General Assembly Fourth Committee
Special Political and Decolonization

Reparations for Trans-Atlantic Slavery

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Introduction

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade forcibly displaced millions of Africans, treated human beings and their descendants as property, generated wealth for states and private actors, and contributed to racial hierarchies whose consequences remain subjects of international debate. The contemporary question before the United Nations is no longer simply how this history should be remembered, but rather how its consequences should be addressed through reparatory justice[1]. Reparations in this context are not limited to financial compensation. The debate increasingly encompasses formal acknowledgment and apologies, restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, education and memorialization, institutional and economic measures, and guarantees of non-repetition[2]. This broader understanding raises difficult questions: Who bears responsibility for harms committed centuries ago? Who should qualify as beneficiaries? How should historical and continuing harms be assessed? Which forms of redress are appropriate? And should existing development assistance count toward reparatory measures?

These questions have acquired greater diplomatic significance as African and Caribbean states have coordinated their positions and brought reparatory justice more prominently into multilateral institutions. The issue therefore combines historical justice with contemporary questions of international law, development, diplomacy and institutional responsibility. For the United Nations, the challenge is to facilitate cooperation among Member States with substantially different positions while determining what practical role the organization can play in advancing dialogue, documentation, restitution and other forms of redress.

Background

The contemporary international reparations debate developed through several stages of recognition, remembrance and regional mobilization. A major diplomatic milestone came at the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, South

[1] OSAA. 2025b. “Beyond Compensation: Reparatory Justice as a Structural Economic Imperative for Africa,” May 2, 2025. UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa
[2] OHCHR. 2023. “Strong Leadership and Political Will Crucial to Ensure Reparatory Justice for People of African Descent – UN Report,” September 28, 2023. United Nations/OHCHR source

Africa[3]. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action recognized slavery and the slave trade, including the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, as crimes against humanity and connected their historical legacies to continuing racism and racial discrimination. Durban did not establish a binding compensation mechanism, but it provided an important international framework for subsequent discussions of recognition, responsibility and remedy.

The United Nations subsequently developed a broader architecture of remembrance and education. In 2007, General Assembly Resolution 62/122 designated 25 March as the annual International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade and supported educational outreach. Later initiatives included the Ark of Return permanent memorial at United Nations Headquarters and the International Decade for People of African Descent[4]. Following the first Decade from 2015 to 2024, the General Assembly proclaimed a Second International Decade for 2025-2034, providing a continuing institutional setting for addressing recognition, justice and development.

Regional organizations increasingly moved the discussion from remembrance toward reparatory action. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) developed its Ten-Point Plan for Reparatory Justice, encompassing measures such as formal apology, public health, education, psychological rehabilitation, debt cancellation and other forms of redress. The African Union similarly elevated reparations into a continental diplomatic agenda and designated 2025 as the "Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations"[5]. Its programme emphasized developing a common African position, strengthening institutional mechanisms and expanding cooperation with CARICOM and the African diaspora.

These developments created the diplomatic foundation for a significant change at the United Nations in 2026. On 25 March, the General Assembly adopted the Ghana-led R*esolution A/RES/80/250* by 123 votes in favour, three against (Argentina, Israel and United States) and 52 abstentions[6]. The resolution declared the trafficking of enslaved Africans and racialized chattel enslavement of Africans the "gravest crime against humanity" and called for dialogue concerning multiple forms of reparatory justice. This marked an important transition from decades of recognition and remembrance toward more explicit consideration of redress.

Current Situation

The central issue in 2026 is increasingly one of implementation. Following the adoption of Resolution 80/250, attention has turned to what reparatory justice should encompass, how claims should be assessed, which institutions should coordinate the process and how states with different positions can participate. Ghana has played a prominent role in this implementation phase. From 17-19 June 2026, it convened the High-Level Consultative Conference on the next steps following Resolution 80/250. The Accra process established three mechanisms, which include a High-Level Advisory Council on Reparatory Justice, a Global Experts Panel on the Restitution of Cultural Heritage and a Global Legal Panel on Reparatory Justice. These mechanisms seek to develop legal, institutional and practical approaches to reparatory justice

[3] UN. 2001. *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action*, adopted at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, 31 August-8 September 2001.
[4] UNGA. 2007. *Permanent Memorial to and Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, A/RES/62/122, 17 December 2007. https://docs.un.org/A/RES/62/122
[5] AU. 2025. "AU Theme of the Year 2025: Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations," 2025. https://au.int/en/theme/2025
[6] Declaration of the Trafficking of Enslaved Africans and Racialized Chattel Enslavement of Africans as the Gravest Crime against Humanity, A/RES/80/250, adopted 25 March 2026. https://docs.un.org/A/RES/80/250

rather than reopening the question of whether the historical injustice should be recognized.

