context, UNILAB must avoid a neocolonial approach, which promotes intellectual and economic dependency, and should, instead, support the strengthening of African autonomy, respecting local cultures, knowledge, and identities.

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**2025**  
**YEAR OF**  
**REPARATIONS:**

**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

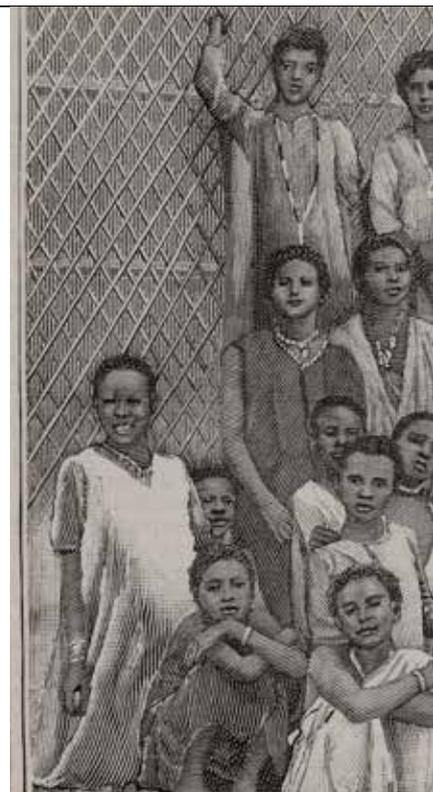
# Did You Know?

**Those who benefitted from the slave trade believed that slaveowners, not enslaved African-Americans deserved to be compensated for their benevolence of manumission (freeing slaves)**

# Why Are African States Not Pursuing Reparatory Justice for Colonialism and Slave Trade Injustices?: Challenges and Recommendations for Total Commitment to Reparatory Justice in Africa

By **Beth Michoma**

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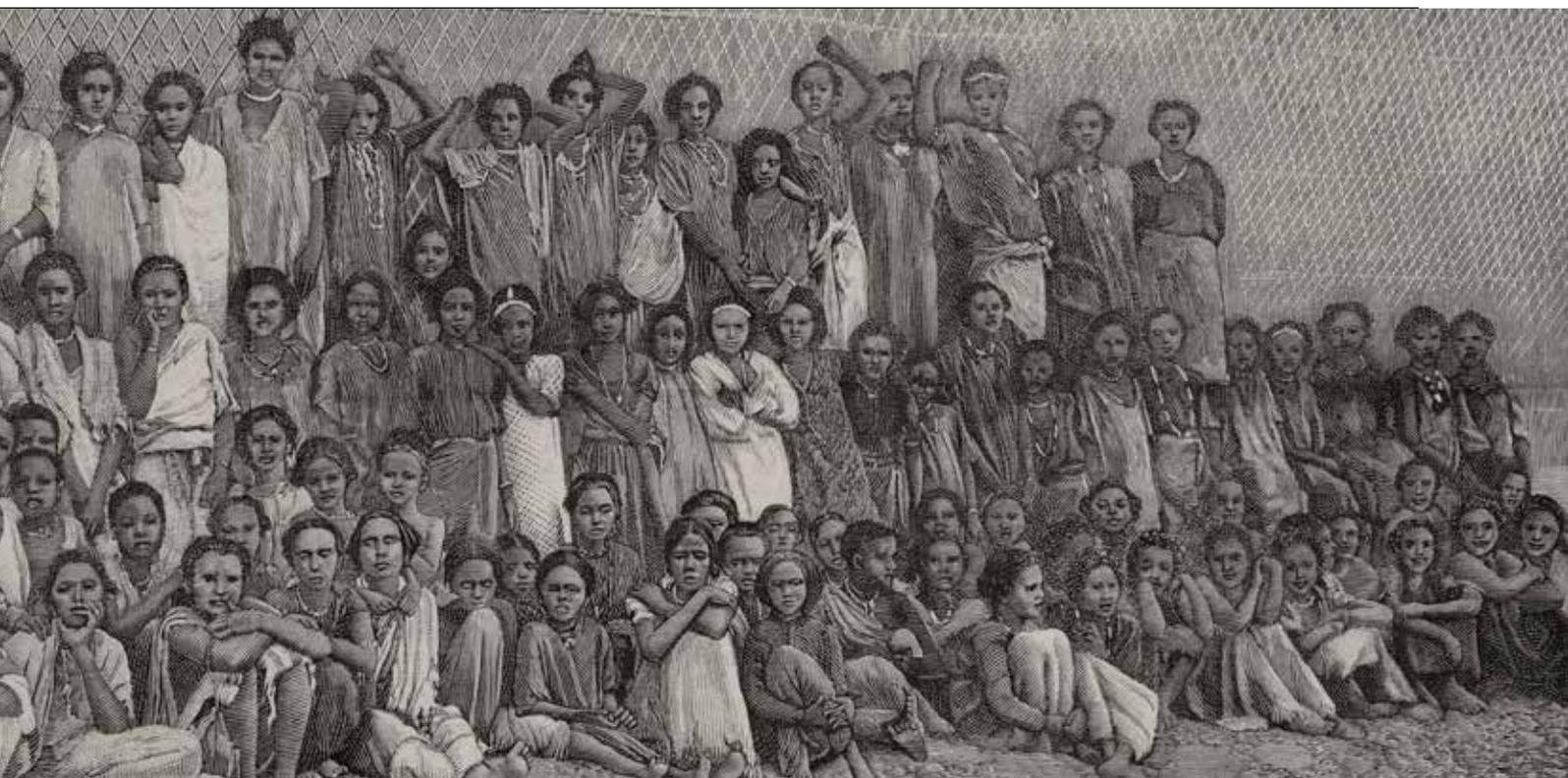
Colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade were profound scourges during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, leaving in their wake, death, poverty, suffering, displacement, and the erasure of the religious and cultural identities of the African peoples. Decades later, those who benefited and are still benefiting from the exploitation of the continent have yet to fully assume responsibility. Instead, they often obscure their atrocities, and when faced with accountability, they may offer conditional apologies that avoid setting precedent or may provide miniscule reparations to the affected African communities relying on the legal principle of Locus Standi.

Decades, after the end of colonialism, comprehensive research on its impact and effects on the African population and economy remains insufficient. While there is ample evidence of physical, psychological, and sexual violence that supports the case for reparations, discussions frequently overlook the claims related to forced and unpaid labour, unjust taxation imposed by colonial authorities, economic espionage, and the plundering of valuable religious and cultural resources.

In 1993 the Abuja Proclamation on Reparations for African Enslavement, Colonization and Neo-Colonization, was enacted. The key takeaway from the proclamation was the recognition that the harm suffered and damage sustained by the African

people due to colonialism and slavery was not a thing of the past. Further, the proclamation called for reparations for the injustice suffered. A significant point to emphasize is the belief that the pursuit of compensation would simultaneously serve as a journey of self-discovery and foster a sense of brotherhood among the African people.

Since that time, there have been numerous efforts to mobilize support for African states in their pursuit of reparations from former colonial powers. A notable example is the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, established in 2001, which acknowledged the enduring impacts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and the transatlantic slave trade. This declaration reaffirmed the rights of African peoples to



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An engraving depicting a large group of enslaved East African people, including many children, in Aden, Yemen, November 1888. Published in the 17th November 1888 edition of the 'Illustrated London News'  
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Hulton Archive/Getty Images

seek reparations for these historical injustices, many of which continue to affect them today.

