

# International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition

Remembering so as not to Repeat: Sowing the Future of  
Dignity for Afro-descendants

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I begin by thanking the Government of Barbados and UN Women for this extraordinary opportunity to participate in the inaugural event to commemorate the United Nations International Day for the Remembrance of Slave Trade and its Abolition.

I am honored, not only in my role as Chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, but also and above all as heir to the strength and determination of generations of enslaved people who resisted and fought to achieve the abolition of slavery.

The transatlantic trafficking of millions of African people is a crime against humanity, and we are just beginning the process for the recognition of this crime to imply concrete

actions, resources, agreements and a new order that guarantees reparations for an unacceptable condition that millions of African people and their descendants had to suffer, because of slavery, by force for more than three hundred years.

I want to emphasize that it is necessary to remember... It is essential to know history from a realistic perspective, which makes clear the European barbarism over entire peoples who were forcibly subdued and deprived of the basic right to be treated as human beings, so that through slave labor, they could build fortunes and an important part of the development of the West.

Barbarism, brutality, a crime of incalculable dimensions, of which the African continent and millions of people of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean are still living the consequences.

Remembering and recognizing is the first step to advance in the reparatory justice that we are demanding, to guarantee the rights of the present to people who today face a

diminished citizenship and a generalized exclusion that is largely explained by the fact that they are descendants of enslaved people.

Remembering and recognizing is also necessary to rewrite a globally accepted history that minimized the consequences of the slave trade in both: human and economic dimensions. But it also made invisible the racist colonial base on which the "democratic pacts" were built in most countries of the region.

We have to remember, recognizing that other side of history. That history that begins on August 22 and as a result in the early morning of August 23, 1791 in Santo Domingo, today Haiti, where the beginning of the uprising that resulted in both: the independence of Haiti and the abolition of the transatlantic traffic of African people and slavery.

It is then a matter of recognizing that the abolition of the unacceptable slave trade by Europeans was the result of the enslaved people's own struggle. It was not from any perspective an act of conscience on the part of those who

inhumanely managed the irrational exploitation of millions of people.

We are here remembering that the abolition of the slave trade was the result of the determination and courage of African and Afro-descendant people, to recover their dignity violently taken away for insatiable economic exploitation.

But we also commemorate this August 23 in a context that challenges development and sustainability, because it is also impossible to deny that global agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, which promise that "no one will be left behind", will be impossible to achieve without recognizing the racial gaps that affect millions of people of African descent, and the reality that African countries still face today as a result of colonialism.

The objective of commemorating the International Day for the Remembrance of Slave Trade and its abolition is therefore to place this human tragedy in the global collective memory.

According to UNESCO, it should provide an opportunity for "collective recognition of the historical causes, methods and consequences of this tragedy, as well as the interactions and power relations between Europe, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean".

Returning to the present, we need to underline, that the COVID 19 pandemic aggravated the unacceptable situation of exclusion, poverty and denial of rights experienced by people of African descent. In Latin America, for example, the forced exclusion of millions of Afro-descendant children from the education system for almost 24 months as a result of COVID places them at an even greater disadvantage than they already faced.

I insist that remembering and recognizing the current reality obliges us to work in unity to achieve the promise of equality contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This implies acting globally and locally for true reparatory justice and well-being for people of African descent.

This is the road to reparations and I think that it is very important that we use as a tool, the frame of the Permanent Forum of Afro-descendants that I am responsible for chairing today.

Part of the Forum's mandate is to contribute to the drafting of the Declaration on the Human Rights of People of African Descent, which should be approved by the States before the end of this first Decade.

This is critical because this bill of rights is grounded in the reality that the history of transatlantic trafficking, colonialism and slavery put millions of people of African descent at a distinct disadvantage. Therefore, this Declaration of Human Rights that we are working on becomes a fundamental tool to achieve global commitment on behalf of people of African descent.

