

PRESENTATION BY
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IN COLLABORATION WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMISSION IN JAMAICA

***“A CONVERSATION WITH AFRICA:
TRUTH, RECONCILIATION AND REPARATORY JUSTICE”***

THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 2021

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The P. J. Patterson Centre for Africa-Caribbean Advocacy is honoured by the invitation to serve as Co-Host of the Second Webinar in this series of a Conversation with Africa.

It is for a purpose such as this we were launched one year ago by our Vice Chancellor at The University of the West Indies Professor Sir Hilary Beckles.

As we commemorate International Day of Remembrance, as declared by the United Nations, we pay due homage to the victims of slavery in the Transatlantic Slave Trade by calling for Truth, Reconciliation and Reparatory Justice. We can never forget this most heinous crime against mankind. The European nations have never apologised to the victims or their descendants. Atonement for this crime against humanity is long overdue.

The P. J. Patterson Centre for African-Caribbean Advocacy will engage with whatever Universities and Scholars to enable us to win both the battle and end the war.

We must ensure victory at last. A Luta continua.

We are impelled to look further and beyond in the search to command redress, not only for our ancestors, but as well for future generations to obtain equal rights and justice.

We are all conscious of the ebb and flow of the global times within each decade. Yet there can be no doubt that the world we all inhabit now has witnessed a convulsion of unprecedented proportions. No one can predict how and when the scourge of the global pandemics will end.

I speak of COVID-19 and another pandemic - the pandemic of racism which has raised its ugly head in the most abhorrent fashion. It is no longer concealed but brazen and bare-faced. Nor can we ignore the genocide which the indigenous people in Africa and the Americas experience from day to day.

These two pandemics make 2021 a special year in which to focus on issues of poverty and chronic diseases that have affected our people so severely in Afro descendant communities throughout the Americas.

We can only overcome the deficit and legacy of slavery by recognising the imperative to work together with unity of purpose and action. The people of Africa, the Caribbean and the African Diaspora constitute a mighty force. We must display an invincible Spirit to fight as one single army in the struggle for peace, justice and progress.

The immortal words of the legend Peter Tosh remind us.

Without Peace, there can be no justice.

The global crises, the flagrant discrimination we face impel us to be decisive and determined to confront boldly the iniquity and inequities we have suffered for far too long. If not now, when if ever it will end?

Lest we forget, Africa too has been robbed of an entire generation who would be expected to supply the critical elements of human capital to provide the requisite skills for its progress and prosperity.

The A.U. has among its objectives the full participation of its Diasporas, an important element in the building of the African Continent in its entirety.

My participation today is therefore all the more pleasing as a Trustee of the African Union Foundation. It was spawned to facilitate the meaningful involvement of the African Union to facilitate its Sixth Region and the African Diaspora on this side of the Atlantic in the forging of stronger links with the entire Continent.

We cannot allow this moment to escape our grasp.

Recently, there have been some encouraging signs that the slave trading countries are beginning to recognise that the evil and pernicious nature of human trafficking will never be forgotten or forgiven. Universities, banks, corporate businesses, museums are among the entities which have started to accept responsibility for the egregious sins. A few enlightened Parliamentarians have come to realise that the calls for reparation are getting louder and the just demands for reparatory justice will only intensify.

Ours is not a plea for charity nor an appeal for alms. We are not beggars – we are demanding adequate compensation for the wrongs we have suffered.

Four centuries have come and gone without any semblance of stirring the conscience of our captors. We were stolen from Africa to labour on the sugar estates in the West Indies, or to pick cotton from the plantations in the South of the U.S.A.

While preaching in the pulpits with our eyes closed and their pockets bulging they taught us hymns to sing:

***O'er heathen lands afar
Thick darkness broodeth yet.***

The colonial masters were busy capturing the lands, dividing our people by drawing boundaries which separated one tribe into several parts while pilfering the gold, the diamonds, and later on the uranium, to enrich Europe and create the “first world” entirely at our expense.

It is time we say loudly and say together **“Enough is more than enough – Not one day longer.”**

The Caribbean for its part, largely through CARICOM, has never failed to recognise that with Africa as a crucial partner how much more powerful and irreversible is our insistence that there be one law and one system of international law that secures a guilty verdict for those who have perpetrated the atrocities of slavery.

To succeed, we have to change the culture – we even have to change the vocabulary. Why is it that with the exception of one’s bank account, “black” is always a word that is degenerative or degrading – “black sheep” of the family; “black” spot; “black” day?

We have been condemned to

Abject poverty, hunger, ignorance and disease.

We are but three years before the end of the International Decade for People of African descent.

Now is the time to increase the sound and intensify the pressure –

Sound and Pressure.

Africans and African descendants have continued to contribute prolifically across all aspects of human endeavour. Healing through articulation of our truth, securing an apology from offending countries; reconciliation; repair and adequate recompense are long past due. England found a way to compensate slave owners; the loss we have suffered is incalculable but we are prepared to consider full payment by instalments according to the value of their currency with compound interest outstanding.

Reparation is long overdue to redress the wrong we have suffered.

International law ought to recognise that nations or individuals who have wronged other nations or individuals should make reparation to wipe out the consequences of the illegal act and restore the situation which would have existed if the act had not been committed.

Through the process of reparation, it is imperative to undertake in earnest, 'truth and reconciliation' between victims and beneficiaries – uncomfortable truths must be confronted and there be equity in every aspect of human endeavour.

Today we remember the victims who managed to survive the horrors of the Middle Passage. How can we ever forget the 400 years of trauma, which people of colour have endured nor the 15 million victims who perished on the way.

The Trade and slavery itself and colonialism have ended. However, the legacy of pain and systemic racism are still alive. Inter-racial discrimination is still flourishing and the pattern of inculcating a sense of innate inferiority is thriving against the negro race.

Poverty, debt and poor health remain in many affected communities and countries. Unequal access to education, health care, justice and technology are also common features. Negatively affecting Africans and African Descendants is the scourge of violence; stymied development; fractured identities; and many other dysfunctions.