Further, in 2022 the African Commission on Human and People's Rights passed the Resolution on Africa's Reparations Agenda and the Human Rights of Africans in the Diaspora and People of African Descent Worldwide (ACHPR/Res.543 (LXXII)2022). The Resolution reaffirmed the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Despite the expressed commitment of African states and their populations to pursue reparations, achievements towards reparative justice remain minimal. Reparations for colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade are more often the exception than the rule.

African nations and their populations do not appear to be actively pursuing compensation; rather, they seem to have adopted a mindset focused on moving beyond past grievances and looking toward the future. This attitude may also reflect the challenges associated with seeking reparations.

To understand why we are not actively pursuing reparations, we need to examine several key factors and challenges:

- **Political Will:** A significant barrier to progress is the prevailing lack of political will.
- **Economic Concerns:** In the 21st century, policymakers appear to prioritize diplomatic and trade relationships with former colonial powers over addressing historical injustices. When economic disparities exist and colonial states serve as primary

trade partners, there is a tendency for these nations to overlook the pursuit of reparations.

- **Financial Concerns:** A notable challenge arises from the financial implications associated with pursuing reparations. Both states and their people may express apprehension regarding the potential financial burden of engaging in a legal battle for reparations.
- **Legal Complexities:** The legal framework surrounding the implementation of reparations is notably intricate. Key challenges include determining eligibility, calculating the appropriate amount of compensation, and establishing effective methods for distribution. Each of these aspects requires careful consideration and legal

scrutiny. This legal process can deter African states and their people from pursuing reparatory justice.

- **Public Opinion:** Public perception significantly influences the discourse surrounding reparations. A lack of consensus among the populace regarding the fairness of such measures can hinder progress. It is essential to recognize that the pursuit of reparations is not solely the responsibility of the government; rather, it must also be accountable to the victims of colonialism and the slave trade.
- **Social Cohesion:** Currently the African populace is diverse. There is a valid concern that the pursuit of reparations may inadvertently foster divisions within society. Striking a balance between achieving justice for historical injustices and preserving social harmony presents a delicate challenge. Given these considerations, it is evident that the implementation of reparations is laden with complexities that necessitate careful navigation and thoughtful solutions.

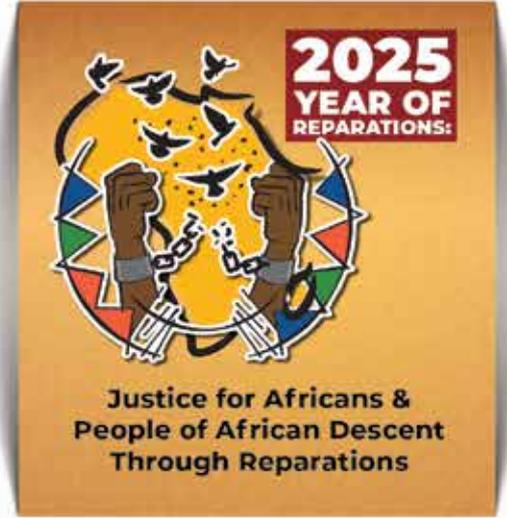
Acknowledging the challenges faced by African states and their citizens in the pursuit of reparatory justice, and recognizing the absence of a unified framework to guide these efforts, the following recommendations are essential:

- **The African Union Legal Framework for Reparatory Justice:** It is essential for the African Union to establish a comprehensive legal framework that provides guidance to African states and their citizens regarding the legal processes associated with reparatory justice.
- **Inclusion of Reparatory Justice into Key Agenda:** Reparatory justice ought to be integrated into the implementation of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasize equity and the imperative of leaving no one behind. It is also imperative that reparatory justice is thoroughly and comprehensively integrated into the United Nations Declaration on the Human Rights of People of African Descent.
- **Resource Allocation:** African states must strategically assess how to allocate resources to achieve reparatory justice while balancing reparations with other pressing societal needs, including healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

- **African Union Study on Quantification of Damage from Colonialism:** The African Union should conduct a study on quantifying the damage to the African Population and Economy. The results of the study shall serve as a guideline for the legal professionals involved in reparation cases.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges and obstacles encountered in the pursuit of reparatory justice, the time to address this crucial issue is now. We must not defer this responsibility to future generations. The esteemed Nigerian author Chinua Achebe once remarked, "A man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body." This profound insight underscores the importance of acknowledging our past; without addressing historical contexts, we may struggle to achieve success in our future endeavours as a continent.

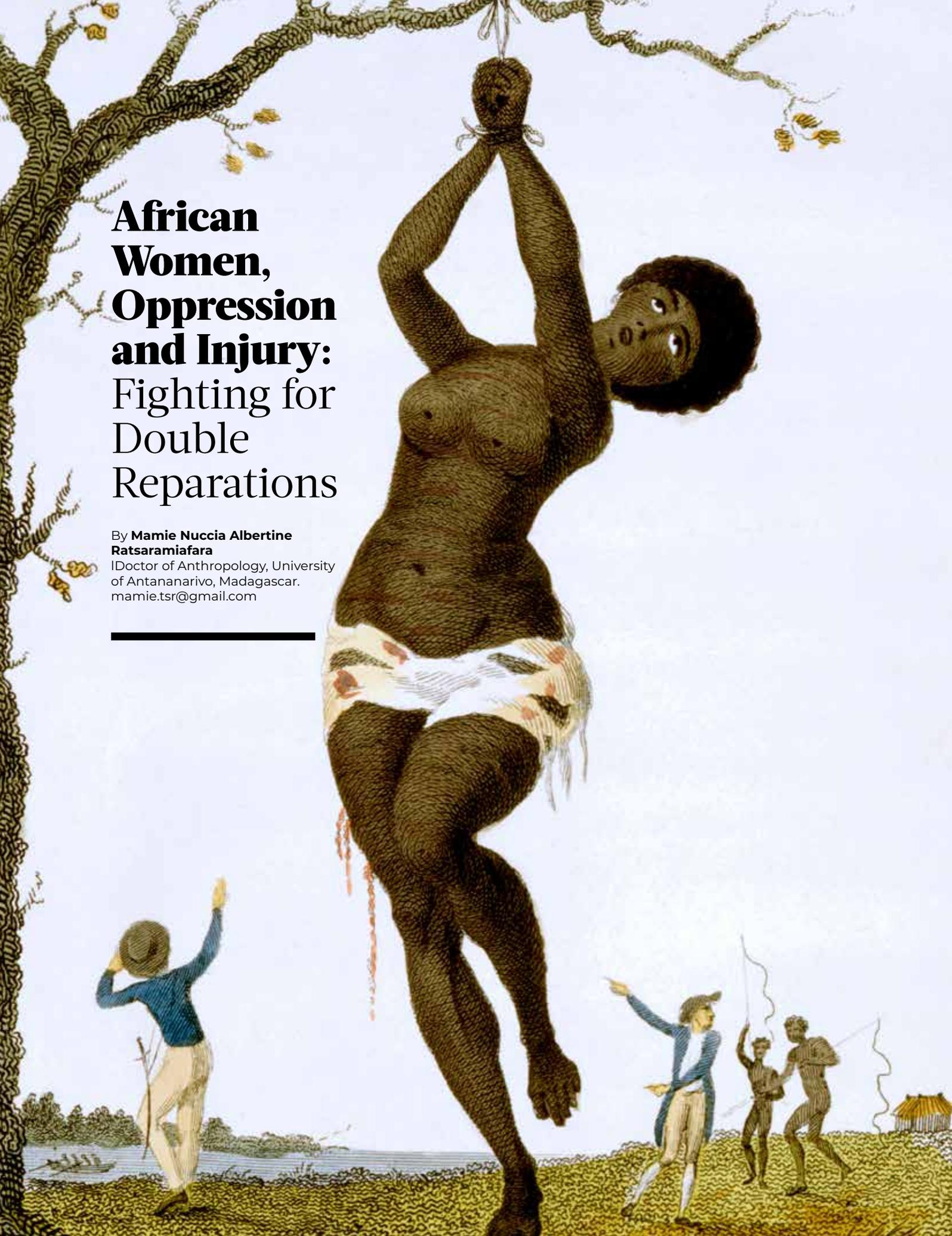


# Did You Know?



**Black ex-slaves who fought for US independence were promised '40 acres of land and a mule'. The slaves never received what was promised.**

