

**REMARKS**

**BY**

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***THE DIPLOMACY OF REPARATION:  
BUILDING BRIDGES AND FORGING PRACTICAL  
PARTNERSHIPS***

**SECOND CARICOM REPARATION CONFERENCE**

**ANTIGUA & BARBUDA**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2014**

**THE DIPLOMACY OF REPARATION:  
BUILDING BRIDGES AND FORGING PRACTICAL PARTNERSHIPS**

**PROTOCOL**

**I am honored to engage this 2<sup>nd</sup> CARICOM Conference on Reparations.**

**I am doubly honored to be asked to deliver the opening plenary with a mandate to set the tone and contemplate temperature of the many discourses you will explore in the next two days.**

**Let me at the outset congratulate our CARICOM Heads for the timely establishment the Regional Reparations Commission.**

**I particularly wish to celebrate those Heads who have established National Commissions, and who are making budgetary provision for them to be able to deliver upon their approved mandate.**

**The Regional Commission has wasted no time getting on with its business.**

**Members of the Commission should be commended for the impact you have had in short time on our community who you have educated and energized. You have captured the attention of**

**the entire world it seems, and conversations are taking place everywhere.**

**The task ahead will require that you remain resolute, responsible, and respectful.**

**Keep before you the brilliant reflective comment of the Great Nelson Mandela: “it always seems impossible until it happens”.**

**Colleagues, I have been a supporter and advocate of the principle and praxis of reparatory justice for as long as I can remember.**

**I have endeavored during my entire professional and political life to keep faith with this perspective in respect of Caribbean people, particularly those of African descent who have, and continue to be, in need of special acts of reparatory justice.**

**I am here today, however, to stand in solidarity with the work of the Caricom Regional Commission, and the vision of my colleagues Heads who have given vanguard support for its work.**

**Let there be no doubt. This Commission, still in its infancy, has already matured the issues of reparatory justice before the region and world.**

**Progress has been made on many fronts.**

**Your very existence as a Commission is tangible proof that civil society and the State have finally found a broad basis on which to build a common platform.**

**Such a common platform is indispensable if we are to launch targeted diplomatic missiles in the short, medium and long term.**

**This alliance you have struck builds upon the historic work of the late and great Honorable Marcus Garvey, Ambassador Dudley Thompson, our brothers and sisters of the Rastafarian faith, and many more in the Caribbean and beyond who have called for a global discussion of reparations for the descendants of the enslaved Africans.**

**Let there be no doubt. Chattel slavery, slave trading, and the genocide of our indigenous people, are all “Crimes against Humanity”.**

**As such they must be addressed within the context of global diplomacy and international law.**

**In our Caribbean world the legacies of these crimes are everywhere to be seen in action, serving as fetters upon our best efforts at development.**

**I wish to endorse the principles and proposed projects embedded in the 10 Point Reparatory Justice Plan which you submitted, and has been endorsed by Heads of Government.**

**The Plan calls for an organized and systematic discussion of legacies to be repaired.**

**It is a reasonable plan of action.**

**It is based on reason and respect for the culture of diplomacy, international law, and the culture of bilateral and multilateral inter-governmental engagement.**

**Your recommendations call for the building of bridges and partnership procedures that are consistent with the attainment of desired objectives in difficult political and historical environments.**

**I am aware of the reactions to your recommendations largely because I have followed closely the trajectories of the excellent leadership provided the Jamaican National Commission on Reparations by Professor Verene Shepherd.**

**Her dedication to this cause no one can question. The support she receives from Lord Anthony Gifford is a special gift to us all, and I am sure that Minister Hanna has recognized the fruits of the entire commission whose recent report has been tabled in Parliament for a subsequent debate.**

**I have spent decades in these difficult international environments working on behalf of CARICOM, Jamaica, and other global interest that are supportive of our peoples' development agenda.**

**I know a little about the logic and language of these spaces and I am here to say this to you. "P.J. Patterson, even from a seat in the pavilion is willing to help in any way you imagine will be of value to the Commission".**

