

Reparatory Justice for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery in British Honduras Motion, 2021.

WHEREAS, the Thirty-Fourth Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community held from 3rd to 6th July 2013, in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, mandated the establishment of a CARICOM REPARATIONS COMMISSION as well as national reparations committees to pursue reparatory justice for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery and Native Genocide in the Commonwealth Caribbean;

AND WHEREAS, the CARICOM REPARATIONS COMMISSION has devised a “Ten Point Plan for Slavery Reparations” which calls for, among other things, the research and preparation of claims setting out the moral, ethical and legal case for the making of reparations by the United Kingdom; and this House is aware that Jamaica is preparing to present a Petition to Her Majesty the Queen for the referral of this question to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England;

AND WHEREAS, Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community recommitted themselves to the advancement of this issue at their Thirty-Second Intersessional Meeting held virtually on the 24th and 25th February 2021;

AND WHEREAS, a credible body of regional and international studies have been able to substantiate that profits from the British slave trade and slave labour contributed significantly to the accumulation of capital in England which financed the Industrial Revolution and, conversely, contributed to the underdevelopment of member states of the Caribbean Community;

AND WHEREAS, the United Nations Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, acknowledged that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are crimes against humanity, and “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 developing countries” and that Africans and people of African descent, Asians and indigenous people were victims of these acts and continue to be victims of their consequences;

AND WHEREAS, on 17th June 2020, at the 43rd Session of the Human Rights Council Urgent Debate on current racially inspired human rights violations and systemic racism the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, called for amends to be made for centuries of violence and discrimination, including through formal apologies, truth-telling processes and reparations in various forms;

AND WHEREAS, the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act, 1833, which abolished the slavery system and the British government paid £20 million (which today, by some convertors, would equate to about £70 billion) to the former slave owners as compensation for the loss of their human “chattels” but there were no reparations of any kind to the indigenous people and former slaves and their descendants;

AND WHEREAS, the European colonial powers that sanctioned the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery have refused to issue an apology and have shown a reluctance to engage in any meaningful discussion on reparations for their role in the slave trade and the enslavement of people of African descent;

AND WHEREAS, there is convincing legal research that shows, firstly, that the unauthorized removal and forced transportation of African people from Africa and their subsequent enslavement in Caribbean countries, including Belize, were against the fundamental principles of the common law; secondly, there was no clear legal basis for slavery in Belize and, in any event, any such legislation that purported to authorize slavery was void as being repugnant to fundamental principles of English law;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House debate the issue and take the unanimous decision that:

1. The Government of Belize is morally, legally, and ethically obliged, on behalf of the former slaves and their descendants of Belize (then the British Settlement in the Bay of Honduras) to present the appropriate case in the United Kingdom to determine whether, as a matter of law, the United Kingdom is liable for the unlawful seizure, transportation and subsequent enslavement of African people in Belize under British Colonial Rule up until 1833, and to receive the appropriate reparations from Britain;
2. The Government of Belize, in presenting this case to the appropriate body, shall seek to valuate not only the economic cost of slavery in Belize but also, based on expert evidence, seek reparation for the former slaves and their descendants for the denial of their culture and history; human rights abuses, including but not limited to murder, rape, flogging, branding, denial of freedom of movement, freedom to worship, freedom to own land, and the right to education; and for the severe generational mental and psychological damage to slaves and their descendants, long after 1838, caused by their degraded status as slaves and perpetuated by associated systemic racism and racial discrimination;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Honourable House calls upon its sister CARICOM states to take similar decisions in their respective jurisdictions on this matter.