**Honouring that promise could have transformed the economic foundation of Black America, with ripple effects still visible today.**

A historical illustration depicting a woman hanging from a tree. The woman is the central figure, shown from the waist up, with her arms raised and hands tied to a branch. She has a shocked or distressed expression. She is wearing a white loincloth with a red and black pattern. The background shows a landscape with a body of water, a small boat, and several other figures. One man in a blue shirt and white pants is on the left, and two other men are on the right, one pointing towards the hanging woman. The style is that of a 19th-century engraving or woodcut.

# African Women, Oppression and Injury: Fighting for Double Reparations

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This article aims to highlight the double historical oppression of African women. This requires an exploratory study on the claim for specific reparations taking into account both colonialist oppression as well as its latent impacts on women which persists from generation to generation. This study proposes a gender-centred approach to ensure true restorative justice. Qualitative documentation data collected through scientific and non-scientific literature constitute the material corpus of the study. For Africa, a remarkable step has already been taken in the search for restorative justice for Africans and people of African descent. However, in terms of gender demands, the oppression and wounds of African women will be an axis that needs to be explored and (re)considered in order to fully achieve this objective of inclusive justice.

▶ Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave', 1806. The slave is tied from a branch of a tree in an obvious state of distress and pain. In the background are colonial men giving orders to other slaves who hold long whips. From Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam 1772-77, an indictment of slavery by John Gabriel Stedman. (London 1793)  
© Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images

### Introduction

According to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), it is by ensuring the rights of women and girls across that we will achieve justice and inclusion, develop economies that benefit all, and preserve the environment we share, now and for future generations. For Africa in particular, according to Agenda 2063, Africa aspires to qualitative and quantitative transformations for its population. As a result, it is necessary to reconsider African history in order to be able to move forward freely into the future. A few questions emerge: how did the oppression of women manifest itself during the colonial period, what are the associated impacts, what are the advances in terms of reparations and what will be the perspectives to consider?

### Materials and methods

A sample of non-scientific texts such as stories, novels, poems, expressions and proverbs as well as scientific texts and works expressing in one way or another the various kinds of oppression suffered by colonized African women, was established.

The corpus sample is thus composed of fifty non-scientific texts collected across the fifty formerly colonized countries, and one hundred scientific texts from various disciplines, articles, chapters and books combined. These descriptive, narrative and analytical texts have been selected under a single theme, which is the oppression of colonized African women. They were analyzed according to different forms and grids of analysis, namely discourse analysis, content analysis, narratological analysis and comparative analysis. This highlighted the different manifestations of this oppression and violence against women in colonized countries. These analyses also made it possible to identify the points of convergence and divergence of this phenomenon, and to understand the extent of the damage and the level of repair required.

### Results

Screams... crying... Injuries

The data unanimously showed that African women and girls suffered horribly from oppression during the colonial period. Three forms of oppression and violence were identified. Women and girls suffered a form of violence in the form of biopower whereby women and girls, including their bodies, their land and especially their existence, were seen as an object of power by colonial rulers, hence the emergence of the sex market and slavery in all its forms.

Another form of oppression was also identified: violence through racial discrimination as well as the marginalization and discrimination of the female gender. They were considered savage, primitive beings, not worthy of any form of education or instruction. The third and final form of violence against colonized African women is, according to the data collected, their common wound, a latent and deep wound. Violence, physical, sexual, psychological and moral, separated from their land, their ancestors and their descendants, in short their diversion from their existence, constitutes a serious wound that has been absorbed but manifest over the generations.

The wounds of a woman who are often physically and sexually assaulted, forcibly taken to an unknown and chimerical land, a mother who is abused and stigmatized, could be passed on from generation to generation.

### **Women and Restorative Justice**

As far as the progress of this fight for restorative justice in general and separative justice for women is concerned, steps have already been taken. In terms of legal framing on justice, in 2013, the African Union with the Reparations Commission called on the European colonizers who are still entrenched in this practice in this period of neocolonialism to drop this old practice and to start engaging in conciliation and cooperation through reparations (The Abuja Proclamation, 1993) and calls on the profiteers of the slave trade to clearly support the African peoples in the field of politics and economics (The Abuja Proclamation, 1993).

In regard to the Programme of Action in the Durban Declaration in 2010, more specifically the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the Declaration mentioned the need to design, promote and implement, at the national and global levels, strategies, programmes, policies and legislation, which may include special and positive measures, to ensure equal social development and the enjoyment of their civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural to all victims of racism; racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, 2010).

In regard to women in particular, according to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women, in Article 25 on reparations, States undertake to ensure appropriate reparation to any woman whose rights and freedoms, as recognized in this Protocol, are violated.

Fairly recent literature, conveys how in the fight against the oppression of women, women were at the forefront of fighting for women and for justice to be done. From Aline Sitoé Diatta of Senegal (1920-1944), Lalla Fatma N'Soumer (1830-1863), Kimpa Vita of Congo (1684-1706), M'Balia Camara, Guinea (1929-1955) to the present day, the struggle of women for women continues implicitly or explicitly.

However, efforts still need to be made to make reparations for African women and people of African descent, as well as their descendants, who are victims of colonialist oppression.

It is necessary to (re)consider the gender approach by according women and their cause for reparations to ensure sustainable and inclusive restorative justice. According to Knibielher and Goutalier, there is a gap to be filled, an injustice to be repaired, a perspective to be reversed (Knibielher and Goutalier). Refocusing the fight on the reward and effective liberation of women would be a necessary step to achieve true restorative justice.

### **CONCLUSION**

We need to review the literature to highlight the need to redress African women and women of African descent who are victims of bad colonial practices. The results propose that the various forms of women's oppression during the colonial period caused deep wounds and persist over time and over generations. This is a necessary wake-up call for women and for a peaceful and prosperous Africa, the Africa we all want.

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## Negroes for Sale.

A Cargo of very fine stout Men and Women, in good order and fit for immediate service, just imported from the Windward Coast of Africa, in the Ship Two Brothers.—

Conditions are one half Cash or Produce, the other half payable the first of January next, giving Bond and Security if required.

The Sale to be opened at 10 o'Clock each Day, in Mr. Bourdeaux's Yard, at No. 48, on the Bay.  
May 19, 1784. JOHN MITCHELL.



