**AACC Consultation on African Churches Perspectives on Decolonization and Reparations Debates in Global Christianity**

**Presentation on Development of the concept of Reparations**

**By Dr Tinashe Gumbo**

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**Presentation Outline**

* Reparative justice conversations within AU and AACC
* Understanding the Reparation discourse
* Problem with the current conversation
* Completing the conversation: True definition of reparations
* What the Church in Africa can do

1. **Reparative justice conversations**

* Conversations around reparations gained momentum globally and in Africa over the past couple of years
* There is no dispute about the fact that justice is required for the victims of serious violations resulting from historical crimes, namely, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, systemic discrimination etc

**African Union Efforts**

* Since 1963 (OAU) until now, reparations have been on the agenda of the AU: 2025 Theme, *‘Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparation’. See the AU Concept note of the theme for details.*
* AU has taken several decisions and supported initiatives to spearhead and promote the advancement of the cause of justice and the payment of reparations to Africans, and the restitution of cultural artifacts, relics, and heritage pillaged during colonisation and enslavement to the African countries where these items were looted and stolen (AU, 2025).
* Global Pan African movements and activism- continental activism for reparations, including reparative justice, was amplified by activism on for climate justice, debt justice, tax justice, a call for the reform of global economic and financial institutions, as well as the call for transformation of the global governance systems.
* **Group of Eminent Persons:** The emergence of political activism led by people such as Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola of Nigeria led to the OAU officially inaugurating the 12-Member Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) at a meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, on 28th June 1992.
* **1993 Abuja Proclamation on Reparations** sponsored by the GEP and the Commission for Reparations of the OAU became the first common position on reparations by the African leaders.
* **2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**: The AU joined the United Nations at the Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The declaration was comprehensive and the first world commitment to dealing with racism etc. The declaration was reaffirmed by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights through the 2022 Resolution on Africa’s Reparations Agenda and Human Rights.
* **The 2021 Continental Experts Workshop on the Restitution of Cultural Property and Heritage** was held in collaboration with the Government of Senegal.
* **2022 Africa-Diaspora Summit on Reparations in Ghana**: co-organized by the Government of Ghana, Africa Transitional Justice Legacy, Africa America Institute, the Global Circle for Reparations and Healing, and other Diaspora organizations under the theme ‘Advancing Justice: Reparations and Racial Healing’. The major innovation in the declaration was the inclusion of the notion of racial healing in the conversation on Reparations.
* **2023 Accra Proclamation**: In 2023, a lot of actions were fulfilled. The stakeholder's meetings, Accra Reparations Conference, tour to the Republic of Barbados etc. Subsequent actions led to the adoption of the 2025 theme on reparative justice.

**AACC**

* The AACC General Secretary shared our journey on this matter and what we hope to gain out of this consultative meeting we are holding, more focused on this matter.
* AACC and other Faith Actors: Virtual Consultation (Jan) and Addis Pre-Heads of State and Government Summit
* We also continued to infuse conversations on reparations in our ongoing work on climate justice, debt justice, tax justice, racial justice, and other dimensions of system change



1. **Understanding reparative discourse of reparation, restoration, and restorative justice**



Daly and Proietti-Scifoni (2011) discuss the meanings of reparation, restoration, and restorative justice and their histories and applications. They argue that reparation is a recent addition to domestic criminal justice in common law countries, although it has been a principle of domestic and international law for many centuries. Equally, restoration is a recent addition to domestic criminal justice, international law, and transitional justice, having emerged in the mid-1980s with advocacy, theory, and research associated with restorative justice.

Restoration and restorative justice are largely confined to domestic criminal justice. However, restoration now appears in international human rights instruments as an element of restitution and restorative justice associated with truth commissions (Roche, 2003, and Brahm, 2004, cited in Daly and Proietti-Scifoni, 2011)

On the other hand, in general, reparation is more often associated with international human rights and humanitarian law and justice mechanisms in connection with war, internal conflict, and states’ wrongful acts against states or individuals. REDRESS (undated), an NGO for torture victims, describes reparation as “refocusing on the restorative in addition to the retributive”.

It can be seen that generally, the discussion around the three concepts entails focusing on mechanisms of ‘access to justice’ and reparation (the latter including restitution, compensation etc), which together form remedies for violations of human rights.

* Reparation, restoration, and restorative justice contain new roles for victims, offenders, and other participants, and new ideas about what should occur. These center on a more informal, dialogic process, which may provide openings for offender remorse and victim validation; active participation by lay actors; and sanctions that are linked in a meaningful way to offenses.
* Etymologically (history of the word) and historically, reparation and restoration developed from similar roots, but they evolved differently in international and domestic criminal justice.
* The international criminal justice field divides “justice” and “reparation,” with the former focused on standard modes of adjudicating and punishing offenders, and the latter, on modes of redress for victims, typically as collectivities.
* Reparation is an umbrella term that includes restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. Below, I summarize the key elements of reparation relevant for this consultation.
* **Restitution:** returning or restoring victims to their original situation before the violations. But is it possible?
* **Compensation:** entails payment for damage or losses and is usually required when full restitution is impossible e.g, climate financing in the form of grants and not debts

**NB:** What is enough compensation? Who determines the amounts? What is the role of an ordinary victim in the discussion of that?

* **Rehabilitation:** includes the provision of medical and psychological care as well as legal and social services.

**NB:** Is this applicable to historical crimes?

* **Satisfaction**: acknowledgement of the violations, an expression of regret, a formal apology, measures to stop violations, commemorations and tributes to victims, memorials, public disclosure of the truth.

