

Bridging The Atlantic: Legacy, Solidarity, and Reparations

On September 7, 2025, the Second Africa- CARICOM International Summit on Reparations was held in Addis Ababa. Reparations for African enslavement gained increased attention in the United States beginning with the 2014 Atlantic article by Ta’Nehisi Coates and accelerating during the 2020 “racial reckoning” that accompanied the murder of George Floyd at the hands of police and racial variation in the COVID mortality impact. Indeed, the 2020 debate for the Democratic Party nominees for president included questions about reparations for African enslavement.

In 2025, discussions about reparations seem unlikely and infeasible as we witness a global resurgence of white nationalism, especially in the United States. The Trump administration has mused about excessive attention to “how bad Slavery was”, ordering effective removal of attention to the transatlantic slave trade from national museums, public school curriculums, and national parks. Yet in the international arena, the calls for reparations continue, championed by the Africa Union and CARICOM.

To learn more about this continued commitment Africa and the Caribbean, as researchers who have proposed reparations as public health intervention, we travelled to Addis Ababa...

1. The Transatlantic Slave Trade and Its Legacy

The transatlantic slave trade spanned the 16th – 19th centuries, during which time an estimated 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped and trafficked across the Atlantic – a journey that some 10.7 million survived. The vast majority of those captured were taken to Brazil and the Caribbean, while less than five percent were sent to North America. For all people of African descent, the legacy of centuries of uncompensated labor has had a lasting impact. In Africa and the Caribbean, the historical theft and use of enslaved labor has affected national development: Africa lost population, and its economies were distorted by the trade in human beings. In the Caribbean, wealth generated by enslaved labor was largely extracted and repatriated to the metropolitan centers of their colonial powers and the growing United States. Although the capture and enslavement of people of African descent had been outlawed in African and Caribbean territories by the late

1800s, colonial rule persisted well into the 20th century. While calls for reparations for the descendants of the enslaved have a long history, in the United States extending back centuries, it was the Caribbean that made the pursuit of reparations an official state project with the establishment of the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\) Reparations Commission](#) in 2013, chaired by Professor Sir Hilary Beckles. The commission's mandate is to pursue reparations for the Indigenous peoples and people of African descent.

2. The 2001 Durban Conference and Its Aftermath

Africa and the Caribbean have long maintained relations of mutual solidarity and support rooted in shared ancestry and anti-colonial struggles. From August 31 to September 7, 2001, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly convened the [World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance](#), in Durban, South Africa. This conference, presided over by Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and then the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, addressed the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and issued the [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#). The declaration affirmed that slavery and the slave trade were, and had always been, a crime against humanity. It further recognized that

"Historical injustices [i.e. slavery, colonialism, genocide, apartheid] have undeniably contributed to the poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion, economic disparities, health disparities, instability and insecurity that affect many people in different parts of the world, in particular in developing countries" (Article 158).

The Durban Conference was a contentious meeting, with divisions between Western and African nations, the latter supported by delegations from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean. The United States and Israel withdrew from the meeting in protest over the designation of Zionism as a form of racism. Despite these disputes, the Durban Declaration contained strong anti-racist language, although no strong commitments to action. The World Trade Center attacks on September 11, 2001 – occurring just days after the conference ended – overshadowed the meeting's outcomes and diverted global attention from its deliberations.

3. Post-Durban UN Efforts and Global Recognition

Follow-up meetings and activities continued after the Durban Meeting, although progress was slow. Subsequent UN efforts brought together member states to address racism and the situation of people of African descent. Among these efforts were the establishment of the [Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent](#) in 2002; the declaration of the [International Decade for People of African Descent](#) for the period 2015-2024; and, most recently, the launch of the [Second Decade for People of African Descent](#), announced in December 2024 by the OHCHR, to extend through 2034.

4. Africa-Caribbean Relationship and Collaboration

Outside of the UN system, the African Union (AU) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) began formal exchanges with the aim of pursuing increased cooperation in economic development, trade, and travel, as well as the shared goal of reparations for the historical injustice of the transatlantic slave trade and colonization. The AU comprises 55 member states, including all 54 African UN member states and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, a territory administered by Morocco as Western Sahara,

represented by the Polisario Front. The AU was established in 2002 as the successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which had been established in 1963 when many African countries were still under colonial rule. The OAU sought to build an independent Africa and thus had its roots in the anticolonial struggle. CARICOM, founded in 1973 by Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana, now includes 15 “full” members and six associate members. Originally created to promote regional economic integration and reduce barriers to trade and travel, CARICOM has more recently turned its focus toward addressing the collective historical impacts of colonization and the transatlantic slave trade.