The process continued during the 81st session of the General Assembly[7]. On 23 September 2026, Ghana, Germany and France co-hosted a high-level side event focused on moving from commitments toward action, particularly regarding the return and restitution of cultural property[8]. President John Dramani Mahama proposed strengthening voluntary restitution, developing more permanent international legal and diplomatic mechanisms through the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and increasing investment in African museums, archives, conservation facilities and related infrastructure. The event did not establish a new universal reparations mechanism; rather, it demonstrated the growing emphasis on practical implementation and international cooperation.

Major disagreements nevertheless remain unresolved. Member States continue to differ over what constitutes reparations, which actors bear responsibility, who should qualify as beneficiaries, how historical harms should be measured, and whether responsibility should be understood in legal, political or moral terms. There is also disagreement over the appropriate balance among financial compensation, restitution, debt and development measures, institutional reform, acknowledgment and other forms of redress. Another unresolved question is whether existing development assistance can contribute to reparatory justice or whether reparations must be additional measures explicitly linked to acknowledged historical harms.

The current debate has therefore moved beyond recognition but has not produced consensus on implementation. Resolution 80/250 and subsequent initiatives have created greater political and institutional momentum, but questions of responsibility, beneficiaries, financing, legal authority and the form of redress remain at the centre of negotiations.

Forms and Mechanisms of Reparatory Justice

Cultural Restitution as Reparation Justice

The restitution of cultural property has emerged as one practical form of reparatory justice, particularly where objects were removed through colonial conquest, military expeditions or other coercive circumstances. Recent African cases demonstrate that restitution can take different forms and that the physical return of an object does not necessarily mean the transfer of its legal ownership.

In Ghana, 32 Asante royal objects held by the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum returned in 2024 under renewable loan arrangements, allowing the objects to be displayed in Ghana while ownership remained with the British institutions[9]. The case illustrates an important distinction between return through a loan and permanent restitution of ownership. A related restitution process emerged in 2026 concerning four cultural objects from Kpando (two war drums and two war horns) held by the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin[10]. Germany had authorized their repatriation to the Akpini of Kpando, and at the June 2026 reparatory justice conference in Accra, German Ambassador Frederik Landshöft presented Ghana with

[7] UNGA. 2026a. “81st Session of the UN General Assembly,” 2026. https://www.un.org/en/ga/81/
[8] UN. 2026. “General Assembly High-level Week 2026,” September 18-28, 2026. https://www.un.org/en/high-level-week-2026
[9] British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, and Manhyia Palace Museum, “Asante Regalia to Be Displayed in Ghana for the First Time in 150 Years,” January 25, 2024. https://www.britishmuseum.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/Asante_regalia_to_be_displayed_in_Ghana_for_first_time_in_150_years.pdf
[10] Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. “Repatriations from the Ethnological Museum.” December 2, 2025. https://www.preussischer-kulturbesitz.de/en/newsroom/press/press-releases/detail-page/article/2025/12/02/repatriations-from-the-ethnological-museum.html

provenance research documenting the objects and their colonial-era acquisition[11].

In June 2025, the Netherlands returned 119 Benin Bronzes that had been looted during the British attack on Benin City, Nigeria in 1897[12]. The Dutch government described the restitution as unconditional, and ownership was transferred to Nigeria. This demonstrates a state-to-state model in which legal title accompanies physical return. Ethiopia illustrates the difficulties that can arise when restitution remains unresolved.

British forces removed manuscripts, religious objects and royal possessions from Maqdala in 1868, many of which subsequently entered British collections[13]. The British Museum acknowledges the military circumstances through which its Maqdala collection was acquired and has received requests for the return of sacred objects, but discussions continue. In Kenya, restitution has involved source communities more directly. In 2023, 85 sacred vigango, which are memorial sculptures associated with Mijikenda communities, were returned from four museums in the United States and formally received at Kaya Kauma in Kilifi County[14].

Together, these cases demonstrate that cultural restitution can involve renewable loans, permanent transfers of ownership, unresolved claims, or direct engagement with source communities. They also raise broader questions for reparatory justice: who should own contested heritage, who should receive returned objects, and whether physical return without transfer of legal ownership constitutes adequate redress.

