**Expert Workshop on Reparations, Racial Justice and Equality**

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CARICOM Heads of Government took the historic decision in July 2013 to establish a CARICOM Reparations Commission, comprising of the Chairpersons of national committees on Reparations, which were to be established in each of the 15 independent Member States of CARICOM.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Commission is chaired by Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Vice Chancellor UWI, leading Caribbean historian and reparations advocate. Since its establishment, the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) has spawned a global human rights and social justice movement, with the CRC playing a pioneering and leadership role. CARICOM through the Commission, is providing intellectual leadership and guidance on Reparations on a global scale and is viewed by many as the vanguard of the movement. Reparations commissions have been launched or are in development in a number of countries and regions outside the Caribbean, including the United States, Canada, Brazil, Venezuela and Europe. The National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC) was established in April 2015 in New York and has articulated a Ten Point Action Plan based on CARICOM’s model. These institutions have been active and impactful, taking guidance and using the ideas, strategies and human resources of the CARICOM Commission. The adoption of the reparatory justice theme and the Ten Point Action Plan, has changed the nature and identity of the discourse in several countries, by linking reparatory justice to economic and social development.

These dynamics have created context and traction for United States democratic presidential candidates to identify with the movement. This development is transformational and the Caribbean Commission has contributed significantly to re-energizing the Reparations movement in the United States. In Asia, the Parliament of India has called for the payment of Reparations from the Government of the United Kingdom. Venezuela has established an Afro-Venezuelan Commission on Reparations and in Guyana, the first youth for Reparations group, *Ikemba*,[[2]](#footnote-2) was formed in November 2017.

The United States Virgin Islands (USVI), inspired by CARICOM’s initiative, has made significant progress in advancing Reparations claims from the Government of Denmark, framed within the context of the centennial year (2017) of the sale of the USVI to the United States. Public apologies were issued by the Danish royal family and the Government of Denmark. Danish citizenship for the people of USVI is being pursued and the Government of Denmark has so far agreed to provide US$10 million for the further development of the USVI Archives and US$10 million for a culture and identity project. The negotiations are ongoing.

CARICOM has played a leading role at the global level in advancing issues related to people of African descent, including racism and reparations for slavery. CARICOM co-sponsored the resolution in 2007 that set in observance 25 March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Professor Verene Shepherd, leading Caribbean historian, Co-Chair of the National Council on Reparations, Jamaica, and Director of the Centre for Reparation Research at The UWI, served on the *United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent* from 2010-2016 and as Chair of the Working Group for the period 2011-2013. Currently, Professor Ahmed Reid, historian, also Jamaican, is serving on that body ­­­­for the period 2016-2022. It was this Working Group that was instrumental in bringing about the recognition by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), of 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent and subsequently the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015 – 2024).

The Centre for Reparation Research (CRR) was established at The University of the West Indies in October 2017 and has led a multifaceted programme of research, outreach and providing support to the CRC in developing publications and drafting the letters to European Heads of Government on Reparations. The CRR has been inundated with requests for information and presentations at events from students, media, governments and universities.

There has been significant public engagement and discussion on Reparations at several international meetings and there is a demand for the Chairperson and other members of the CRC to participate in international conferences. Some of the more recent initiatives include an International Colloquium held in Porto-Novo, Benin, in September 2018, on the theme of “Returning to Source: The Future of Reparations and Restorative Justice for Afrikan Enslavement;” the International Conference on Reparations held in Caracas, Venezuela, in May 2018, at which the Hon. Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines made an address; and The Adwa Pan-African University’s International Conference organized by the Government of Ethiopia, held in April 2018. The government of Benin has erected a *Gate of Return*, as a mark of reparation and to acknowledge the atrocities of enslavement.

The global reckoning on Reparations has also impacted several elite universities in the United States, including Brown and Columbia Universities, Princeton, University of Chicago and Georgetown University, which have institutional histories of owning enslaved Africans. Undergraduates at Georgetown University voted overwhelmingly in April 2019, in favour of a $27.20 per semester “reconciliation contribution” fee to benefit descendants of 272 enslaved Africans who were sold by the school in the 19th century, to clear the indebtedness of the institution and ensure that it remained open. Universities in the United Kingdom, notably Glasgow University, Cambridge University, University of London and Bristol University, like their counterparts in the United States, have or are in the process of investigating the extent to which their institutions benefited from slavery. This is with a view to introducing programmes of redress for people of African descent, such as scholarships, student debt forgiveness, discounted tuition fees and hiring more faculty of African descent.

