

Concept Note

HIGH-LEVEL EVENT

Theme:

"Consolidating the normative framework in the struggle for justice for the victims of slavery, deportation and colonization: Contribution of international law and UN mechanisms for just and lasting reparations"

September 2025

I- Background and rationale

A- Background

According to several international reports and texts, the establishment of effective restorative justice for Africans and people of African descent, victims of slavery, deportation and colonization, would be a catalyst for advancing international agendas for sustainable development and the promotion of human rights.

In 2019, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance described the issue of reparative justice as an "**urgent project**" to which the community of states must respond absolutely.¹

UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent² emphasize the need for due recognition of the suffering inflicted on the victims of slavery, deportation and colonization as well as the need for structural reparation for the intergenerational damage caused by such acts.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA)³ recognised that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of colonialism and continue to be victims of its consequences. Furthermore, the effects and persistence of these structures and practices have been among the factors contributing to lasting social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world today;

Despite these proclamations, the process towards the effective realization of restorative justice still seems to have stalled. In order to relaunch this legitimate process and place it on the international agenda, Africa, through a variety of initiatives, is fully committed to the ongoing reclamation and advocacy of restorative justice.

In 2023, at a conference co-organized by the Republic of Ghana and the African Union, African states adopted the Accra Proclamation on Reparations, which called for a united front for justice and reparations, including "*the exploration of legal and judicial options for reparations*"⁴.

In line with this logic of obtaining reparations through the law, the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, upon a proposal by the Togolese Republic, adopted on 16 February 2025 a

¹ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/74/321>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5768-people-african-descent-report-permanent-forum-people-african>

³ Paragraphs 98 to 106 of the DDPA

<https://www.un.org/en/fight-racism/background/durban-declaration-and-programme-of-action>

⁴ <https://au.int/fr/decisions/accra-proclamation-reparations>

historic decision on the "***Qualification of slavery, deportation and colonization as crimes against humanity and genocide against the peoples of Africa***". ⁵

This major decision is in line with the relevant resolution of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) on reparations for Africans and people of African descent adopted in 2024⁶ and the African Union's 2025 theme: "Justice for people of African descent through reparations".

Most recently, the African Union and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) held the ***2nd Africa-CARICOM Summit*** in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from September 7 to 9, 2025, with the aim of strengthening integration and cooperation between the two regions, particularly in the context of seeking reparations for historical wrongs. This common front tries to consolidate the shared commitment of both communities, drawing in particular on relevant initiatives within CARICOM such as the ***CARICOM 10-point plan for reparatory justice*** developed by the ***CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC)***.

These initiatives are urgent appeals for a more committed and decisive international law, for the international recognition of the atrocities of these crimes and their fair legal qualification, as well as the consolidation of the legitimate right to reparations.

The planned high-level event aims to contribute to this consolidation of the normative framework of restorative justice for Africans and people of African descent, through the promotion of greater involvement of UN mechanisms.

B- Rationale

The high-level event is fully framed in the Second International Decade for People of African Descent (2025-2034) proclaimed by the United Nations, under the theme "*People of African Descent: Consideration, Justice and Development*"⁷. It aims to create a pragmatic dynamic of action towards restorative justice, in particular by leveraging law and justice mechanisms within the United Nations system.

The 34th African Union (AU) Assembly Heads of State and Government through its Decision dated 07 February 2021 declared the Decade for African Roots and Diaspora for the period 2021-2031. The same decision established the High Committee in Charge of the Agenda for the Decade on African Roots and Diaspora, whose inaugural session was held on 10 June 2021. The High Committee is at an advanced stage of preparatory work for the convening of the Nineth Pan-African Congress to be held in Lomé, Togo, from 04 to 08 December 2025.