But again, when we look at the past, we have as a precedent, an effort of our own, an unwavering determination to claim justice... reparatory justice.

We are standing on the shoulders of giants, who opened with effort and dedication the challenging path we face today. Just to exemplify, since 1920, we have the Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World led by Marcus Garvey, an extraordinary and pioneering human rights tool. This Declaration was welcomed at Madison Square Garden by more than twenty-five thousand of black people who came from different parts of the world.

However, at the international level within the United Nations, it was not until 2001 that a clear commitment to people of African descent was established in the Durban Declaration and Program of Action. After Durban, we achieved more such as, the Group of Experts on People of African Descent and the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Durban Declaration and Program of Action.

Subsequently, the approval of the International Year for People of African Descent in 2011 was achieved; the agreements of the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024; the International Day for People of

African Descent every August 31, which was approved in 2020 and finally the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent itself.

The Declaration of Human Rights of People of African Descent, which is in process now, and will be the first international instrument exclusively for Afro-descendants people, will necessarily incorporate an unrestricted commitment to reparations.

It is a matter of repairing the social, economic and intergenerational trauma of the worst human tragedy known in the history of humankind, the unacceptable tragedy of the trafficking of millions of African people and their enslavement for centuries. That is the size of the challenge before us.

We have resisted for centuries... And we will continue to resist until we achieve the promise of equality in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



We are promoting many strategic actions; I heartily congratulate the Government of Barbados for the wonderful leadership it is showing in the area of Reparations.

I would like to invite you to convene a Group of World Leaders to join us, as Forum, in this titanic task of achieving a true commitment to the Development and Reparations Agenda; the 2nd Decade and the Declaration of the Human Rights for People of African Descent.

We have in our favor an extraordinary amount of knowledge, black researchers, universities; political leaders continue to accumulate incalculable strength so that we can make possible the dreams of equality, rights and eradication of systemic racism.

We have also accumulated an impressive social and political force that accompanies us in the present and that recognizes centuries of struggle for immediate reparation that recognize humanity and guarantee the inclusion of women, young people, boys and girls of African descent.

We must be part of all global agendas that guarantee new agreements where the systematic exclusion of the past is not repeated. That is why it is important to remember, as we do today... so as not to repeat.

We do not intend to build a ghetto about people of african descent and our rights.

Reparations and inclusion of people of African descent must be an integral part of the discussions and agreements at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit now in 2023; the Climate Change Agenda and the COPs; the Summit of the Future in 2024, the new international financial agenda, the Africa 2063 Agenda, as part of the Sixth Region, among others. Without us people of african descent, there will be no development for humanity, nor leaving behind entire peoples and people who are in total exclusion.

Those of us who are here know the unacceptable reality that official data already show as a consequence of systemic

racism: for example, life expectancy is lower; black women have a higher risk of dying in pregnancy; the COVID-19 pandemic evidenced lower possibilities of having quality health, exclusion in connectivity, decent education, decent work, potable water and decent housing conditions, among other structural inequalities.

In the non Black Countries, our young people, many more than others. They are closer to being in prisons and in the criminal networks that kidnap them for lack of opportunities.

And they, young people and children, deserve to be the focus of all our actions.

In this post George Floyd's cruel murder era, no one denies anymore that reality that was denounced for decades, and yet the reality is the same on the streets, in the airports and in public places for black people.

We know that structural violence significantly affects women and manifests itself in unacceptable sexual violence,

institutional violence with denial of rights and even in the denial of racism itself, which places the victims in a situation of aggravated discrimination.

While, for the general population, the principle of innocence is the norm, for people of African descent and especially for our black youth, the principle imposed on them is that of guilt....

That is why we demand Justice, prompt and fulfilled Justice. But also Reparatory Justice...