CARICOM’s initiative on Reparations has received endorsements from the Pan-African Congress, CELAC and ALBA. The Commission’s work has also attracted significant coverage by the international media.

The CRC meets regularly on a quarterly basis to coordinate national and regional activities on Reparations. National Committees are actively engaged in organizing public education and outreach activities and concluded a regional series of Reparations rallies and relays in 2017.

The Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee on Reparations (PMSC) which is chaired by the Prime Minister of Barbados - The Rt. Hon. Mia Mottley, has oversight responsibility of the work of the Commission. The work of the Commission is financed by contributions from Member States.

The CRC’s Reparatory Justice programme as articulated in the Ten Point Action Plan, sets out a comprehensive plan for reparations as follows:

1. A Full and Formal Apology
2. Indigenous Peoples Development Programmes
3. Funding for Repatriation to Africa
4. The Establishment of Cultural Institutions and the Return of Cultural Heritage
5. Addressing and Remedying the Public Health Crisis
6. Education Programmes
7. The Enhancement of Historical and Cultural Knowledge Exchanges
8. Psychological Rehabilitation as a Result of the Transmission of Intergenerational Trauma
9. The Right to Development through the Use of Technology
10. Debt Cancellation and Monetary Compensation

The CRC welcomes the following recent developments:

1. Arising from the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution** adopted on 22 December 2018 (A/73/587), which issued a global call for concrete action for the total implementation of and follow-up to the *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action,* steps are being taken to establish a United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent. The Forum “will serve as a consultation mechanism for people of African descent and other interested stakeholders as a platform for improving the quality of life and livelihoods of people of African descent…”
2. Resolution 2018/2899(RSP) adopted on 26 March 2019, by the **European Parliament,** which called on the European Union and its Member States to implement measures to address structural racism that affects 15 million people of African descent in Europe. The Resolution *interalia* called on European Union institutions and Member States to officially acknowledge “past and ongoing injustices and crimes against humanity, such as slavery and transatlantic slave trade, or committed under European colonialism,” and to take action which may include “some form or reparations such as offering public apologies and the restitution of stolen artefacts to countries of origin.”
3. The **growing movement among universities** in the United States and the United Kingdom to address their historical links with slavery and bring about social justice; and the engagement with the Caribbean Reparations movement by universities in Africa, notably in Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Benin, have significant potential to support and propel the CARICOM Reparations initiative.

**Recommendations to Ms. E. Tendayi Achiume, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance**

1. We need an effective global platform through the United Nations to advance the reparations issue. We appreciate having the ICERD, WCAR and the Durban Declaration, the International Decade for People of African Descent, the Permanent Memorial “Ark of Return,” and now the proposed permanent forum of People of African Descent. But we know the UN can do more. Like what has been done to put the spotlight on the SDGs, Climate Change, Non-Communicable Diseases, Sustainable Development and Small Island Developing States. High Level Fora and a full hearing by the UNGA would make a difference to:
	1. Gain the attention and support of world public opinion as a game changer
	2. Have greater resource allocation for the follow-up to Durban and to implement the International Decade
2. We are halfway through the International Decade and it doesn’t feel like we’ve maximised the opportunity. Resources is a big issue but we also need to have a focal point, an office in the Americas to drive the issue. There is a major disconnect
3. We need to strengthen activism at the national level. We need establish reparations committees in the countries where people of African Descent live and they need assistance. eg. CRC Committees

This is a movement about redress and repair for a horrific crime against humanity, with disastrous and lasting consequences on a scale that is unmatched by any other such crime. We have a just cause and a compelling case and hope you will help us to bring about the social justice we seek – in much the same way that the world supported reparations for the atrocities committed against the Jewish community.

It may, as one of my colleagues in the CRC maintains, that we may need the establishment of an international tribunal created by the UNGA to address a claim of this magnitude and complexity. We need to reaffirm the value of our civilization and heritage and hold those responsible, accountable.

1. National Committees have been established in 12 Member States but only 9 are currently functioning. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ikemba* is West African/Igbo in origin and means “strength of the people.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)