The effort to “bridge the Atlantic” has been longstanding. In 1993, the first Pan-African Conference on Reparations was held in Abuja, Nigeria, under the auspices of the OAU. The conference called upon, *“Heads of States and Governments in Africa and the Diaspora itself to set up National Committees for the purpose of studying the damaged Black experience, disseminating information and encouraging educational courses on the impact of Enslavement, colonization and neocolonialism on present-day Africa and its Diaspora.”* The meeting led to [The Abuja Proclamation](#), which renewed calls for global reparations efforts by urging “...the international community to recognize that there is a unique and unprecedented moral debt owed to the Afrikan peoples which has yet to be paid” (Abuja Proclamation, 1993).

In 2012, hosted by the African Union under the leadership of South Africa the [Global African Diaspora Summit](#) was held in Sandton, South Africa. The focus on the diaspora reflected efforts during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki when the diaspora was declared the “6th Region” of Africa by the AU in 2008. The summit [report](#) reaffirmed the

importance of Pan-African solidarity to economic development. The meeting highlighted the importance of the African diaspora to the achievement of this goal.

AU engagement in support of reparations has increased in the 2020s. A decision adopted by the AU in 2021 ([Assembly/AU/Dec.847\(XXXVI\)](#)) called for the establishment of an African Caribbean Joint Mechanism on Reparative Justice. Formal summit meetings followed: the First Summit in 2021 and the Second Summit in 2025, which formalized partnerships and established cooperation agendas.

5. Formal Partnerships: AU-CARICOM Summits

The [First AU-CARICOM Summit](#), held virtually on September 7, 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was hosted by Kenya with the theme “Unity Across Continents and Oceans”. Heads of State and Government from several African and Caribbean nations, including Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Angola, Malawi, Jamaica, Zimbabwe, Antigua and Barbuda, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Dominica, Tanzania, Madagascar, and Guyana, participated. Given the pivotal moment in history, the summit addressed the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and called for more vaccine equity for their nations, pointing to the disparities in vaccine distribution globally.

As part of advancing collaboration, the summit further directed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the AU and CARICOM nations to be signed during the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development’s session in October 2021 in Barbados. The final communiqué outlined commitments to fostering collaboration through a multilateral air services agreement, institutionalized AU-CARICOM cooperation, and the establishment of an annual summit on September 7, declared as “Africa-CARICOM Day”. However, the communiqué did not address the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade.

The MOU was signed in September 2024 by the CARICOM Secretary-General, Dr. Carla Barnett, and the African Union Commission Deputy Chairperson H.E. Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa. The MOU seeks to deepen relations by creating platforms for closer people-to-people interaction and solidarity through initiatives, including a diaspora volunteer exchange as a framework for associating people with development.

6. Reparations Advocacy and the Accra Proclamation

Reparations-related initiatives continued. In November 2022, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights passed a resolution ([ACHPR/Res.543 \(LXXIII\) 2022](#)), reaffirming that accountability and the provision of remedies for historical mass crimes, including slavery, the trade and trafficking of enslaved Africans, colonialism and racial segregation, are integral to combatting ongoing systemic racism and to the advancing the human rights of Africans and people of African descent globally.

At the 36th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in February 2023, member states proposed “Reparations for 2025” as a theme and endorsed the Government of Ghana's offer to co-organize, with relevant stakeholders, an international conference on reparatory justice. This meeting, hosted in 2023 by Ghana and the AU, resulted in the [Accra Proclamation on Reparations](#). Among its commitments were the establishment of a Global Reparations Fund and the creation of the Office of the AU Special Envoy on Reparations for Africans. The proclamation also declared 2025 as the Year of Reparations, calling for “*Justice for Africans and people of African descent through reparations*”.

Other efforts took place outside of formal governmental structures. In August 2022, the [Accra Summit I](#) was held in Ghana, titled “*Advancing Justice: Reparations and Racial*

Healing Summit". A follow-up meeting, [Acra Summit II](#), "*Centering Healing: For Africans and the Global African Diaspora in the Context of the African Union Theme of the Year 2025 on Reparations*", was held in March 2025 with support from the MacArthur Foundation. Participants included Nikole Hannah-Jones, who conceived the [1619 Project](#) and emphasized building a united front to advance the cause of justice and reparations for Africans and people of African descent.