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**The demand for justice and legality is an essential element in the struggle for a just cause. So it is with the claim for Reparations.**

- a. That the mass kidnap and enslavement of Africans was the most wicked criminal enterprise in recorded human history,**
- b. That no compensation was ever paid by any of the perpetrators to any of the sufferers, and...**
- c. That the consequences of the crime continue to be massive, both in terms of the enrichment of the descendants of the perpetrators, and in terms of the impoverishment of Africa**

**LORD ANTHONY GIFFORD**



◀ US-HISTORY-  
SLAVERY-  
◀ ARCHAEOLOGY-  
ANGOLA-  
CAMEROON  
A census of Virginia and a muster showing Angela's, the first documented African woman (initially documented as Angelo) to arrive in the Virginia Colony and become a slave, are on loan from The National Archives, UK, for public display in 2019 at Jamestown Settlement, in Williamsburg, Virginia, on August 19, 2019. - Archaeologist in historic Jamestown are working hard to retrace bits of the life of Angela, who arrived in Jamestown from Africa 400 years ago. Angela (initially documented as Angelo) was one of the first African slaves known to reach the first permanent English settlement in North America, which would later be part of the United States. © BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP via Getty Images

# Reparation for the consequences of the war of Independence in Cameroon: A lever for the healing of colonial trauma

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The war of independence in Cameroon (1955-1962), led by the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) against the French colonial regime, remains a painful chapter in the country's history. Military violence, bloody repressions, forced displacement and extrajudicial executions have left deep wounds in the collective memory of the Cameroonian people. How can reparations for the consequences of

the war of independence in Cameroon contribute to the healing of colonial trauma and the consolidation of historical justice within the framework of pan-African dynamics of reparation? This article will explore how a process of repairing the consequences of this war could be an essential step towards healing colonial trauma. The methodology will combine desk research on colonial archives and historical narratives,

semi-structured interviews with survivors, historians, and political actors, and comparative analysis with other reparations processes in postcolonial contexts. Particular attention will be paid to the role of the African Union and its human rights bodies in facilitating this process, drawing on the experiences of reparations in other post-colonial contexts, including in the Caribbean region. This work is part of the

theoretical framework of the African renaissance and historical justice promoted by the African Union in the framework of the Year of Reparations. The expected results are the identification of historical traumas related to the war of independence in Cameroon, the analysis of the historical justice deficit and the proposal of a reparation framework adapted to the Cameroonian context.

## INTRODUCTION

Cameroon's war of independence (1955-1962) remains one of the most violent and little-known episodes in the history of African decolonization. Led by the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) against the French colonial regime, it ended in ferocious repression, marked by massacres of civilians, extrajudicial executions and forced displacement of populations. However, this war remains hardly studied and largely obscured in official accounts, both in France and in Cameroon. The lack of historical recognition and the lack of redress for the injustices committed during this period continue to fuel collective trauma, while maintaining social and political fractures within Cameroonian society. In this context, the question of historical justice and reparations is acute. How could acknowledging and repairing the consequences of this war contribute to healing colonial trauma and consolidating historical justice? This article is part of a restorative justice and African renaissance perspective, by examining the forms that a reparation process adapted to the Cameroonian context could take. By mobilizing a comparative approach with other postcolonial experiences, particularly in the Caribbean region, it will be a question of proposing a framework of reparation integrating official recognition, material compensation and restitution of historical and cultural heritage.

## Cameroon's War of Independence: A Hidden Historical Trauma

Cameroon's war of independence was marked by violent repression by the French colonial regime (Delthomes, 2019). Villages suspected of supporting the independence cause were razed to the ground, thousands of Cameroonians were killed, and many others were forced into exile (Ramondy, 2025). This war, often referred to as a "hidden war", left deep scars that continue to affect Cameroonian society.

Between 1955 and 1962, Cameroon was the scene of a bloody conflict between the UPC supporters and the French colonial forces. The UPC insurgents, inspired by nationalist and socialist ideals, demanded effective independence, free from French tutelage. The response of the colonial power was of unprecedented brutality: bombing of villages, summary executions, torture and mass displacement of populations (Atangana, 2010). Records reveal extrajudicial executions, forced displacement, and systematic torture practices aimed at suppressing nationalist opposition (Human Rights Watch, 2019). This violence has deeply marked the collective memory and exacerbated economic and social inequalities in post-colonial Cameroon (Mbembe, 2001). Rural areas, particularly in the Sanaga-Maritime and West regions, were particularly affected. Thousands of civilians were victims of the repression, and the war left deep traces in the Cameroonian collective memory.

### **A repressed memory**

Despite the scale of the violence committed, the war of independence in Cameroon remains largely absent from official accounts and school curricula (Fanon, 1961).

This historical silence has contributed to the marginalization of victims and their descendants, thus slowing down national reconciliation initiatives (Terretta, 2014). Acknowledging injustices and opening up archives are essential steps for the rehabilitation of victims and the reconstruction of collective memory (Sarr, 2019). In France, this embarrassing colonial past has long been ignored.

However, in recent years, initiatives have emerged to document these events and demand justice. Cameroonian and French researchers, historians and activists are trying to lift the veil on this dark page of history. The report of the Ramondy Commission (2025), which examines France's role in the repression of independence movements, is a significant step forward in this quest for truth.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF REPAIRS: RECOGNIZING, COMPENSATING, RESTORING**

The process of reparation in a scenario like this consists of the recognition, compensation and restitution of the archives.

- **Official recognition of the abuses**

The first step in a reparations process is the official recognition of abuses committed during the war of independence (African Commission on Human Rights, 2021). This recognition could take the form of a solemn declaration by the French state, accompanied by an official apology to the victims and their descendants, the adoption of official declarations by the French and Cameroonian authorities, as well as the establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions (African Union, 2022).

A work of remembrance is also necessary, involving the rehabilitation of the figures of the UPC and the integration of this history into the school curriculum. This is part of a perspective of historical justice, aimed at restoring the truth and alleviating the suffering of the affected families.

- **A compensation framework for victims**

Beyond symbolic recognition, material compensation measures must be considered. A compensation framework must be established to address the suffering of victims' families (Zehr, 2002). This may include financial compensation, economic and social rehabilitation programmes, as well as initiatives to ensure access to education and health care for the descendants of victims (Braithwaite, 1989).

These compensations could be financed by a joint fund between the French state, the European Union and pan-African institutions, similar to the funds set up for reparations in other post-colonial contexts.

- **The restitution of archives and heritage**

Another essential aspect of the reparation concerns the restitution of the archives and cultural heritage related to this period. Many colonial archives relating to the War of Independence are still held by France. Their restitution would allow historians and Cameroonian citizens to better understand and document this period and re-establish historical truth (Ramondy, 2025).

In addition, the restitution of cultural property looted during the colonial period, such as works of art preserved in French museums, could contribute to a revaluation of Cameroon's historical and cultural identity. (Sarr, 2019).

### **The African Union and the Pan-African Dynamics of Reparation**

The African Union (AU) plays a key role in promoting historical justice and reparations for colonial crimes. In collaboration with its human rights bodies, it can facilitate discussions among the States concerned, promote the adoption of reparations frameworks and encourage exchanges between Africa and the Caribbean on restorative justice experiences.

The Year of Reparations, proclaimed by the AU, is part of a broader dynamic of acknowledging the harms suffered by African peoples and developing strategies for compensation and restoration.

Within this framework, AU human rights bodies, such as the African Commission on

Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Court on Human Rights, could play a key role in developing a continental framework for reparations, promote the adoption of reparations frameworks, and encourage exchanges between Africa and the Caribbean on restorative justice experiences (Césaire, 1955).

society. A well-conducted reparation process could not only heal the wounds of the past but also contribute to the construction of a fairer and more peaceful future for future generations. By integrating these efforts into a pan-African dynamic, it becomes possible to transform the memory of the past into a lever for justice and development for the future.