Systemic racism challenges Afro-descendants' right to life and we can end it with action and real commitment. Using all the tools that are in our favor. That is why I strongly promote the Global Coalition Against Systemic Racism and for Reparations. It is a space for action involving communities, organizations, local and national governments, academia, the private sector, international organizations and everyone committed to ending racism. We use art, culture, creativity, science and knowledge in favor of an anti-racist culture.

In order to achieve all the changes that we face today, it is necessary a greater, growing and proportional political participation of Afro-descendant women and men, because it is from the formal power spaces where we must change the reality of exclusion and racism. That is why I want to share that we have created the Afro-Political Women's Forum.

And because of that, let me congratulate the wonderful leadership of the Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Mottley.

Prime Minister Mottley is a true inspiration! She is direct, decisive, proactive and challenges the status quo. She puts this small and wonderful country at the center of all global debates, not only making the strength of the Caribbean felt, but also strengthening strategic relations with Africa and giving a prominent place to the reparations debate. That is why we are here today! Because we need to unequivocally support the leadership of Barbados and its Prime Minister and also consolidate the agenda of reparatory justice and a new global Pact that guarantees dignity for all people and sustainability for our planet.

It is time for multilateral organizations to assume concrete investment and contracting commitments, which is why today we require the People of African Descent Development Fund, which will allow for Reparatory Justice.

In terms of reparations, it is necessary to ensure that all those responsible for or complicit in the human tragedy of the trafficking of African people and their enslavement not only apologize to millions of Afro-descendants, but also commit to making reparations for the consequences of this crime against humanity. States, Private family companies, and the even the church's must assume the economic, social and moral consequences and the intergenerational trauma it has meant for generations of peoples of African descent.

I would also like to express my commitment to the Study Tour, which is working to join forces for the reparations agenda, in which Barbados also plays a very important role, with its Ambassador David Comissiong, the support of the Open Society Foundation and others.

We need to work together because Private Sector is a strategic actor in the Afro-descendant inclusion and development agenda. We need concrete actions to strengthen companies with capital of black people. As well as promoting the incorporation of Afro-descendant women and men into the economy of the present and the future, including the digital economy, new technologies, the green, blue and orange economy.

We are proposing to be a central part of the climate debate, because the impacts on our communities are imminent, we are ready and ready to make proposals, to put the community perspective, to bring solutions from our knowledge and wisdom. We are protagonists... And reparations are fundamental to not continue re-victimizing millions of Afro people who struggle and claim their dignity every day.

I summarize the proposals I have made throughout this presentation:

1. Let us formally establish the Task Force of leaders at the highest level to guarantee the presence of Afro-

descendant proposals in all global agendas. Including the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the Financing Agenda, the Future Summit and the Climate Change Agenda.

2. Strengthening the work agenda between the Permanent Forum on people of African, Caribbean and African descent for the reparations agenda. Supporting the leadership of Barbados and Prime Minister Motley.
3. Articulate all necessary political efforts around the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent for the Reparations agenda, promotion of the Second Decade for People of African Descent and the Declaration on the Human Rights of People of African Descent. Including affirmative actions in positions of power and management.
4. Establish the International Alliance for Afro-descendant Reparations, which supports the social process that guarantees the request for forgiveness to the Afro-descendant peoples by the Slave States, the Catholic



Church and all actors involved in this crime against humanity, as a fundamental step for reparations.

5. Promote the Global Financial Fund for Development and Reparations for Afro-descendant peoples and communities, as a mechanism that allows for financial resources to counteract the exclusion and systemic racism that denies rights and robs millions of people of their dignity.

6. Finally, I would like to invite you to join the Global Coalition Against Systemic Racism and for Reparations. Collective action is the key we need to accelerate the pace and the guarantee of good living for all people and peoples of African descent. Let us make the Ubuntu principle a reality: I Am because We Are.

Together we can move forward on the road to restorative justice, and a commitment that involves financial resources, plans, policies and accountability.

Today millions of children of African descent are confident that we are doing the job they deserve.

Thank you very much.