7. The Second AU-CARICOM Summit (2025): Reparatory Justice

The [Second AU-CARICOM Summit](#) was held on September 7, 2025, at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, in Nelson Mandela Hall. Our delegation (Dr. Mary Bassett, Dr. Brittney Francis, and Mr. Guutaa Regassa) succeeded in being credentialled as "special guests" with support from the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, facilitated through the UC Berkeley reparations team – most of whom, except for Mr. Regassa, were unable to travel to Addis Ababa. There were no side meetings, and any open debate appeared to have taken place before the summit itself.

The 2025 Summit was hosted by the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and co-chaired by Dr. Terrance Drew, Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis and incoming Chair of CARICOM, and the Chair of the African Union, President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço of Angola. The overall theme – "Transcontinental Partnership in Pursuit of Reparatory Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations" - aimed to hold European nations accountable for their historical and contemporary impediments to development across Africa and the Caribbean.

a. Opening Session and Interventions

The meeting's opening session included several speeches by high-level representatives: Dr. Carla Barnett, Secretary-General of CARICOM; H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission; Dr. Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of Ethiopia; Dr. Terrance Drew, incoming Chair of CARICOM; and a representative from the UN Secretary-General, and President Gonçalves Lourenço, AU Chair. Dr. Barnett opened with powerful remarks on the historical and contemporary consequences of colonization and the transatlantic slave trade. She described the horrors and collective trauma experienced by millions of people of African descent across the globe, separated for centuries by an ocean and economic order. She reflected on how, for many in their nations, this is the first generation not to live under colonial rule – creating opportunities for national identity and development.

President Lourenço of Angola, Chairperson of the African Union, called on former colonial powers to offer reparations for their crimes and for the continued marginalization that has obstructed meaningful liberation and economic progress. Other speakers framed this summit as an opportunity to deepen collaboration in trade, science, health, and technology, especially in the context of new global challenges such as artificial intelligence (AI), which one participant described as a “war on humanity”.

The Summit was well attended, with high-level representation including at least five CARICOM prime ministers, among them the Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, and the Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, Dr. Terrance Drew. The 2025 Chair of CARICOM, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Andrew Holness, was unable to attend the Summit due to commitments with the European Union. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, was also absent, although the reason was not

offered. African heads of state and government included the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, the President of Angola and the President of Kenya, William Ruto and others. The African Union designated the 2025 theme as “Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations”. It further called for the establishment of a Transcontinental Partnership Framework that embraces the AU, CARICOM, and the African Diaspora in Latin America, North America, Europe, and elsewhere to build a strong common front in pursuit of reparations and reparatory justice globally.

b. Draft Communiqué and Economic Cooperation

According to the [draft communiqué](#), the closed session allowed member states to share their support for strengthening institutional linkages and cooperation in areas like trade, investment, entrepreneurship, education, scientific research and development, improved air and sea transportation, cultural and creative industries, peacekeeping, and people-to-people exchanges. The CARICOM Reparations Commission was present for the closed session but did not make remarks. Most contributions were read from prepared texts, emphasizing efforts to adopt a Pan-African approach to shared experiences of colonialism and its continuing economic consequences.

The member states pointed to the fact that trade between Africa and the Caribbean remains limited – accounting for less than 6% of exchange exports – but expressed hope to improve this directly, with plans to improve infrastructure and technological advancement in their various geographies. The [African Export-Import Bank](#) (Afreximbank) was highlighted as an important partner in supporting joint ventures around economic development projects. The original [CARICOM-Afreximbank Partnership Agreement](#), introduced in 2022 following the African Union’s 2008 designation of the Diaspora as

Africa's "sixth region", recognizes that Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora share deep historical, cultural, and political ties, as well as a sense of common identity. Expanding trade between the regions will promote economic development for both.

