

## **Reparatory Justice**

There is a misshapen and malformed history that must be addressed on behalf of the generations of People of African Descent regarding their right to development and in a very real sense their right to sustainable development. The Permanent Forum must be at the very soul of creating spaces for global conversations on ensuring that the resources needed for repair and restoration of humanity and dignity of a group of people, who from their encounter with colonialism, have been subjected to a systematic discrimination that has relegated them to social, economic, cultural, political and ecological inequalities simply because of the colour of their skin and their origin.

Let us establish from the onset that the racism ideology which accompanied the Europeans across the Atlantic resulted in three outcomes which established the case for reparatory justice. The first was the extinction project – Focused on the annihilation of the indigenous people. The second was the enslavement philosophy – Focused on the commercialisation and dehumanisation of enslaved people of African

descent. The third is the extraction venture – Focused on the enrichment of Europe

We should also establish that the fight for our freedom and justice started from the first day of enslavement and every act of resistance was our way of shouting that we wanted a change in our conditions. We fought against all their systems through revolutions, riots, in their courts and in Maroon Societies. We never accepted that this was our lot in life.

The fight for reparation is the crescendo of that call. It is a cry for economic justice, repayment and repair, for truth, for reconciliation, for acknowledgement that this was a crime against humanity. It is the economic claim that the investment was blood and lives, and that the return on investment must be reparation and restitution. “It is a legal claim to hold to account all former colonial countries responsible for African enslavement. Reparation is the next step in our emancipation and consequently our independence.

It is a clear political statement made by people of African descent from around the world for compensation for the crime of slavery and its

concomitant and continuous denial of humanity through perverse systemic institutionalisation of discrimination in all its forms. Colonialisms have left structural barriers that limit the descendants of trafficked, commercialised and enslaved Africans from inclusion and participation in the full social, political and economic life globally and hence keeps us away from sustainable development.

We must take time to understand the brutality of enslavement – the inhumanity of chattel slavery. That, this was State sponsored enslavement and trafficking of Africans, their continent and their descendants. Then we have to come to terms with the compensation paid to enslavers for the brutality unleashed on us. The British government paid off this debt to slave owning families in 2015. This means that people of African descent living in Britain were paying that debt through their taxes. Then there is case of Haiti which paid reparations to the French for their freedom up until 1947. It took more than a century to pay off that debt, recalling the Haitian Revolution was in 1804. This pauperised the country and ensured that Haiti the first Black republic would never succeed.

We have to tackle the naysayers, deniers and apologists head on. The argument against reparations has centered on what is seen as the technical difficulties in tracing human rights violations over the centuries and paying such to individuals. Yet they have found money to fund studies that conclude that aliens and not Africans built the pyramids. They also cite the complicity of Africans in the slave trade and enslavement, while paying reparations to others who were complicit in Naziism. The open conversations are necessary as many of us are so affected, even ashamed that we were enslaved that we are quick to embrace the ideology that has told us, that slavery is in the past, let it go or that we should be grateful that we were taken out of Africa. and civilized. Let us not forget the equally distracting reverse racism argument when we raise our voices or take actions. We have even been conditioned into believing that our lack of progress is because we do not work hard enough., that we are lazy. How much harder did the enslaved have to work to benefit from the fruits of their labour?

In Britain's Black Debt – Hilary Beckles outlined that “slave trading and slavery were understood as crimes then, as they are now, and as such are subject to reparatory justice;” The case for reparations has centred on Britain and it must provide a blueprint for the pursuit of reparations from all other former colonial powers. Black people have always maintained that equality could not be decreed by law or through lofty expressions of remorse and contrition. Such expressions must be accompanied by atonement. Some of these European powers are still colonisers and we must continue to press them to make amends, and to free the countries, mainly of people of African descent, still under their control.

Then there is the fact that many “Scholars have been reluctant to discuss the oppression of black women during slavery because of an unwillingness to seriously examine the impact of sexist and racist oppression on their social status.” Black men were exploited as labourers in the field, the black female was exploited as a labourer in the field, a worker in the household, a breeder and as an object of white male sexual

assault.” In other words, there was no one more exploited during slavery than a dark skinned African woman. [Bell Hooks. Ain’t I a Woman (p22)]

Enslavement was not gender neutral. We must never forget that in the slave society only the off spring of enslaved African women would be born a slave. It is our duty to uproot the misrepresentation of black women as second-class citizens. As women we have been fighting for that upgrade to first-class from the days of enslavement, race has always been the determining factor in how black women are treated; class has simply reinforced the status. We may have been equal under the whip but this demeaning has been unrelenting. If we do not put the redress of the dehumanisation of the women of Africa and their female progeny at the heart of the movement, we will never get justice and reparations for all.

In closing let me leave you with the message that, you need never whisper again about this injustice which manifested itself after 1492. The Reparations Movement, reparatory justice is about the fight for freedom, justice and the acknowledgement of this great crime committed against the African people and its lingering, concomitant injustices. We must

never let this reparations movement evaporate. Finally recall this African proverb of encouragement. Little by little, a little becomes a lot. Don't give up the fight.