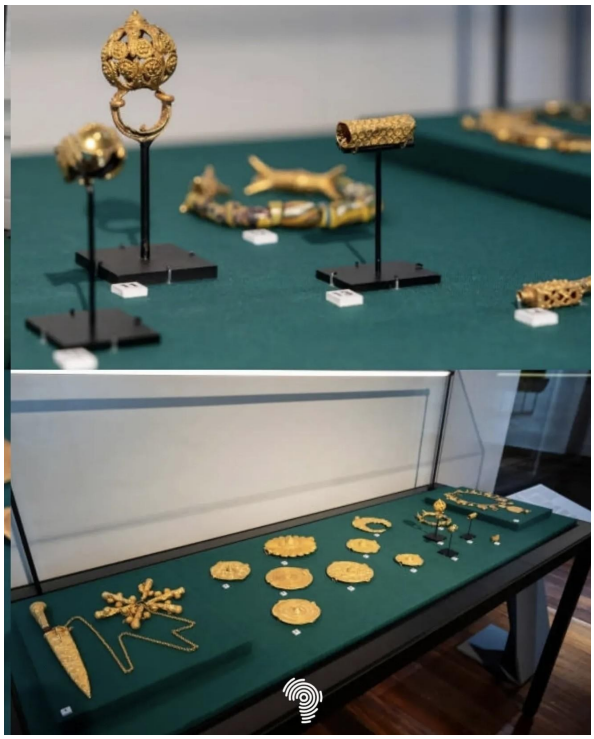


Figure 1. *Asante royal objects returned to Ghana in 2024. Source: Manhyia Palace Museum, 2026.*

Land Restitution as Reparation Justice

Land restitution seeks to restore land or land rights lost through racial discrimination, colonialism or other systems of dispossession. South Africa provides an important example. Under the Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994, individuals and communities dispossessed under racially discriminatory laws can seek restoration of land or other forms of equitable redress. By December 2025, the government reported that approximately 3.9 million hectares had been restored and about 2.4 million people had benefited from settled claims[15]. Although South Africa's program addresses apartheid-era dispossession rather than trans-Atlantic slavery

[11] Nyagamago, Maxwell. "Germany Nears Return of 4 Colonial-Era Cultural Objects to Ghana, Ambassador Says." Pulse Ghana, September 3, 2026
[12] Government of the Netherlands, "Benin Bronzes from the Netherlands Returning Home to Nigeria," June 18, 2025. https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2025/06/18/benin-bronzes-from-the-netherlands-returning-home-to-nigeria
[13] British Museum, "Maqdala Collection," accessed September 27, 2026. https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/maqdala-collection
[14] UNESCO. 2023. "Rekindled Hope: 85 Sacred Vigango Return Home," July 2023, updated August 18, 2025. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/rekindled-hope-85-sacred-vigango-return-home

specifically, it demonstrates how restitution can involve restoring productive assets and rights rather than returning cultural objects alone. United Nations reparations principles similarly recognize restitution as an attempt, where possible, to restore victims to the position that existed before a violation.

Financial Compensation as Reparation Justice: Debt Relief and Structural Economic Redress

Financial compensation remains one of the most prominent forms of reparatory redress, but also one of the most contested. UN reparations principles recognize compensation alongside restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. Some governments and regional organizations argue that reparatory justice should address structural economic inequalities associated with slavery and colonialism. CARICOM's reparations framework for instance includes debt cancellation[16], while African and UN discussions have increasingly considered debt, access to capital, economic sovereignty and reform of international financial structures within the broader reparations debate. The UN Africa Dialogue Series 2025, held under the theme of "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations", called for structural approaches addressing historical economic dispossession and contemporary inequalities[17].

Acknowledgment, Apology and Social Redress as Reparation Justice

Reparatory justice can also include formal acknowledgment, apologies, education, memorialization, health interventions and rehabilitation. In 2022, the Netherlands formally apologized for the Dutch State's role in slavery and subsequently committed €200 million to measures addressing its legacy, including education, research, remembrance and community initiatives[18]. This approach reflects the broader United Nations conception of reparation, which recognizes rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition in addition to compensation and restitution.