Afreximbank's Caribbean office opened in Barbados in 2023 and has hosted since hosted its "Afreximbank Annual Meetings" in Guyana (2023), the Bahamas (2024), and Grenada (2025), making significant steps toward building strong relationships and advancing economic development. Since establishing its regional presence, Afreximbank has approved over US\$700 million in financing across the Caribbean, with a project pipeline exceeding US\$2 billion. Investments have supported key sectors, such as energy, tourism, education, and small business development. Member states also called for the need to increase commitment to developing both direct maritime and air connectivity between African nations and the Caribbean, noting that currently there is only one documented direct flight operating between Nigeria and St. Kitts, with hopes to expand routes in the future.

c. Health and Technology Cooperation

While the COVID pandemic made health equity a focal part of the first AU-CARICOM Summit, it received less attention during the second summit in 2025. Still, member states reaffirmed commitments to advance South-South cooperation and capacity-building through the [Health Development Partnership for Africa and the Caribbean](#) (HeDPAC), in collaboration with the AU Commission's Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development (HHS) and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC). These initiatives seek to develop and strengthen regional capacity for medical emergencies and workforce development. Heads of State

and Government expressed their willingness to cooperate in advancing the health and well-being of their citizens, as set forth under [SDG 3](#) and [Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want](#).

On technology and innovation, member states acknowledged the urgent need to enhance engagement with emerging technologies, such as AI, to avoid further exclusion from global innovation systems that have historically excluded them. Member states pledged to increase skills among their citizens to prepare their countries to become leaders in this area, while also advancing cooperation in research and development, along with the responsible, inclusive, and ethical governance and deployment of emerging technologies.

d. Climate Change, Governance, and Reparatory Justice Commitments

Delegates also addressed the pressing impacts of climate change, especially for low-lying and landlocked nations, and reiterated the need for reform within various United Nations bodies, like the UN National Security Council, to amplify African and Caribbean voices related to peace, security, and decision-making. Immediately following the AU Caricom meeting was a meeting on the climate crisis. The [2nd Africa Climate Summit](#) aimed to improve the shared vision of climate action and advance Africa led solutions.

Although specific reparatory justice plans were not extensively outlined, several country representatives stated their countries' unwavering commitment to addressing past harms and the reparation agenda. The summit unanimously concluded with the adoption of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Reparatory Justice for Africans and People of African Descent, without any amendments. As reported by *The St. Vincent Times* on

September 7, 2025, the [draft communiqué](#), which is probably close to the final version, as although the official final text has not yet been published, while many states, especially Caribbean nations, repeatedly called for reparations, these calls lacked detailed plans. The draft communiqué ended with a single mention of reparations:

“Heads of State and Government reiterated their unwavering call for reparatory justice for Africans and People of African Descent. They underscored that the enduring legacies of the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans and chattel enslavement constitute grave crimes against humanity, which necessitate restitution, compensation and development. To this end, the Summit agreed to adopt “The Addis Ababa Declaration on Transcontinental Partnership in Pursuit of Reparatory Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations.”

8. Conclusion: Advancing Transatlantic Unity

The meeting closed, having met its goals to increase collaboration on shared challenges and improve conditions in member states. There was a reaffirmation to hold the Africa-CARICOM Summit regularly, with a commitment to alternate hosting between Africa and the Caribbean. The next meeting is scheduled for September 7, 2028, at a CARICOM location. However, the Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, Dr. Terrance Drew, urged the group to meet before the scheduled meeting in 2028, if necessary, through a virtual meeting.

Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, emphasized the need for financial support for the AU CARICOM Secretariat to manage to work needed to sustain the partnership’s work. H.E. Chief Fortune Charumbira, President of the Pan-African

Parliament, stated that *“The 2nd Africa-CARICOM Summit represents a turning point in building a truly united transcontinental partnership. The Pan-African Parliament stands ready to provide legislative support and ensure the voices of Africans and people of African descent are championed in this historic pursuit of reparatory justice and sustainable development.”*

The meeting highlighted the importance of engaging with the African diaspora – particularly in countries with large populations of descendants of enslaved Africans, including the United States – though defining this group remains complex, especially where descendants are a minority in countries reluctant to acknowledge enslavement’s enduring impact. Engagement with Brazil currently seems more likely. Notably, Ron Daniels and Kamm Howard, affiliates of the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), attended the summit and were invited to sit with the CARICOM Reparations Commission.

Shortly after the summit, the new Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) was inaugurated on September 9, 2025. During the visit to Addis Ababa, Drs. Bassett and Francis visited the Science Museum of Ethiopia, which had a significant focus on Ethiopia’s plans to increase the use of AI and shift to electric and water-based energy sources and the ways in which Ethiopia hopes to lead these efforts across the continent. As a sign of the growing collaboration between the Caribbean and Africa, Prime Minister Motley attended to the ribbon cutting for the dam. In a period where many challenges remains, the steadfast commitment to pursuit of reparations was reinforced and the meeting ended on a hopeful note.

Reference list

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