### Comparative experiences: the case of the Caribbean

The demands for reparations for slavery and colonization made by the States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) offer an interesting frame of reference. In 2013, CARICOM adopted a ten-point plan for reparations, including acknowledgment of wrongdoing, economic compensation, and development programs for affected populations.

These moves could inspire a pan-African initiative to seek reparations for colonial injustices, including those related to Cameroon's war of independence.

### CONCLUSION

Cameroon's war of independence represents a deep trauma whose after-effects are still visible today. Acknowledging abuses, providing compensation, and returning heritage are essential steps toward historical justice and lasting reconciliation. The African Union, in partnership with international institutions and concerned States, has a crucial role to play in facilitating this process. The Caribbean example shows that a reparations framework can be successfully put in place, provided that there is strong political will and the mobilization of civil

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# Reparations in Africa: A Fight for Dignity and the Future

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### Reparations: an imperative of justice and dignity

The claim for reparation goes beyond mere financial compensation and the main purpose is to repair the moral and material damage inflicted on millions of Africans over the centuries. In addition, several fundamental axes address the following demands: the restitution of stolen cultural property, the cancellation of debts considered unjust, greater support for African infrastructure and the fight against systemic discrimination. These axes are not a way of righting the wrong, but of restoring dignity to people of descent.

Agenda 2063 fully incorporates the idea of reparations by linking African prosperity to inclusive development, in line with Aspiration 1. Equitable development requires historical justice. In addition, Aspiration 3 covering good governance and respect for human rights, requires restorative justice for the historical crimes leading to current inequalities.

It is impossible for Africa to build a solid future without resolving the unrepaired mistakes of its past and without becoming aware of the weight of the injustices of the past. In this context, Agenda 2063 is an ambitious roadmap to transform Africa into an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent by 2063.

The transitional justice process enables countries to overcome their history of violence, conflict, or massive human rights violations by putting in place mechanisms for accountability, reparation, and reconciliation.

Agenda 2063 recognizes that transitional justice is a key driver for the reconstruction of post-conflict societies. It promotes not only reconciliation but also institutional reform and the establishment of redistributive (socio-economic) justice. The idea is to avoid a simple "negative peace" (absence of war), to move towards a "positive peace" that includes social justice, equality and cohesion.

The transitional justice policy, launched in 2019, reflects the aspirations of the agenda – particularly those related to peace, security and reconciliation. It must be accompanied by deep structural reforms in the areas of governance,



A single-sheet broadside with bold serif font typeface advertising an auction for the sale of eighteen slaves. The broadside lists the sale location as the St. Louis Hotel and the date the sale is to take place as March 25, 1858. It then lists the names, ages and skills of the individuals being sold. A disclaimer in the middle of the broadside reads "All of the above Slaves are from the State of Alabama, and sold under / a full guarantee, except the defects above stated." © Heritage Art/Heritage Images via Getty Images

access to justice, education and socio-economic inclusion. This will strengthen the resilience of African societies to future crises and conflicts, while enabling them to project themselves towards a more just and peaceful future.

Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 calls for a peaceful and secure Africa, stressing the need to resolve conflicts and build peace through inclusive means. Transitional justice reform and innovation efforts are relevant to this goal, as they install mechanisms to acknowledge past damages, build international and national trust, and foster social cohesion after periods of violence and repression.

While, Aspiration 5, which promotes a strong African identity based on culture, memory and historical truth, is also central to transitional justice. Truth, as a fundamental element of justice, helps to restore the dignity of victims by publicly acknowledging the historical wrongs suffered. Collective memory is thus transformed into an effective means of preventing the recurrence of human rights violations, while developing a sense of belonging and solidarity around a common identity.

The African Union's Agenda 2063 sets out a clear path to this restorative justice, where the revelation of historical truth, memory, and symbolic and material reparations play a critical role in the restoration of the continent. Reparations are not an option for Africa and its diaspora, but a necessity to build a future of peace, justice and dignity.

### **Lessons from African experiences**

Transitional justice in Africa can take different forms depending on local contexts, as experience demonstrates. The African Union has adopted an approach based on recognition of responsibilities and commemoration. Public acknowledgement of past injustices is crucial to fostering lasting reconciliation, as demonstrated by South Africa and Rwanda. After the end of apartheid, the TRC was gradually established to investigate human rights violations committed between 1960 and 1994. Its aim was to promote national reconciliation by providing a forum for victims to tell their stories and

perpetrators to admit their actions in exchange for a possible amnesty. Although criticized for its approach oriented towards forgiveness rather than punitive justice, the TRC played a crucial role in rebuilding a post-apartheid society by establishing a national dialogue on the wounds of the past.

Gacaca are community courts created to judge crimes related to the Rwandan genocide of 1994. These local courts were intended to deal with a large number of cases quickly while involving local communities in the justice process. Gacaca not only contributed to national reconciliation, but also allowed thousands of people to be tried for their participation in the genocide, while reintegrating repentant perpetrators into their communities. This model of community justice, based on local traditions, reinforced the idea that transitional justice must adapt to the cultural and community realities of each country.

Another example of reconciliation and reintegration is Ghana's "Year of Return" initiative, which encourages Afro-descendants to reconnect with their origins and contribute to the country's economic development. The return of works of art or the cancellation of unjust debts, as well as measures to support development, play a crucial role in creating justice and equality.

Reparations are arduous and time-consuming to achieve, but it is essential to restore African dignity and turn centuries of injustice into opportunities for a more just future.



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# Did You Know?

With the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834 the British Government presided

over the largest transfer of wealth to individuals in history. No portion of this was paid to the people who were enslaved. Instead, it went to thousands of slave owners across the globe as compensation for their loss of property/ 'assets'. The government borrowed £20 million, to pay 3000 families which based on inflation alone that would amount to £17 billion today. This amounted to 40% of its annual tax receipts at the time. The pay-outs went to 47,000 individuals and families. These ranged from high ranking aristocrats running large sugar plantations to lowly widows who kept a few slaves as passive income.

# The Restitution of African Cultural Property: A Flexible International Cooperation approach

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The means of 'flexible' international cooperation, such as political commitment, consultations and exchanges, have enabled progress in the process of restitution of African cultural property. However, their non-binding nature slows down this process. It therefore becomes imperative to move to genuine binding international cooperation, in order to guarantee effective restitution and thus redress part of the colonial injustice.

Media teams capture images of two artifacts on display prior to a signing of an agreement of intent at the Foreign Ministry for Germany's return of the so-called "Benin bronzes" on July 1, 2022 in Berlin, Germany. The agreement over saw the speedy return of 1130 artefacts from five German museums to Nigeria originally taken by German colonial forces over 100 years ago

© Omer Messinger/Getty Images



Understanding the issue of the restitution of African cultural property from the perspective of international cooperation, which we describe as "flexible", is a particularly interesting approach. This perspective offers, through its most visible markers of political commitment to and in favour of restitution requests, bilateral negotiations, exchanges of expertise, and other non-binding channels, a relevant insight into the modalities and means by which the process of restitution of African cultural property operates in the current context. It also shines a spotlight on the major obstacles that hinder the acceleration of the restitution processes of these cultural objects, thus revealing the need to rethink it in depth. The latter is crucial for the implementation of regional institutional commitments in this regard, such as the fifth goal of the African Agenda 2036 aimed at consolidating African cultural identity.

