

Reparations Demand Expanding Among African People Worldwide

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Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo are issuing calls for damages rendered during European imperialist occupation joining efforts already underway across the continent and the Diaspora

During late August, the Central African state of Burundi appealed to the Belgian and German governments to pay reparations for the crimes committed during their colonial occupation of this country during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Burundi joins the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which had already spoken to the issue making similar claims on Belgium, the imperialist power which laid waste to the country from 1876 through the 1960s.

Prior to the recent efforts by Burundi and the DRC, people in the Republic of Namibia and the United Republic of Tanzania filed claims against the German government for their role in the genocide carried out during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Namibia, formerly known as Southwest Africa, the Nama and Herero nations suffered immensely as a result of the mass extermination of their people.

In Tanzania, there were atrocities committed by the German colonial authorities which prompted the rebellion against injustice known as the Maji Maji Revolt of 1905-1907. A similar war of liberation was waged also in Namibia, although in both cases the imperialists were able, through the ruthless use of weaponry, overcome at that time, the resistance of African people.

These demands for reparations are not isolated. There are other countries within the African Diaspora which have also made the same demands.

The International Struggle for Reparations

Of course in the United States, various organizations going back decades have made the call for the payment of reparations for nearly 250 years of African enslavement. Some of these organizations include the Nation of Islam, Republic of New Africa, National Black Economic Development Conference, National Coalition for Black Reparations in America (NCOBRA), among others. Additional demands for reparations are being made for mass killings and displacement as occurred in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921, when an estimated 300 African Americans were killed by white mobs including law-enforcement agents.

Even in the Caribbean island-nation of Haiti, after the 12 year rebellion and revolutionary war for independence (1791-1803), the former colonial and slave-owning power of France in 1825 demanded the payment of indemnity for their supposed economic losses during the liberation of the country. Concurrently, successive U.S. administrations in the wake of the Haitian Revolution refused to recognize the African-Caribbean nation diplomatically until 1862, more than a year after the beginning of the Civil War.

Deposed Haitian President Jean Bertrand Aristide raised the demand for reparations from France based upon the post-colonial history of the country. Aristide was overthrown by a coalition of imperialist states including the U.S., France and Canada in 2004.

On a broader level, the [Caribbean Community \(CARICOM\)](#), composed of various governments within the region, has established a Commission to pursue reparations from the imperialist states. The Caribbean Reparations Commission explains its mission on their website saying:

“The CARICOM Reparations Commission is a regional body created to Establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of Reparations by the Governments of all the former colonial powers and the relevant institutions of those countries, to the nations and people of the Caribbean Community for the Crimes against Humanity of Native Genocide, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and a racialized system of chattel Slavery.”

The U.S. had a vested interest in not recognizing Haiti because of its own role in the Atlantic Slave Trade. It was the profits accrued from the involuntary servitude of African people which fueled the rise of industrial capitalism. The fact that the U.S. fought a protracted Civil War which killed nearly a million people in order to end legal enslavement is a clear illustration of the significance of the system to the growth and development of the country. (See [this](#))

With specific reference to Burundi, a report on the actual political situation involving the government says:

“The country’s senate has put together a panel of experts to assess the damage done during colonialism and advise on the cost of damages, according to Radio France International. Burundi plans to send these recommendations to the German and Belgium governments. The country also intends to demand the European countries return stolen historical artifacts and archive material. From 1890, Germany colonized Burundi, which became part of German East Africa.” (See [this](#))

Image on the right: Belgian King Leopold II slaughtered millions of Africans in Congo



As this issue relates to the neighboring DRC, the Belgian colonialists engaged in genocidal policies inside the country for decades. Millions of Congolese were forced to work for the Belgian monarchy and later the colonial government in Brussels. It has been estimated that 8-10 million Congolese people died during the initial colonial engagement from 1876-1908, when after this period, King Leopold II relinquished direct control of the vast and mineral wealthy country to the regime in Brussels.

The [African Exponent news service](#) wrote of the continuing colonial and neo-colonial control by imperialism in the DRC that:

“King Leopold later handed Congo to Belgium, and the country perpetuated the evil rule initiated by Leopold, till Congo obtained its independence in 1960. And even after independence, the West connived together to assassinate Patrice Lumumba who had been democratically elected as the first prime minister of the country. In his place the West ensured its proxy, Mobutu Sese Seko got in, and his rule was extremely disastrous to the country as it was characterized by ruthlessness and looting that sounded like fiction.”

A report issued by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent surmised that Belgium should pay reparations to the DRC for the human rights violations committed by the colonial authorities. The Working Group goes as far as to suggest that the problems which have arisen since the independence of the country in June 1960 are a direct result of the legacy of colonialism.

Image below: Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba



Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961), who was the first leader of the independent former Belgian Congo, was overthrown by an alliance of U.S., Belgian and other imperialist

powers. These interests deliberately targeted Lumumba and his Congolese National Movement (MNC) for destabilization and liquidation. Although much information has been uncovered about the coup and brutal assassination of Lumumba (1960-1961) and his comrades, no person or entity has ever been held accountable in a court of law.

This report from the Working Group on the historical role of colonialism as well as the racist policies of contemporary Belgian society, emphatically notes:

“[W]ith a view to closing the dark chapter in history and as a means of reconciliation and healing....to issue an apology for the atrocities committed during colonization. The root causes of present-day human rights violations lie in the lack of recognition of the true scope of the violence and injustice of colonization. We are concerned about the human rights situation of people of African descent in Belgium who experience racism and racial discrimination. There is clear evidence that racial discrimination is endemic in institutions in Belgium.” (See [this](#))

Responses by Imperialism to Demands for Reparations and the Way Forward

All of the colonial, neo-colonial and imperialist states charged with human rights violations, genocide and other crimes against the people have either rejected the claims made against them or have provided inadequate responses. The U.S. has never even apologized for the centuries of enslavement and national oppression of African people.

Germany was reported to have made a miniscule offer to Namibia for its colonial atrocities. The Namibian government of President Hage Geingob, the leader of the South-West African People’s Organization (SWAPO), the liberation movement which led the struggle for independence against the settler-colonial apartheid regime, has dismissed the German gestures as insulting.

A report published in an independent newspaper said of the talks between Germany and Namibia did not result in any real offer by Berlin to provide reparations for colonial crimes against humanity. The article emphasizes that:

“A German special envoy in the ongoing genocide negotiations has rejected claims that his country had offered to pay Namibia about €10 million, or N\$180 million, as reparations. In June this year, President Hage Geingob said in his state of the nation address that Namibia rejected a €10 million offer by Germany as reparations for the genocide perpetrated by German settlers between 1904 and 1908. This offer was ‘an insult’, according to Geingob. Geingob in June also announced that the genocide talks were at an advance stage and that Germany was ready to apologize to the affected communities. However, Germany is now rejecting Geingob’s claims saying no offer was made for reparations.” (See [this](#))

These developments in Africa, the Caribbean and among African Americans in the U.S. illustrate the convergence of these struggles to hold the racist systems of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism responsible for their crimes historically and in recent decades. African Americans are still consistently targeted by law-enforcement and vigilantes for brutality and assassination.

The existence of these complimentary demands provides even broader openings for

international solidarity and organization. Only when there is a worldwide movement aimed at reversing the legacy of imperialism, will there be the possibility of creating a new international system based on genuine equality, self-determination and social justice.

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Featured image: Tanzania Maji Maji warriors as political prisoners of German colonialism; all images in this article are from the author

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