Global North countries, including the Netherlands, Denmark, France, the UK, and the European Parliament, have already issued public apologies for their role in the slave trade. Pope John 11 also issued an apology for the Church’s role in slavery. In 2021, Germany issued an apology for its role in the slaughter of the Herero and Nama people in Namibia, labelling it a genocide.

This consultative meeting should also note the steps taken by some individual African countries, such as Benin, Ghana, and Uganda, which have also apologized to the Africans in the Diaspora for the countries’ involvement in the slave trade.

**NB:** Apologies made by leaders, does this represent the country’s stance? Apology to Africans in the Diaspora, what about the relatives who were left behind in Africa? Is an apology enough? What else could the countries have done? Thus, the question of who should be making the apology and to whom should be well discussed in this meeting to guide the Church in Africa’s advocacy on the matter.

* **Guarantee of non-repetition**: contributes to non-recurrence; associated with structural reforms and strengthening of state institutions and laws, and ensuring sufficient civilian oversight. Transforming the global economic and political systems.

**NB:** After apologies, what else did the Global North do to guarantee non-recurrence? Are they prepared for the transformation of the global institutions they control?

1. **Problem with the current conversation**

Cristina Duarte, the Under Secretary-General and Special Advisor on Africa to the United Nations Secretary General (2 May 2025), laments the incompleteness of the reparations conversations. She raises the following issues:

* The conversation is driven by historical developments
* Confined to rectifying past wrongs in financial terms
* No serious conversations to address the structural injustices that have continued to affect humanity in the Global South
* The discussion has remained incomplete and misdirected
* The Past YES, but Africa is suffocating within the international commerce and multilateralism: IMF, WB, WTO, UN etc.
* African theology of finance, trade, etc?
* The conversation does not include intersectional issues of gender, peace, faith etc
* The conversation happens at political leadership levels, with little or nothing happening at the local community levels that lost their ancestral land to colonialists, their relatives to slave traders etc.

1. **Completing the conversation**



* Slavery, colonial exploitation, violent occupation, racial discrimination, and cultural pillage are monumental crimes, hence, the demand for justice is not negotiable
* However, there is a need to consider the present-day systemic injustices
* The past created the present challenges Africa faces today
* Unfavorable global economic system- extractivism
* Huge African debt (odious and illegitimate debt); climate crisis; Illicit financial flows (tax injustices-tax evasion and tax avoidance); export of raw materials (e.g. DRC cobalt -70% but only 1% refined locally, Zimbabwe platinum too); environmental degradation



* Thus, the definition of reparation should not be stuck in history. It should consider the present challenges of Africa emanating from the past.
* It should go beyond the financial discussion but also consider intersectional matter- faith, gender, peace etc
* It should be a call for the transformation of the rules that govern the international economic and political game: trade, finance, and governance systems, which perpetuate injustices
* There is a need to avoid contradiction: if not challenged, the current conversation can allow the Global North to use stolen African wealth to pay for the reparation. Africa continues to lose resources through sustained pillars of extractivism, tax avoidance, and evasion, debt servicing etc.
* The need for comprehensive restructuring of the political and economic structures that perpetuate African underdevelopment
* It should be a holistic program meant to dismantle all forms of injustice. There is a need to consolidate the various declarations and proclamations made by the AU into a single comprehensive call for reparations.

1. **What should the Church do?**
   1. Taking advantage of the current momentum created by the AU 2025 theme and program of action, the Church should advocate to the AU to ensure that its framing of reparations is intersectional, addressing the compounding effects of race, gender, class, and other forms of identity-based discrimination
   2. To meaningfully pursue reparative justice, the AU should encourage global north nations and global institutions, including the Church, to acknowledge and apologise for the historical harms done to Africans and people of African descent. There must be a recognition of their complicity in the injustices of the slave trade, colonialism, and contemporary neo-colonialism. Only when there is an admission of past wrongs can there be true commitment to repair and reconciliation.
   3. Advocacy on debt justice: debt cancellation, debt audit, debt forgiveness, etc. The current global financial system has deep historical roots in the inequities of colonialism. The system is dominated by international financial institutions, notably the IMF, the World Bank, and global capital markets, which are heavily influenced by philosophical positions that prioritize market liberalism, creditor dominance, and resource extraction. After decades of extractivism on the continent’s resources, these institutions have contributed far more to the inequalities and destitution in African countries through their conditional lending policies in the guise of economic reforms. Oftentimes, borrowing countries are forced into positions of implementing deeply unfair and unpopular policies.
   4. The Church in Africa should amplify its role in the Zacchaeus Tax Campaign, relaunched in Africa by the world ecumenical partners in 2023. The AU member states must not relent in their efforts to support the United Nations Tax Convention process to promote international tax cooperation, tackle tax avoidance, and raise the necessary public finance. The current tax regime is shrouded in inequalities and loopholes that have led to the unaccounted extraction of African resources.
   5. Climate justice: The Church should continue to advocate for climate justice through interfaith platforms. The call for increased and proper administration of loss and damage funding (climate financing-grants) should continue.
   6. Reform of the global economic and financial architecture
   7. Reform of the global governance system
   8. As I conclude, I wish to express my support for the emerging school of thought pursued by Abdul Karim Bangura and others, the *deneocoloniality* paradigm that argues that the *decoloniality* school of thought is absolving those in the developing countries who are willing partners in perpetuating the oppressive mechanisms on their people. Bangura and others argue that we have elements in Africa that have even established additional oppressive machinations on their people for their self-aggrandizement.