**The beginnings of flexible cooperation in the field of restitution of cultural property.**

The beginnings of the emergence of flexible international cooperation in the restitution of cultural property can be traced back at least to post-independence demands for reparation of colonial injustices. These initiatives, which appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, and were supported by speeches and symbolic actions carried out by African political leaders as well as by international organizations, have gradually gained momentum on the international scene, particularly in Africa, where "85 to 90% of African heritage is now outside the continent" (Mehdi, 2018). The speech of the President of Zaire (now DRC) to the UN in 1973, demanding the return of African property looted during colonization; the 1978 appeal by Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, then Director-General of UNESCO, for the restitution of African cultural property and heritage, as well as Article 28 of the OAU Cultural Charter, are emblematic examples of these post-independence initiatives calling for the restitution of the continent's cultural property.

This first wave of post-independence restitution demands, employed pragmatism combined binding approaches, such as restitution agreements, with more flexible approaches,

such as long-term loans, deposits, sales, and donations, faced legal and political obstacles. These obstacles have prevented the issue of the restitution of cultural property from being put on the international agenda. Indeed, it will come up against limited legal frameworks for state-to-state restitution (Martinet, 2019), and the inherent limitations of key international legal instruments, such as the 1970 UNESCO Convention and the 1995 Unidroit Convention. It should be emphasized that the latter two instruments have not had retroactive effect, which means that claims for restitution of property acquired during the colonial period, i.e. before their entry into force, do not fall within their scope. In addition, another sticking point will lie in the cardinal principles organizing the conservation and management of cultural property under other skies. The principle of alienability and imprescriptibility of works in public collections is one of these principles. It prohibits the transfer, sale or transfer of cultural property to other owners. This principle is a lever on which is based part of the argument that rejected, during the first wave of post-independence restitution requests, any principle of reparation for colonial injustices by means of the restitution of cultural property.

In addition to these obstacles, there is also the lack of political will on the part of some States that possess cultural property looted during the colonial period. This can be seen, among other things, by the evasions consisting of putting on the table arguments related to the conservation or legality of property under colonial-era international law (Martinet, 2019). However, these arguments do not take into account the unjust nature of colonization, as recalled by the 1973 United Nations General Assembly resolution, which equated colonial occupation with foreign occupation (A/RES/3187 (XXVIII), 18 December 1973).

The near absence of concrete results during the first wave of post-independence requests for the restitution of cultural property is largely explained by these different obstacles. It was not until the revitalization of the repair movements that tangible results emerged. A

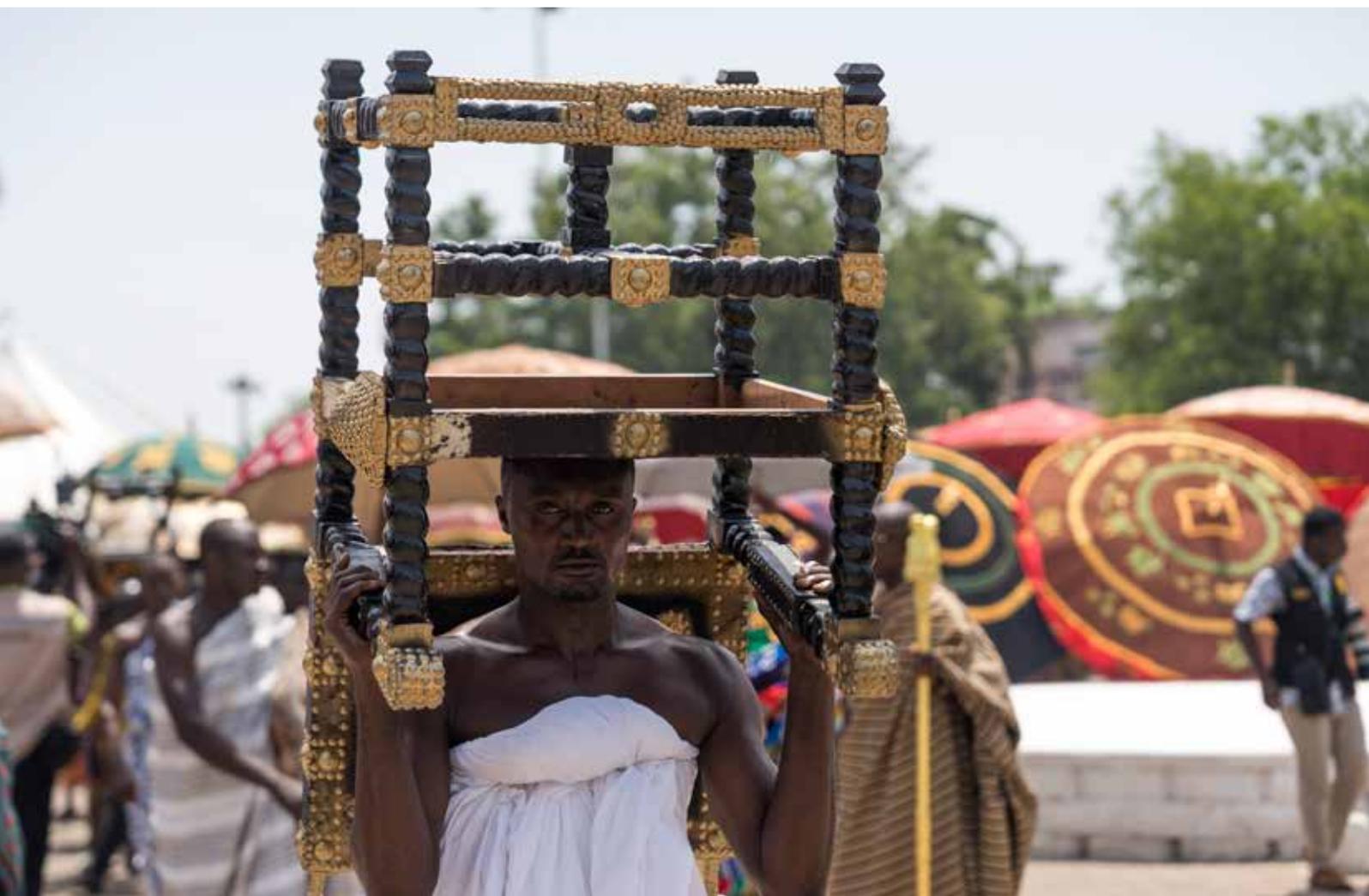
major turning point in these legitimate demands was reached with the Abuja Declaration of 1993. As an extension of the first wave of post-independence restitution demands, this declaration calls for the recognition of the cultural damage caused by colonization, urges the restitution of African artefacts and traditional treasures, and encourages a diversity of actors, such as the African diaspora, to contribute to the reflections on reparations for colonial injustices. This renewed African political will marks a high point in the beginnings of flexible international cooperation. However, it is in the wake of the confrontation between the will of the revitalized reparations movements and the reluctance to return cultural property that a provisional compromise will emerge, thus strengthening the flexible channels of international cooperation in the restitution of cultural property.

**To return cultural property by flexible means.**

The principle of the restitution of African cultural property looted during the colonial period is now at the heart of the international agenda. It is the subject of particular attention from the African Union, as evidenced by the organization, in collaboration with the Government of Senegal and the Open Society Initiative in West Africa, of a continental expert workshop on the restitution of cultural property and heritage in 2021.

