Fourth General Assembly

Regulating reparations for slavery

Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2023

"let us sing songs of freedom together"

Forum: The Fourth General Assembly

Issue: Regulating reparations for slavery

Position: President

Introduction

The issue of “regulating reparation for slavery” lies at the intersection of history, justice and the enduring legacy of one of humanity's most shameful chapters. Over the past decade, a global awakening has taken place, leading more and more countries and organizations to openly acknowledge their profound role in the transatlantic slave trade. These recognitions are not just symbolic; they represent an essential first step in acknowledging the immense suffering, oppression, and dehumanization endured by enslaved individuals and their descendants.

However, while recognition is an important step, it comes with a specific call to action: financial compensation. This appeal is rooted in the belief that, as the next step, the international community must address the long-term consequences of slavery and work towards restoring justice. Navigating the complex terrain of modern slave reparations is a formidable challenge that requires careful consideration.

The historical context is both revealing and disturbing. In the not-so-distant past, slave owners were compensated for the loss of their "property" when slavery was abolished, setting a strange precedent for restitution. Contrastingly, millions of slaves and their descendants never received any form of large-scale compensation. Thus, the fundamental question arises: How can we correct this historical mistake, especially when the vast majority of former slaves are no longer alive and determining the eligibility of their descendants is a complex and ethical undertaking.

Complexity increases when it comes to determining who is responsible for granting such compensations. Should it be individuals, organisations or entire countries? These issues highlight the need for the international community to establish practical guidelines and comprehensive compensation frameworks based on the principles of justice, equality and healing. In essence, the issue of providing reparations for slavery was not just a historical note; it is a profoundly moral and ethical imperative. It challenges us to fight the legacy of systemic injustice, confront persistent disparities rooted in centuries of exploitation, and chart a path to reconciliation and redress.

Definition of Key Terms

Enslavement

Enslavement is the act of making a slave out of a person, which is defined as a person who is legally owned by someone else and has to work for that person, usually without any compensation.

Transatlantic Slave Trade

The historical period, spanning from the 15th to the 19th century, during which millions of Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic Ocean and enslaved in the Americas and other regions.

Reparations
Compensation or solutions provided to individuals, communities, or nations for past injustices, usually by other nations.

Descendant Communities
The present-day communities comprised of individuals who are descendants of those who endured enslavement.

Historical Injustices
Refers to past actions that are considered unfair, unjust, and morally wrong, usually against a group of people, society or nation.

Socio-Economic Disparities
Systematic differences in economic and social outcomes among different groups within a society, often influenced by historical factors.

General Overview
The issue of "Regulating Reparations for Slavery" is an intricate and morally challenging topic with a long history. The transatlantic slave trade, spanning from the 15th to the 19th century, represents one of humanity's darkest chapters. It involved the cruel and systematic forced migration of millions of people to the other, more dominant nations, where they endured unimaginable suffering, exploitation, and dehumanization. Slavery became the cornerstone of economic prosperity for many colonial powers, leaving an indelible mark on the course of history.

The formal abolition of slavery in the 19th century marked a watershed moment in human rights, yet it did not bring justice to the millions who had suffered. Instead, former slave owners were compensated for their loss of "property," while those who had endured slavery were left without reparations or redress. This historical injustice has cast a long shadow, with the descendants of enslaved individuals continuing to experience the socio-economic and psychological consequences of their ancestors' subjugation.

This legacy of injustice has contributed to systemic racial disparities that persist to this day. Many descendants of enslaved individuals face barriers to economic opportunity, educational attainment, and access to healthcare that can be traced back to the historical trauma of slavery. Recognizing this legacy underscores the urgency of addressing the issue of reparations and seeking to rectify these enduring injustices.

In recent years, there's been a worldwide recognition as countries and groups have admitted their part in the transatlantic slave trade. These apologies are a crucial step in acknowledging the deep hurts caused by slavery and the ongoing unfairness it has caused. However, this acknowledgement has led to a louder call for more than just words — a call for reparations. The idea of reparations is about more than just saying sorry; it means taking real actions to deal with the long-term impacts of slavery. This call for reparations has gained support as descendants of enslaved people ask for fairness for the historical wrongs committed against their ancestors.

Moreover, this call for reparations isn't just about money. It's also about recognizing the need to get rid of systematic racism, promote fairness, and fix the big inequalities that still affect communities descended from African ancestors. It's a call for big changes that acknowledge the lasting impacts of slavery and try to fix them in a big way.

The question of giving reparations for slavery today is full of challenges that go beyond just laws and what's right. One big challenge is that there are very few people who were once enslaved still around today, making it nearly impossible to give reparations directly to them. This makes it hard to decide who should be eligible and how to be fair, especially when it comes to the descendants. Another hard part is deciding who should be responsible for giving reparations. Should it be the countries that got rich from the slave trade, the groups that kept slavery going, or everyone in the world? This debate brings up big questions about who should take the blame, what's fair, and how to practically share out reparations. Currently, there's also a debate about what form reparations should take. Should it mostly be about money, or should it include other plans to get rid of racism and make things fair? Balancing the need for reparations with the bigger goals of making society fair and bringing people together is a tricky job that needs careful thought.