**Some of you are aware that I have been invited by the African Union to facilitate the work of the Sixth Regions- the Diaspora of Africa- in the forging of stronger links with the entire continent.**

**It is essential that Africa becomes engaged in our campaign, for they too have suffered irreparable loss by the pernicious scourge of slavery, which has arrested and retarded our full development.**

**We are all the sons and daughters of 'stolen people'.**

**Those of us who wish to return to the homeland should be facilitated by host countries and countries responsible for the human rights violation in this quest.**

**Quite correctly, the Ten Point Action Plan calls for the funding and facilitation of these projects of 'return' by countries that have been enriched by the slave trade.**

**I was pleased to hear that Professor Beckles, your Chairman, after his presentation at the British House of Commons, was invited to address the Congressional Black Caucus of the United States in Washington a few weeks ago.**

**No doubt, his engagement with Congressman, John Conyers, the legendary soldier of reparatory justice for African Americans, and with Professor Ron Daniel of the Institute of the Black World, was fruitful and seminal.**

**I am reliably informed that as a result of this engagement the United States will in short time have a National Reparations Commission, designed upon the CARICOM model.**

**This is a most remarkable break-through. I understand that representatives of this Initiative are here, and will speak to us about their plans.**

**I have also been informed that it is the intention of our American comrades to launch their National Commission in New York within the context of a joint sitting with the CARICOM Commission.**

**Marcus Mosiah Garvey had foreseen these developments.**

**Today, we remember him for building a global network, anchored in New York and Jamaica, to demonstrate that only such a broad vision can succeed in bringing reparatory justice to our people.**

**The joint sitting of two Commissions in New York should be a moment of remembrance and celebration of Garvey's role and place within this movement, which is now once again energized for another historic advance.**



**These are significant developments that will transform the global reparations movement.**

**Imagine if you will a joint sitting, not only of the CARICOM and United States Commissions, but a sitting that includes also the Commissions of Brazil and Britain, and in the future, African States.**

**At the recent Pan African Congress held in Johannesburg, a resolution was passed calling for a Global Reparations Commission that includes dozens of national commissions established in all those countries that were scarred and damaged by the globalization of chattel slavery.**

**These developments are all now within sight, and the CARICOM Commission will have a critical leadership role in this forward movement.**

**This is as it should be. The Caribbean was, after all, the epicenter of the quake that shook African people to the core, and enriched and emboldened European nations during the post-Columbus invasion of our environment.**

**Building Bridges and Practical Partnership must by necessity define the global and regional movement towards reparatory justice for Africans at home and in the diaspora.**

**It is a framework to foster a sense of family and friendship that is required to strengthen the weak and encourage the discouraged.**

**Without systems of solidarity the political process that is reparatory justice will be complicated unnecessarily.**

**For this reason I am happy to endorse the structure and design of this conference.**

**The idea of an “Expert Exchange” that calls for pulling together of professionals to reason with the grass roots and community cadres is precisely what is required in order to build bridges and practical partnership.**

**For decades there has been a deep division between the grass roots and professional elements on this subject.**

**This division has served to destroy any prospect of a popular front for popular mobilization.**

**It has served, furthermore, to create an artificial environment in which those with schooling believed that their knowledge is superior to, and more relevant than, those who experience of everyday the harshest living in the most dispossessed and disenfranchised domains.**

**And finally, it has served to fracture our party politics in ways that denied the possibility of state, civil society, and community coming together to mobilize minds and money around the most relevant argument of the post-national era—reparatory justice!**

**It is timely and intelligent that doctors, lawyers, priests, journalists, artists, musicians, writers, and economists should come on board with traditional grass roots advocates, in order to hammer out a strategy that will benefit our entire community.**

**This coming together is what is required to liberate the entire world from the cycle of shame and guilt that has encircled the legacies of slavery.**

**The time has come for Caribbean people to move forward decisively.**

**The time has come for us as a people to break free of the colonial scaffold that has clouded our vision of the future with imperial illusion and ineptitude.**

