

Panel I
Reparatory Justice and Economic Development of People of African Descent
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Excellencies

Distinguished Participants

The economic development, economic viability and economic independence of people of African descent are one and the same time an essential pillar and an indispensable attribute of reparatory justice, both pathway and outcome.

The overriding imperative for the enslavement and trafficking in Africans, for four centuries, was the overwhelming avarice of the perpetrators of these criminal acts, laced with a disdain for people who were different and, therefore in their minds, inferior.

The avarice is easy to understand, then and now. Back then, enslavers and colonisers wanted, they did not need it, labour and thought this was a pretty easy way to acquire labour. Just capture some strong human beings, traffic them, and feed them enough to keep them working and that was it. Today, neo-enslavers and neo-colonizers want resources – land, timber, gold, diamonds, uranium, petroleum, coltan, aluminum, copper, fish, seafood, coffee, cocoa, sugar, fruit, all of which are relatively easy to commandeer. In his book *Guns, Germs and Steele: The Fates of Human Societies* and its sequel, Pulitzer Prize winning and Phi Beta Award in Science author Jared Diamond lays out the intersection of these three elements, a chance of time and geography, that enabled enslavers, among others, to overwhelm those they enslaved.

The disdain for Africans is less easy to figure out. Psychologists tell us that in order to perpetrate a crime as hideous as maiming or murdering someone, the perpetrator must first dehumanize that individual to protect the perpetrator's own sanity. Why? Because, somewhere buried in our collective psyche is the knowledge that people are people, that they come in different shapes, sizes, colours, heights, looks and other attributes, like flowers do. The research literature is clear that it is this unassailable truth that forces would-be perpetrators to imagine those whom they wish to dehumanize as rats or roaches, inferior in intellect or physical ability, witches or wizards, the enemy who is 'out to get us', incapable of self-government, or any number of other weird, irrational, and unfounded suppositions. Hence, the disdain that permitted and today permits otherwise seemingly human, sane and reasonable people to think that the enslavement of others then or the exploitation now, was and is acceptable, even among some who were delusional enough to conclude that it was something that God ordained and therefore would bless.

The fact that there are those who inadvertently colluded then, and those who knowingly collude today, must be the focus of another essential conversation.

Understanding these factors is essential to understanding that reparatory justice requires, among others, at least five key elements:

- Recognition of historical and contemporary wrongs and the acknowledgment of loss and harm. Permit me to add here that apologies are good, some would argue essential, but that we know that without any additional steps, apologies are merely platitudinous, superficial, performative, and do more harm than good, in that they imply a genuine wish to repair the loss and harm, and when this is not forthcoming, I would argue that they merely add to the wrongs that have already been imposed on others.
- Repair and rehabilitation of ways of living, knowing, being, living together – myths, education, history, language, spaces, places
- Reparation – material restitution
- Return of artifacts and assets
- Reform of laws, policies, structures, systems, practices.

As indicated in these five elements, and I repeat they might not be exhaustive, economic development, economic viability and economic independence are key. The progression from development to viability to independence is necessary, so that people of African descent retreat from being beggars in their own lands, condemned to accept unfair contracts for the petroleum or coffee, unfair hiring practices when their government take dodgy loans, and live in inferior spaces in their own countries. To do so, let me list five areas that require attention in the economic sphere:

- Reform of education – financial literacy, digital literacy, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, science and mathematics, among other things, being essential. This is on the shoulders of people of African descent.
- Restructuring of national debt and the reformulation of loan and debt policies.
- Reform of land laws – the issue of land title, land grants, and just the simple capacity to purchase and hold land – is essential. I might add that this is not merely an economic issue, but a cultural, social and for many a spiritual issue, but that’s another conversation.
- Reform of banking and insurance practices – the issue of having the same interest rates, that financial products be accessible to Black peoples, and that the interest rates to say a Black country be the same as to a white country with the same economic metrics should be a no-brainer, except that the assessment of risk is art and not science.
- Reform of hiring policies and practices.
- Reform of national legislation, intellectual property regulations, and international public law and public international law, and looking ahead to the regulation of digitalization and artificial intelligence.
- Reform of international transportation – air, sea and land.
- Reform of visa procedures.
- Reform of international development.

A wise person once told me if it took five years to compromise an office, fixing it cannot be done in two years. The cumulative effect of enslavement, colonization, segregation and economic exclusion, over the last six centuries, is uncontested. We have an opportunity to address these issues now. Let us seize the moment. I thank you.