Reparation & the Right to Development

Paper Presented to the

REGIONAL MEETING FOR EUROPE, CENTRAL ASIA AND NORTH AMERICA ON THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

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(Mark against delivery)

Good morning colleagues. I am pleased to have been invited to participate in this important meeting, which follows the first Regional Meeting in Brazil. I greet fellow speakers on the platform and UN Member States and members of Civil Society in the audience.

I speak today as a descendant of Alexander Mighty, my great, great grandfather, who was born into slavery in Jamaica in 1829 but left at 5 years old at the time of emancipation in 1834 with nothing but freedom. I speak also on behalf of the people of the Caribbean who, over a century after Emancipation, are still struggling to achieve true political and economic independence and sustainable development; end poverty and make the region less vulnerable to the ravages of natural and man-made disasters and the impact of climate change and centuries old environmental degradation.

While a multiplicity of strategies has been pursued by the Caribbean in its efforts to overcome socio-economic, environmental and political challenges, especially after gaining independence from Western European powers, as those powers left the region un- and under-developed after having used their resources, with indigenous and forcefully imported labourers, to ensure its own development, reparation as part of decolonial justice for such under-development has been placed on the table.

What many have described as the immorality, political irresponsibility and social injustice of European colonizers who conceived of, capitalized, managed and benefitted from the Ma’angamizi or African Holocaust for over 400 years form the philosophical underpinnings of the movement for reparatory justice, which was started by enslaved Africans, continued by post-slavery activists and re-ignited by Rastafari, who have now been joined by students, scholar activists and governments. Based on the causal link between the crimes of slavery and native genocide, the century of racial apartheid that followed emancipation, and the on-going harm and injury to the descendants, seen everywhere in the Caribbean and its Diaspora, Caribbean citizens believe that there is a reparation case to be answered by the relevant European countries.

However, despite requests for engagement with a few to a negotiated settlement and reconciliation, Western European powers have refused to engage in any meaningful dialogue on the issue of reparation. The demand, therefore, remains active and different reparation activists are pursuing different strategies to press the demand. Regional Governments have chosen to build their demand on the Ten Point Action Plan drafted by the CARICOM Reparation Commission and accepted by all Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community.[[1]](#endnote-1) The Plan is not framed as a financial pay-out but as a development package because the region believes it has a right to development and that the Ma’angamizi and colonialism in the Caribbean severely impaired the Region’s development options. The particular focus of CARICOM, is not only captured in the works of scholars like Walter Rodney and Eric Williams who established the roots of Caribbean under-development, but also in the artistic expressions of our artistes. [[2]](#endnote-2)

In this verse from Slave Driver, the Honourable Robert Nesta “Bob” Marley wailed,

“*Every time I hear the crack of the whip*

*My blood runs cold*

*I remember on the slave ship,*

*How they brutalize the very souls*

*Today they say that we are free*

*Only to be chained in poverty....*

*Slave driver the table is turn.”*

The right to development is of course enshrined in the 4th December 1986 UN Declaration during its 97th Plenary. The General Assembly, having considered the question of the right to development, decided to adopt the Declaration on the Right to Development. Articles 1, 3, 4 and 6 are instructive. According to the UN, “the right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.”

The Right to Development agenda is reinforced in the Programme of Activities for the UN International Decade for People of African Descent and in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.[[3]](#endnote-3) Clause 18 of the DDPA emphasizes that “*poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion and economic disparities are closely associated with racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and contribute to the persistence of racist attitudes and practices which in turn generate more poverty.*”

Clause 158 of the DDPA recognizes that… historical injustices have undeniably contributed to the poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion, economic disparities, instability and insecurity that affect many people in different parts of the world, in particular in developing countries; and recognizes the need to develop programmes for the social and economic development of these societies and the Diaspora, within the framework of a new partnership based on the spirit of solidarity and mutual respect.

Poverty is a consequence of colonialism and has always been tied to its discriminatory practices and legacies. The consequence of this is that Caribbean governments that emerged from slavery and colonialism have inherited the massive crisis of community poverty and institutional unpreparedness for development. The pressure of development has driven governments to carry the burden of public employment and social policies designed to confront colonial legacies. As Amartya Sen argued in his 1999 book *Development as Freedom****,*** overcoming these socio-economic problems is a central part of the exercise of development and of the process of ensuring that freedom that will otherwise fall at the feet of underdevelopment.[[4]](#endnote-4)

The DDPA and the POA for the Decade have suggested solutions. But these solutions are rather vague and non-binding and are framed within the context of what David Martin terms “lexical colonialism,”[[5]](#endnote-5) with insufficient emphasis placed on the recipient and not enough empowerment of the “recipient” to deal with the “artefact being transferred”. [[6]](#endnote-6)

The post-independence demand for development with input from former colonial powers, still continues, especially as nationalist leaders, anxious to capitalize on the “*prostrate condition of European nations after World War II,”* [[7]](#endnote-7) in Bruce Seely’s words, never pressed for compensation. On the contrary, the new nations, founded with much hope, faced daunting economic challenges. Seely quotes Ahmad and Wilkie who noted: “*These nations soon began to realize that political freedom could not be construed as an end in itself and that achieving it did not automatically ensure the social and economic well-being of their people.”[[8]](#endnote-8)*

Sir Ellis Clarke, who was the Trinidadian Government’s UN representative to a sub-committee of the Committee on Colonialism in 1964, had made this point in his statement*: “An administering power*…*is not entitled to extract for centuries all that can be got out of a colony and when that has been done to relieve itself of its obligations by the conferment of a formal but meaningless – meaningless because it cannot possibly be supported – political independence. Justice requires that reparation be made to the country that has suffered the ravages of colonialism before that country is expected to face up to the problems and difficulties that will inevitably beset it upon independence.”* [[9]](#endnote-9)

Europe’s alternative strategy of grants and Overseas Development Aid (ODA) is not the answer. The solution lies in reparatory and decolonial justice. Reparations payments allocated appropriately will likely have economically positive and statistically significant impacts on the region’s growth and development.[[10]](#endnote-10)

**NOTES**

1. *See* CARICOM Press release 147/2013 (6th July 2013, Press Release issued at the end of the 34th regular meeting of Heads, under the banner headline “Heads agree on reparations follow-up action”). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Originally published 1944.Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Under-developed Africa (*London: Bogle-L’Ouverture Publications, 1972) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, Clauses 11, 14, 18, 158, 159 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Amartya Sen, *Development As Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. David Martin, “Thoughts on Technology Transfer and Commercialization”, p. 3, response to TTF question #5 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Bruce Seely, “Historical Patterns in the Scholarship of Technology Transfer,” Comparative Technology Transfer & Society 1 (April 2003): 7-48 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. A. Ahmad and A.S. Wilkie, “Technology Transfer in the New International Economic Order: Options, Obstacles, and Dilemmas,” In J. McIntyre and D.S. Papp (Eds.),The Political Economy of International Technology Transfer (New York: Quorum, 1979): 77-94. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Quoted in Gordon Lewis, *The* *Growth of the Modern West Indies (*Monthly Review Press. 1968), p. 385 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. A perspective recently elaborated on by Stefan Richards in ” On the Impact of Reparations Payments for Slavery on Growth and Sustainable Development: Can Reparations Buy Growth?”, April 24, 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)