

# Public Statement by Civil Society Organizations in Europe and the United States Representing People of African Descent on Britain's Historical Involvement in the Transatlantic Traffic of Enslaved Africans and Its Far Reaching Impacts\*

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Articles appearing this past weekend in both the [Guardian](#) and [Independent](#) newspapers in Britain reveal the shocking scale of British "slave ownership" found in scores of official records which have found that thousands of contemporary Britons, including Prime Minister David Cameron, are related to "slave owners" who received huge sums of compensation when the "trade" was abolished in 1833.

The occasion for the articles are the recent findings of a [six-year project](#) by University College London and the premier of the documentary, [Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners: Profit and Loss](#), which is presented by historian and filmmaker David Olusoga and will be broadcast on BBC2 on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July.

In the [Guardian](#) piece Olusoga writes that, "The disadvantage and discrimination that disfigures the lives and limits the life chances of so many African-Americans is the bitter legacy of the slave system and the racism that underwrote and outlasted it. Britain, by contrast, has been far more successful at covering up its slave-owning and slave-trading past."

Olusoga adds that enslavement has largely been "airbrushed out of British history"; that many today have a more vivid image of American enslavement than of life as it was for British-"owned" enslaved persons on the plantations of the Caribbean. "The history of British slavery has been buried," he writes.

Historians generally acknowledge that British ships transported 40% of the conservatively estimated 12 million enslaved persons across the Atlantic and that Britain made more profits from its investments in "slave-trading" of African persons than any other European "slave-trading" nation. Britain extracted more wealth from the Caribbean "slave plantation" than any other European "slave-owning" nation. The Royal family, led by King James II, established Britain's first "slave-trading" corporation – The Royal African Company, chartered in 1672. Like the Royals, the current British Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron, is also an inheritor and beneficiary of enslaved African peoples.

The full abolition of British enslavement on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1838 was followed by the racial apartheid of colonial law and a racialised social hierarchy that is still with the descendants of the original victims – in the United Kingdom as in the United States and the Anglophone Caribbean.

The 2001 [UN World Conference Against Racism](#) (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa, acknowledged that the transatlantic enslavement and trafficking of human beings is a crime against humanity, that its institutionalisation of race and racial stratification made it among the major sources of racism in the world today, and that African peoples and people of African descent were its victims and they continue to be victims of its consequences.

As a signatory to the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, Britain needs to act urgently to settle its outstanding obligation to those who continue to be adversely affected by centuries of its racial apartheid. It can, and should, begin this year, which inaugurates the UN International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024.

The "[Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent](#)" (UN resolution A/RES/69/16) - which was adopted by the General Assembly in November 2014 – acknowledges and profoundly regrets “the untold suffering and evils inflicted on millions of men, women and children” as a result of the transatlantic enslavement and trafficking of human beings and Eurocentric colonisation and empire.

It calls upon those States “that have not yet expressed remorse or presented apologies to find some way to contribute to the restoration of the dignity of its victims” and invites “the international community and its members to honour the memory of the victims of these tragedies with a view to closing those dark chapters in history and as a means of reconciliation and healing.” Moreover, it calls upon “all States concerned to take appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of those practices, bearing in mind their moral obligations.”

Considering all of this, the following signatories of this Statement, the European Reparations Commission (ERC), the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), the Pan-African Reparations Coalition in Europe (PARCOE), the Global Afrikan Congress in the UK (GACuk), Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Professor Verene A. Shepherd, Dr. Doudou Diène, and members of the European Network of People of African Descent (ENPAD), call upon:

1. The British Government and its Prime Minister David Cameron to take full responsibility for the United Kingdom’s involvement in Maangamizi (The African Holocaust) and its far reaching consequences and to fulfill its obligations to African peoples and people of African descent as well as to other victims of historical injustices, as mandated by the United Nations;
2. The British Government and its Prime Minister David Cameron to finally heed the calls that have been made throughout the years – beginning with Quobna Ottobah

Cugoano in *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787) – to establish a National Commission of Enquiry on the historical and contemporary national and international impact of Britain’s transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans; including contemporary issues that have followed in its wake such as debt bondage and other injustices in international relations and the continuing impact of structural racism and discrimination<sup>1</sup>;

3. That the British Government and its Prime Minister David Cameron establish the month of August each year as the National Maangamazi Awareness Month – beginning with 1 August as a National Memorial Day for the abolition of Britain’s enslavement and trafficking of African peoples and people of African descent, and furthermore, to give recognition to the annual 1 August African heritage communities march for reparatory justice, and greater recognition to 23 August as the UN International Day for Remembrance of the Resistance to the Transatlantic Traffic in Enslaved Africans and its Abolition;

Furthermore, we, the signatories of this Statement, call upon:

4. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to assertively and firmly move forward with its claims for reparatory justice from the United Kingdom and other European states for the adverse and unjust consequences of enslavement and Eurocentric colonisation and empire in the Caribbean, and the British Government and its Prime Minister David Cameron to show utmost care, concern and respect for these claims. Therefore we, call upon (a) CARICOM to *urgently* submit to the Government of Britain the “LETTER OF COMPLAINTS” that has been approved by the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) and is now before the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee of CARICOM, and (b) the British Government to agree, on receipt of this letter, to the proposed Summit outlined therein on Reparatory Justice for the transatlantic enslavement and trafficking of human beings and its legacies. We welcome Chairman of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles prediction, in [the British House of Commons on 16 July 2014](#), that “this 21st Century will be the century of global reparatory justice.”

Signed by,

European Reparations Commission (ERC)

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<sup>1</sup> We want to remind the British Government and Public that there already is a national commission dedicated to the memory of the German holocaust during WWII, the [Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission](#), which issued a report this year and was tasked with establishing what more Britain must do to ensure that the memory of the Holocaust is preserved and that the lessons it teaches are never forgotten. There is no reason for the United Kingdom to be less diligent in recognizing, researching, remembering, teaching, keeping alive the memory of and otherwise respecting its direct involvement in the transatlantic traffic in enslaved Africans and its far reaching impacts.

National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC)

Pan-African Reparations Coalition in Europe (PARCOE)

Global Afrikan Congress in the UK (GACuk)

Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, Historian

Professor Verene A. Shepherd, Historian

Dr. Doudou Diène, Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

European Network of People of African Descent (ENPAD), including:

ADEFRA Grassroots e.v., Germany

Africa Council Berlin/Brandenburg, Germany

African Diaspora Youth Network in Europe (ADYNE)

Belgian Platform of the European Network of Migrant Women, Belgium

Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (Le CRAN), France

D'HERO, Netherlands

Ebony African Cultural, Arts and Human Right Organization, Hungary

Fight Racism Now (FRN), Sweden

The Initiative of Black People in Germany (ISD), Germany

Initiative of Panafrican Women Alliance, Germany

Narrative Eye, UK

New Urban Collective, Netherlands

Operation Black Vote (OBV), UK

Pan-African Women's Liberation Organisation, Germany

Panafricanism Working Group, Germany

Platform of African Communities, Belgium

Raad van Afrikaanse gemeenschappen in Europa afdeling Vlaanderen,

Belgium

Soul Rebel Movement, Netherlands

Trajets pour la Reconstruction du Kasai, Belgium

Zwarte Piet Niet, Netherlands

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