This new reality cannot be ignored, so the exploration of the possibilities offered by flexible international cooperation to carry out the first restitutions has been in order. It first took the path of political commitment to restitution. In 2017, for example, during a speech, the French president acknowledged the legitimacy of the restitution requests and expressed the desire to find solutions for the return of African cultural property. This commitment was accompanied by negotiations

**A man carries an asipim chair at the Akwasidae celebration and the returned looted artefacts of the Asante Kingdom on May 12, 2024 in Kumasi, Ghana. The Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles, the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum returned looted gold and silver objects that British troops looted from the Asante kingdom in the 19th century**  
© Ernest Ankomah/  
Getty Images



that led to concrete actions, within the framework of an exceptional regime to the system of public ownership in France, making property inalienable and imprescriptible. The results of this commitment have therefore been limited, since only symbolic restitutions have been carried out so far in Benin and Senegal.

Another modality that was later favoured was the use of long-term loans, deposits or donations, rather than final restitution. Thus, well before exploring the legislative track, Belgium "loaned" in 2022, for an "unlimited" period, a giant kakuungu mask, formerly used for initiation rites of the Suku ethnic group, to the National Museum in Kinshasa. The same process was used by Germany, after the signing of a framework document in March 2019 aimed at speeding up restitutions. It led to the handover, in 2022, in the form of an "indefinite loan", of 23 cultural objects to the National Museum in Windhoek, Namibia. Another similar example is the agreement between the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum for the long-term loan of 32 cultural properties that belonged to the Ashanti Kingdom (now Ghana).

Overall, the means of flexible cooperation implemented to respond to legitimate requests for the restitution of cultural property from African countries represent a step forward in the process of reparation of colonial injustices. However, these frameworks look more like a compromise born of the tension between the repair movements and the resistance that opposes them, which explains the slowness

observed. To reverse this trend, it is necessary to go further.

### **The need to go further.**

The flexible cooperation frameworks favoured until now for the restitution of African cultural property must be overcome for at least three reasons. The first is related to their weaknesses and their non-binding nature. Although it is now recognized that restitution claims are legitimate, the hesitation and reluctance to speed up the process through binding channels does not allow the aspirations of the countries concerned to be effectively addressed. Second, these frameworks tend to dilute responsibilities, multiplying negotiations and symbolic commitments, but without offering solid legal mechanisms to guarantee the return of artifacts. This leaves African states dependent on the goodwill of the holding nations, which slows down the process considerably. Finally, there is a lack of fairness and historical justice. By continuing to promote flexible cooperation frameworks, the imbalance of power between the former colonial Powers and African countries remains, thus perpetuating a form of cultural domination that prevents the true recognition of the wrongs of the past and adequate reparation. For all these reasons, it is necessary to move towards genuine cooperation using international treaties, capable of restoring equality between the parties and overcoming the various obstacles hindering the processes of restitution of cultural property to the African countries concerned.

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# Reparations and Social Justice: The Impact of African Union Decisions on Afro-descendant Communities

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This article explores the effectiveness of the African Union's (AU) decisions on reparations for historical injustices suffered by Africans and people of African descent, particularly slavery and colonization. The central question is to what extent these decisions adequately respond to these injustices. The aim of this research is to assess the impact of AU initiatives, such as the Durban Programme of Action (2001) and Agenda 2063, while highlighting persistent shortcomings. The analysis shows that current initiatives focus mainly on financial

reparations, neglecting key aspects such as the restoration of cultural identity, economic and monetary autonomy, and the reconfiguration of borders inherited from colonialism. By adopting a method of documentary and critical analysis, this article proposes a more integrated approach to reparations, including increased participation of the African diaspora. In conclusion, it calls for a strengthening of political will within the AU and its Member States to ensure sustainable and comprehensive restorative justice.



## INTRODUCTION

The legacy of slavery and colonization continues to affect Africans and people of African descent around the world (Besson, 2004). The struggle for social justice and reparations for these historical injustices is a major issue in contemporary debates on human rights and reconciliation policies (Colonomos, 2004; Rousseau, 2022). The African Union (AU), as the continent's flagship institution, has initiated several actions, notably through the Durban Programme of Action (2001) and Agenda 2063, to respond to these demands. However, the real impact of these decisions remains to be seen, particularly with regard to their ability to holistically address the dimensions of the restitution of cultural identity, economic and monetary autonomy, as well as the reconfiguration of geographical boundaries inherited from colonialism. This article aims to analyse the extent to which these decisions truly contribute to restorative justice, while exploring the initiatives that remain insufficient and the ways in which improvements are needed.

### 1. Historical Background of Repairs

Reparations is a multidimensional concept involving the recognition of past injustices, and compensation for the suffering suffered. The descendants of slaves and colonized people still suffer systemic discrimination, economic inequality, and social marginalization today. While traditional reparations often encompass public policies, social programs, and legal measures, it is crucial to include the full restitution of cultural and linguistic identity, economic and monetary autonomy, and geographic space. These dimensions are often overlooked in current initiatives.

### 2. Decisions and initiatives of the African Union

The AU, it should be recalled, has taken several steps to address the issue of reparations, notably through the Durban Programme of Action (2001) and Agenda 2063. However, these decisions, while important, do not sufficiently address restitution needs beyond financial reparations.

### The Durban Programme of Action:

Adopted at the World Conference against Racism, calls for concrete action to address the consequences of slavery and colonization. However, it focuses mainly on the fight against current racial discrimination, without addressing in depth the restoration of the economic and cultural autonomy of African nations, or the geopolitical prejudices suffered during colonization.

**Agenda 2063:** Aims to make Africa an inclusive global power and calls for redress of historical injustices. However, it remains mainly focused on social justice and reconciliation, without sufficient emphasis on more structural and existential reparations, such as the restoration of monetary autonomy and the repair of the geographical space that has been stolen.

### 3. Forgotten Reparations: Restitution of Identity, Space, and Autonomy

While examples such as the agreement between Namibia and Germany or the Rwandan initiatives show reparation efforts, these initiatives remain mainly symbolic or financial. Cultural, linguistic, and monetary restitution, as well as the reconquest of plundered territories, remain absent from the debates on reparations at the AU level.

#### Restoration of cultural and linguistic identity

Colonization has profoundly altered African cultural and linguistic identities. However, neither Agenda 2063 nor the Durban Programme enshrine a real programme of linguistic and cultural restitution. The promotion of African languages in education, for example, is a crucial element that remains underdeveloped.

#### Restoration of economic and monetary autonomy

Many African countries continue to use externally controlled currencies, such as the CFA franc. The restoration of monetary autonomy, which symbolizes economic freedom, should be a priority in the context of reparations. However, current

AU initiatives focus more on economic development in a globalized framework without questioning postcolonial monetary dependence.

#### Restitution of geographical space

The dispossession of African lands by the colonial powers created artificial borders that continue to generate conflicts and tensions. The restitution of stolen geographical territories, or at least their reassessment in a pan-African framework, should be among the AU's priorities for true historical justice.

#### 4. Challenges to overcome

Several obstacles prevent the AU from addressing these issues in a holistic manner. Member States often lack the political will to address these sensitive dimensions of reparations, and the lack of financial resources prevents ambitious structural programmes from being put in place.

#### **Policy and the will of States**

Some governments remain reluctant to engage in full recognition of historical injustices, in part because of the postcolonial ties they maintain with former colonial powers. In addition, the issue of monetary and geographical restitution implies a questioning of sensitive diplomatic and economic relations.

#### **Lack of Leadership by the AU**

The AU itself, as an institution, needs to show more leadership in pushing these issues to the forefront. The Abuja Proclamation and Agenda 2063 are important initiatives, but they lack specific strategies for cultural, monetary, and geographical restitution.