⁵ <https://diplomatie.gouv.tg/adoption-de-la-decision-sur-la-qualification-de-lesclavage-de-la-deportation-et-de-la-colonisation-comme-des-crimes-contre-lhumanite-et-de-genocide-contre-les-peuples-dafrique>

⁶ CADHP/Res.616 (LXXXI) 2024, November 14, 2024

<https://achpr.au.int/fr/adopted-resolutions/616-travers-des-consultations-sur-les-descendants-dafricains-lascendance-autoch>

⁷ <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/stories/2024/12/second-international-decade-people-african-descent-renews-call-recognition-justice>

The event will also serve as an opportunity for the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to gather relevant proposals and recommendations with a view to drafting a *general recommendation on restorative justice*, scheduled to coincide with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of its creation.

The debates and recommendations will help to identify the avenues for the collective action needed to boost the reparations process. The event will also be an opportunity for States to enrich the discussions through the courageous decisions taken in their national legislations and within their regional groupings, emphasizing their scope and perspectives.

The role of the Human Rights Council (HRC), the contribution of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and other international human rights courts, and the involvement of the United Nations' political and technical structures, will be addressed.

Furthermore, the discussions and recommendations that will emerge from this high-level event will enrich the scope of commitments and proposals aimed at reversing the "*denial of justice*" and accelerating the process towards urgent, effective and lasting reparations.

II- Practical information

Title of the Activity	High-level event on the theme: " <i>Consolidating the normative framework in the struggle for justice for the victims of slavery, deportation and colonization: Roles of the international law and the UN mechanisms for just and lasting reparations</i> ".
Venue	Geneva, (Room to be advised)
Date and time	<i>23 October 2025</i>
Participation level	Ministers, Representatives of UN institutions and mechanisms (OHCHR, HRC), Ambassadors-Permanent Representatives, High-level Experts (Academia and Thinktanks), Reporting Committees and other relevant UN mechanisms, civil society organizations
Organizer(s) and stakeholders	Permanent missions of Ghana, South Africa, Togo, the Permanent Delegation of the African Union, and CARICOM coordination

III- Objective

The overall objective is to stimulate greater support and commitment to the issue of reparations for Africans and People of African descent as victims of slavery, deportation and colonization, notably by using the power of law and judicial mechanisms.

More specifically, the event aims to gather thoughts and perspectives on the idea of the ***Human Rights Council adopting a resolution highlighting the collective and individual obligations of States with regard to reparations, remedial measures and redress for slavery, the slave trade and the trans-Atlantic slave trade and their importance and their impact on the Sustainable Development Agenda.***

The reflexion work will also address the possibility of ***adopting a UN General Assembly resolution specifically on the issue of restorative justice***, as a follow-up to its previous resolutions recognizing slavery as a serious violation of human rights and commemorating the bicentenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade.

IV- Format and specific themes

A- Format

The planned event will take the form of a half-day panel discussion, with ***one (01) opening ceremony*** and ***two (02) mixed and diversified panels, each led by a moderator.*** Each panel will formulate ***recommendations that will be reflected in the event's final report***, which will in turn be published and communicated to UN member states and relevant organizations.

B- Themes

The chosen themes are meant to encourage constructive reflection whilst identifying practical ways forward in the reparations process.

In particular, they relate to the legal qualification of atrocities committed from the perspective of the general and criminal international law to ways of strengthening the specific legal framework for reparations, and to the mobilization and strengthening of the common front for restorative justice.

All speakers will be encouraged to uphold courtesy during debates and to favour a constructive recommendations approach.

V- Resources

In the context of this activity, and in view of the associated expenses, the financial contribution of each stakeholder is welcome.

VI- Expected outcomes

It is expected that the initiative will produce the following outcomes:

- The qualification of slavery, deportation during the slave trade and colonization as international crimes, as adopted by the African Union upon Togo's initiative, is further consolidated;
- The possibility of submitting a specific draft resolution on reparations to the Human Rights Council is examined and discussed;
- The possibility of submitting a specific draft resolution on reparations to the UN General Assembly is examined and discussed;
- The united front for restorative justice for Africans and people of African descent is created, in accordance with the Accra Proclamation;
- The consultative or even litigation path of international justice is explored;
- The implementation of the DDPA is strengthened;
- Best practices and relevant projects are shared.