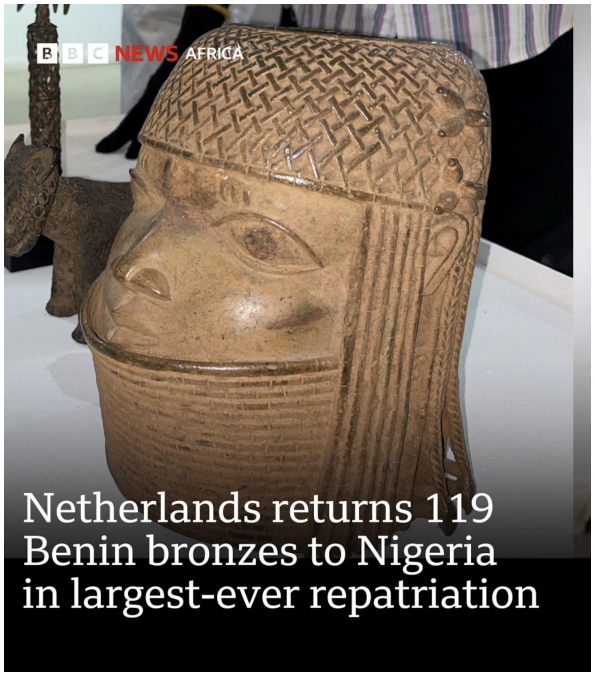


Figure 2. *Objects returned to Nigeria. Source: BBC Africa, 2026.*

The Role of the United Nations on Reparation Justice

The United Nations plays a central role by providing a global forum where Member States can develop shared approaches to reparatory

[15] Republic of South Africa. Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994. December 2, 1994. https://www.gov.za/documents/restitution-land-rights-act; South African Government. "Minister Mzwanele Nyhontso: Land Reform and Rural Development Dept Budget Vote 2026/27." May 20, 2026. https://www.gov.za/news/speeches/minister-mzwanele-nyhontso-land-reform-and-rural-development-dept-budget-vote-202627

[16] OSAA. 2025c. Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations: Perspectives from the Africa Dialogue Series 2025. 2025. https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org.osaa/files/files/documents/2025/ads_2025_draft_4_28_dec_2025.pdf

[17] OSAA. 2025a. "ADS 2025 – A Call to Action." 2025. https://www.un.org/osaa/en/ads2025/call-to-action

[18] Government of the Netherlands. "Government Apologises for the Netherlands' Role in the History of Slavery." December 19, 2022. https://www.government.nl/ministries/ministry-of-general-affairs/documents/speeches/2022/12/19/speech-by-prime-minister-mark-rutte-about-the-role-of-the-netherlands-in-the-history-of-slavery

justice. Its influence, however, rests primarily on norm-setting, dialogue, coordination, and international cooperation rather than enforcement. The 81st session of the General Assembly demonstrated a growing emphasis on moving reparatory justice from recognition toward implementation.

At a high-level side event on 23 September 2026, participants discussed strengthening international cooperation and developing more predictable mechanisms for restitution and other forms of redress. The discussions emphasized that voluntary initiatives alone may be insufficient and highlighted the potential role of the United Nations and UNESCO in providing more permanent legal, diplomatic and institutional frameworks. The broader process also reinforced cooperation among African, Caribbean and other states, while leaving unresolved major questions concerning legal responsibility, compensation, financing and the appropriate forms of reparatory measures.

The Security Council has a limited role in reparations for Trans-Atlantic slavery because its primary responsibility is maintaining international peace and security. However, where a dispute threatens international peace, it can encourage peaceful settlement, adopt resolutions, request Secretary-General reports, establish investigative or subsidiary bodies, and, under appropriate Charter provisions, adopt binding measures. The Council has previously addressed compensation following international conflict. After Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, it established the United Nations Compensation Commission to process claims and award compensation[19]. No comparable Security Council mechanism exists for Trans-Atlantic slavery, which has primarily been addressed through other United Nations organs and human-rights mechanisms.

The Secretary-General can also strengthen implementation by coordinating UN entities, compiling state practice, and reporting on progress. Resolution 80/250 specifically requests coordination with UNESCO and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on remembrance, education, research, and capacity-building, and requests a report at the eighty-second session. This reporting function can turn a broad political declaration into a measurable process by asking states what they have actually done.

OHCHR provides the human-rights framework. Its work emphasizes that reparatory justice should be comprehensive, participatory, gender-sensitive and inclusive. This is significant because slavery's harms were not uniform. Women and girls experienced gender-specific forms of violence and exploitation, while contemporary discrimination can intersect with gender, nationality, migration status and class. OHCHR and UN anti-racism mechanisms can help define standards, collect good practices and ensure that affected communities participate in designing remedies.

UNESCO contributes through education, cultural heritage and the Routes of Enslaved Peoples program. Restitution of artifacts, preservation of archives, memorialization and curriculum development are areas where practical cooperation may be easier than agreement on large-scale compensation. It can also support provenance research, mediation and technical cooperation.