**It was Errol Barrow, who on the eve of Barbados' independence, declared that he would not be caught 'loitering on colonial premises after closing time'.**

**Unfortunately, we are still loitering on colonial premises even though closing time has long passed.**

**Reparatory Justice for the people, the closing of the bridge to the Privy Council, and the ending of a Monarch as our Head of State, are all a part of the process of self-actualization and liberation that will allow us to be free of our colonial past.**

**We have to move on with our quest for freedom and development as sovereign, independent people.**

**My expectation is that this gathering of experts will address these issues as one broad theme – the theme of seeking justice in order to enable progress.**

**I am particularly pleased that the CARICOM Commission has made it abundantly clear that reparatory justice is an integral part of our search for real independence and rooted development.**

**The linking of compensation for 200 years of unpaid labor to the undeveloped nature of our region was articulated as early as 1934 by Sir Arthur Lewis in his small but powerful book, *Labour in the West Indies*.**

**Sir Arthur urged then that the matter of “unpaid slave labour” should not be allowed to disappear from our focus. He rightly insisted it be discussed at the highest levels of policy-making.**

**We might be 80 years late in time, but Sir Arthur would be a happy spirit this morning to know that on the eve of the centenary of his life, we have returned to him as a source.**

**No one can say that this Commission is calling for charity and handouts, and is suggesting a mendicant approach to the matter.**

**We have said that the development of the region remains subverted in large measure by the legacies of the colonial baggage, and that it is largely the duty-- legal and moral--of imperial states, to partly shoulder this weight.**

**We are calling for partnership rather than pitiful posturing in the effort to end what the late, great George Beckford called the ‘Persistent Poverty’ of the post-plantation Caribbean.**

**You are on sound historic and economic ground in insisting that the colonial legacy that still mesmerizes us can only be eradicated within the context of partnership that is best framed, not in terms of aid, but reparatory justice.**

**There is no doubt in my mind that the Caribbean has been neglected in recent decades by the international community, particularly the parts of it that were enriched by extraction from it of wealth during colonialism.**

**The harsh hands being held out to our region by agencies of the developed nations suggest a turning away from this region which was the source of their prior salvation.**

**The people of the region have a right to reparatory justice. You have presented a new framework that historicizes the present, and re-present it as for collective policy.**

**The UN has dedicated the decade 2015 – 2025 to African descendants. This creates an opportunity for a new development dialogue.**

**The UN, in not accepting the word 'reparations' in its official language during the recent September sitting, might have done the movement some good.**

**In resolving that member states should seek to "halt" and "reverse" the legacies of slavery and slave trading it has placed the legitimacy of reparation squarely before the world.**

**Caribbean citizens and states who have fought for this decade, and for official recognition that continuing harm and suffering still exist as legacies of these crimes, are poised to take a giant step forward.**

**"Halting and Reversing" legacies should mean within any program of action "reparations".**

**It is up to member states of our region to see to it as they prepare these programs of action.**

**Governments must see in this Commission a road map to the future.**

**If they fail to do so, there is a great chance that they will be left behind as the people take their business into the streets for summary settlement.**

**I am a believer in popular mobilization for progress within an orderly framework of ideas and issues that are agreed upon.**

**Let there be solidarity across the region on reparatory justice.**

**Let the Caribbean be the vanguard for justice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it was the vanguard for economic accumulation and criminal enrichment in the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

**Mr. Chairman, the great Caribbean Leaders of the past, with whom I was privileged to work and our intellectual giants, who have forged my mind into a force for regional unity and fraternity will no doubt inspire us as they always do for the freedom and liberation of African descendant people.**

**I am honored and privileged to be offered this opportunity to bat first on this wicket.**

**I hope I have seen off some of the shine, put a few runs on the board, and worn down the pacers, so that you can all come out and score a ton of runs.**

**You will be scoring these runs not only for the Caribbean, but for the people of the world who believe in fair play.**



**When we are done, at the end of the game, we can then all gather at the rendezvous of victory.**