Major Parties Involved

African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) is seen as a pivotal player in the discourse on reparations for slavery, representing the collective voice of African nations deeply impacted by the transatlantic slave trade. Comprising member states across the continent, the AU is actively engaged in advocating for the rights and redress of African nations. The historical scars of slavery remain etched in the socio-economic fabric of many African countries, and the AU's involvement is instrumental in coordinating efforts to address historical injustices. By fostering a collective approach, the AU seeks to ensure that the concerns and perspectives of African nations are adequately represented in international discussions on reparations.

Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

CARICOM, representing the Caribbean nations, stands at the forefront of the reparations dialogue, given the historical legacies of slavery within the region. Comprising member states with shared histories of colonization and enslavement, CARICOM actively advocates for reparations to address the enduring socio-economic disparities resulting from historical injustices. The Caribbean nations collaboratively work within CARICOM to amplify their collective voice on the international stage. CARICOM's involvement underscores the need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to reparations, acknowledging the unique historical challenges faced by the Caribbean countries in the aftermath of slavery.

Descendant Communities

Communities comprised of descendants of individuals who endured enslavement form a vital grassroots component in the reparations discourse. Organisations such as the Descendants of Enslaved Africans actively engage with national and international bodies, advocating for reparations and seeking redress for the historical wrongs suffered by their ancestors. These communities bring forth personal narratives and lived experiences, grounding the reparations dialogue in the human realities of those directly affected. Their advocacy not only demands acknowledgement of historical injustices but also seeks tangible measures to rectify the socioeconomic disparities that persist within descendant communities.

National Reparation Committees

ome nations have taken specific institutional steps to address the issue of reparations by establishing dedicated committees or commissions. For instance, Jamaica's National Commission on Reparations reflects a national-level commitment to exploring and implementing reparative measures. These committees serve as formal mechanisms for deliberation, research, and policy formulation at the national level. By establishing such entities, nations demonstrate a recognition of the need for systematic approaches to address historical injustices and chart a course for reparations within their specific contexts. There are also major non-government affiliated reparation committees, such as the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC)

Timeline of Events

1834	Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire
1865	Emancipation Proclamation in the United States
2006	United Kingdom Apology for Transatlantic Slave Trade
2013	CARICOM Reparations Commission Established
2015	UN Working Group on People of African Descent Formed
2019	European Parliament Acknowledges Injustices of Slavery
2022	UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has called on the U.S. government to begin the process of providing reparations to descendants of enslaved people

Possible Solutions

Establishment of Reparations Funds

This possible solution would detail the creation of international and national reparations funds. These funds could be financed through contributions from nations and entities that have historical ties to the transatlantic slave trade. The funds would then be allocated toward initiatives aimed at addressing the socio-economic disparities faced by descendant communities by an independent committee. This could include investments in education, healthcare, and economic development programs to uplift affected populations.

Educational and Cultural Initiatives

This solution involves comprehensive educational and cultural initiatives. This could include things such as revising school curricula to include a more accurate and inclusive portrayal of history, emphasizing the contributions of African civilizations, the impact of slavery, and the achievements of descendant communities. Cultural programs, museums, and initiatives could also be supported to preserve and celebrate the rich heritage of these communities, fostering understanding and appreciation.

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

Truth and reconciliation commissions, modelled after successful initiatives in post-apartheid South Africa, could provide a platform for acknowledging historical wrongs and fostering national healing. These commissions would facilitate open dialogue, truth-telling, and a genuine commitment to reconciliation. While not a direct financial solution, they could pave the way for reparative actions, including policy changes and community development initiatives.

Legal Frameworks and Redress Mechanisms

Developing and strengthening legal frameworks that allow individuals or descendant communities to seek

redress for historical injustices is crucial. This may involve creating or amending legislation to enable lawsuits against entities responsible for perpetuating slavery. Additionally, establishing independent redress mechanisms or international tribunals could provide a legal avenue for addressing claims related to the transatlantic slave trade.

Bibliography

AU. (n.d.). *AU in a Nutshell*. African Union. Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://au.int/en/au-nutshell

CARICOM. (n.d.). *Who we are - CARICOM*. caricom. Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://caricom.org/our-community/who-we-are/

CNN. (2020, August 15). *Slavery reparations: How would it work?* CNN. Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/15/us/slavery-reparations-explanation-trnd/index.html

Lewis, T. (2023, October 10). *Transatlantic slave trade | History & Facts*. Britannica. Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://www.britannica.com/money/topic/transatlantic-slave-trade

NA. (2022, May 10). *13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery (1865)*. National Archives |. Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/13th-amendment

UNESCO. (n.d.). *Transatlantic Slave Trade*. Slavery and Remembrance. Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/article/index.cfm?id=A0002

What is NAARC? (n.d.). National African American Reparations Commission. Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://reparationscomm.org/about-naarc/

What is NAARC's 10-Point Reparations Plan? (n.d.). National African American Reparations Commission. Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://reparationscomm.org/reparations-plan/