#### 5. **Recommendations for a comprehensive approach to reparations**

For comprehensive reparations in Africa, the AU must adopt a comprehensive approach, going beyond mere financial compensation and integrating the restitution of identity, autonomy and

geographical space, while actively involving the African diaspora.

The AU must prioritize the restoration of cultural and linguistic identities, as well as the economic and monetary autonomy of African peoples. This is essential to restore their sovereignty, eroded by colonial and neocolonial rule, and to enable Africans to regain control of their destiny locally and internationally.

The AU must address the borders inherited from colonization, which cause conflicts between states and within nations. The restitution of geographical space requires not only a revision of borders, but also the establishment of dialogue frameworks to resolve historical tensions, which are essential for restorative justice and sustainable peace in Africa.

The African diaspora, rich in its resources, must be more involved in the restitution of culture and identity. By supporting partnerships between the diaspora and the continent, the AU can strengthen ties and foster a reparation dynamic focused on a common future. Finally, the AU must strengthen continental political will, with a strong commitment by Member States to reparations, going beyond material compensation. This process must include reconciliation, collective memory and concrete policies to address historical injustices.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The impact of the current decisions of the African Union on reparations remains limited, particularly with regard to the full restitution of the identity, space and autonomy of the African peoples. For genuine and sustainable restorative justice, the AU must broaden its framework and include more ambitious and comprehensive forms of reparations, touching all aspects of the colonial and postcolonial legacy.

# Restorative Justice and Reparations for Africa: A Path Toward Realizing Agenda 2063 Communities

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On June 19th, 2023, I boarded a flight from Gaborone, Botswana, to Charlottesville, U.S.A., for an intensive six-week training at the Presidential Precinct in

Virginia, under the civic engagement track of the Mandela Washington Fellowship program, a part of the Young African Leaders Initiative. I was excited to join 699 other young African leaders in Washington, D.C., for a three-day summit after completing our respective training across various U.S. institutions.

I began my journey in Williamsburg, at the College of William and Mary. This is where my perspective changed dramatically. During a tour, we visited sites where African slaves were once auctioned. Later, we traveled to Montpelier, where the

“We the People” movement began, and the U.S. Constitution was drafted. We had the “privilege” of staying in the same area where the fourth U.S. president, James Madison, lived and where he enslaved over 100 African men and women. Let’s not forget the fifth U.S. president, James Monroe, who followed suit, enslaving over 200 Africans. Moreover, the third U.S. president, Thomas Jefferson, enslaved more than 600 human beings throughout his life. Of these, 400 people were held in bondage at Monticello, a site I also had the chance to visit. The remaining 200 were enslaved on Jefferson’s other properties. At any given time, about 130 people were enslaved at Monticello.

We toured a train and post station with doors labeled “Colored” or “Whites Only.” I relived the brutal history I had read about in books, but this time, I was faced with the tangible and harsh realities of what our ancestors endured. One quote at the train station particularly struck me, from James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* (1963):

*“You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were Black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were thus expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were*



*not expected to aspire to excellence; you were expected to make peace with mediocrity."*

This quote resonated deeply with me and seemed fitting to echo here in the AU ECHO magazine. The debate surrounding reparations for Africa and its diaspora is not new, but it is time to reignite this conversation with a renewed sense of urgency, in line with the African Union's (AU) vision for Agenda 2063.

Since the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and its evolution into the AU in 2002, reparations, including restorative justice, have been a central priority. This priority not only seeks to address the historical wrongs inflicted on Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, colonialism, and apartheid, but also to remedy the systemic impacts of these atrocities, which continue to afflict the continent and its descendants.

Agenda 2063 sets out a long-term vision for Africa's socio-economic and political advancement, and it is within this framework that the case for reparations must be vigorously pursued. Reparations are not merely a moral obligation; they are

a critical step toward realizing the AU's goal of a prosperous and united Africa that commands global respect (African Union, 2015). Restorative justice, including the restitution of cultural artifacts stolen during colonization, is a vital component of this process.

The AU has consistently supported efforts that advance justice for Africans and people of African descent. In 1992, this commitment was formalized through the creation of the 12-Member Group of Eminent Persons (GEP), tasked with addressing the irreparable damage caused by the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. The Abuja Proclamation, the outcome of the 1993 Pan-African Conference on Reparations, laid the groundwork for future efforts. It stressed the need for African nations to adopt a united stance in demanding reparations for the devastation wrought by these historical crimes (OAU, 1993).

These efforts were reinforced at the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, where the Durban Declaration recognized slavery and the transatlantic slave trade as crimes against humanity. The declaration emphasized the responsibility of former colonial powers to provide reparations for the systemic racism and economic exploitation resulting from these crimes (UN,

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**JAMES BALDWIN**

2001). This declaration was not just a symbolic victory but a call to action, highlighting the necessity of legal and economic reparations for affected populations.

Against this historical backdrop, we must now view the AU's Agenda 2063, a strategic framework envisioning an "integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena" (African Union, 2015). Reparations are a crucial part of this vision, addressing the historical injustices that continue to stifle Africa's socio-economic development. Without rectifying the past, the future of a truly prosperous Africa remains incomplete.

Reparations go beyond monetary compensation. They include the restitution of looted cultural artifacts, relics, and heritage housed in Western museums and private collections. These items are not mere objects; they are symbols of African identity, spirituality, and history. Reclaiming them is essential for restoring Africa's cultural and historical narrative.

Africa's exclusion from key global decision-making platforms further compounds the historical injustices it has endured. The demand for permanent representation for the AU at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), with veto powers, is a prime example. Africa, with 1.4 billion people, accounts for 60% of the UNSC's agenda, yet it is excluded from critical decisions that shape its future. The recent U.S. proposal to grant Africa two permanent seats on the UNSC without veto powers is not a solution—it is an insult. It essentially relegates Africa to "permanent second-class citizen" status in an already exclusionary institution (UNSC, 2023).

The veto power represents real decision-making authority. For Africa to be recognized as an equal partner on the global stage, it must have full voting and veto rights within the UNSC. Anything less perpetuates the power imbalances entrenched during colonialism. Africa's marginalization at the UNSC mirrors the

broader reluctance of the global community to engage with the continent as an equal, despite its critical role in global geopolitics.

The struggle for reparations and the demand for equal representation in global governance are interconnected. Both speak to the larger issue of African sovereignty and autonomy. Africa cannot fully achieve the aspirations of Agenda 2063 while remaining sidelined in global decision-making forums and while its historical wounds remain unaddressed.

The AU must continue to lead the charge for reparations as part of its broader development agenda. Reparations and restitution are not only about righting past wrongs; they are about building a more just and equitable future. Simultaneously, Africa must insist on full representation at the UNSC, including veto power, to ensure it has a meaningful voice in global governance. These two struggles—reparations and representation—are fundamentally linked and represent the unfinished business of Africa's decolonization. As we approach 2025, the AU must stand resolute in its demands, championing a future where justice, reparations, and sovereignty are fully realized.



**Justice for Africans &  
People of African Descent  
Through Reparations**

**There is a need to safeguard the continent's culture, heritage and dignity, through the development of a Common African Position on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage and a Framework for Action on Negotiations for the Return of illicitly trafficked cultural property; and the full restitution of stolen African cultural, religious artefacts, including bodies and body parts**

**An integrated, prosperous  
and peaceful Africa, driven  
by its own citizens and  
representing a dynamic  
force in the global arena**

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