The Permanent Forum on People of African Descent and the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent provide specialized spaces for consultation and recommendations. They can connect state diplomacy to civil society, scholars and communities. Their role is especially important in preventing reparations from becoming a purely state-to-state bargain that excludes descendants and affected communities.

The UN also has clear limits. General Assembly resolutions are generally not binding in the same way as treaties or Security Council decisions

[19] UNSC. 1991. *Resolution 687 (1991)*, S/RES/687, April 3, 1991; UNSC. 1991. *Resolution 692 (1991)*, S/RES/692, May 20, 1991. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/113598

under Chapter VII. The UN cannot unilaterally determine a global compensation amount, compel a state to accept historical legal liability, or decide every dispute over beneficiaries. It also cannot substitute for national legislation, bilateral agreements, court processes or institutional settlements. Its comparative advantage is to establish principles, facilitate evidence-based dialogue, coordinate international action and make implementation visible.



Figure 3. *Voting results for General Assembly Resolution A/RES/80/250, adopted on 25 March 2026. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ghana, 2026.*

Landmark UN Resolutions

Several UN decisions form the diplomatic foundation for debate.

- **Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (2001):** acknowledged slavery and the slave trade, including the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, as crimes against humanity and linked their legacies to contemporary racism. Although not a compensation treaty, Durban remains the central anti-racism framework for reparatory justice.
- **General Assembly Resolution 62/122 (2007):** adopted without a vote; established 25 March as the annual International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade and called for educational outreach.
- **General Assembly Resolution 68/237 (2013)**: proclaimed the first International Decade for People of African Descent, creating a framework organized around recognition, justice and development.
- **General Assembly Resolution 79/193 (2024):** proclaimed the Second International

Decade for People of African Descent, 2025-2034. It was adopted without a vote, showing broad support for continued work on recognition, justice and development even though states differ over reparations.

- **General Assembly Resolution 80/250 (2026)**: the current landmark. Spearheaded by Ghana and adopted 123 in favor, 3 opposed (Argentina, Israel and the United States) and 52 abstentions, it declared the trafficking of enslaved Africans and racialized chattel enslavement of Africans the gravest crime against humanity; recognized reparations claims as a concrete step toward remedying historical wrongs; called for dialogue on apology, restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and non-repetition; encouraged restitution of cultural property; and requested further UN reporting. Ghana's subsequent June 2026 Accra conference sought to translate this normative breakthrough into a practical roadmap[20].

Country and Bloc Positions

The African Union (AU): promotes the sovereign equality, development and security of its 55 Member States in the international system. AU resolutions tend to stress general principles, relevant to all of its Member States. It occasionally gets involved in regional conflicts, even authorizing peacekeeping missions, but not consistently.

The African Group in the UN has been a principal driver of the current United Nations reparatory-justice agenda, with Ghana playing a prominent role in advancing the issue in 2026.

Member States of the African Union are committed to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063, their 'blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future.'[21] They generally see issues before the UN in terms of those priorities. Also important are the anti-colonial priorities of the Non-Aligned Movement. African countries generally welcome foreign development assistance, but increasingly demand sovereign national control over specific projects, a demand that often creates tension with world-be donors, who have their own priorities, especially regarding democratization and accountability.

Above all, the member states of the AU work to ensure African voices are an important part of all UN decisions.[22] Like the Arab League, the African Union usually leaves actual policy-making up to its Member States. On most issues, each state's parallel membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (below) also can be a reliable guide to their positions.

Arab League: Because of sharp differences among its 22 Member States, the Arab League tends to act cautiously. Member States tend to be strongly committed to multilateral diplomacy, but restrained by divisive national interests.[23]

There are sharp disagreements between Islamist and more secular governments, between Shi'ite dominated Iraq and Sunni dominated countries, and disputes over influence such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.[24] On controversial issues the Arab League is likely to leave policy-making up to each of its Member States.

The biggest exception is any issue relevant to Palestine, on which it is more unified, especially

[20] United Nations in Ghana, "Ghana Leads Historic UN Vote," March 25, 2026; Ghana Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "High-Level Consultative Conference," June 22, 2026.
[21] 'Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want', African Union, n.d. https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview; and 'Agenda 2063', Wikipedia, n.d. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda_2063
[22] Mogomotsi Magome, 'African leaders press United Nations for permanent seats on Security Council', Associated Press, 24 September 2026, https://apnews.com/article/africa-unga-security-council-reforms-9d29a10a8caf40a4876e2738446d2ee8
[23] 'Algeria's quixotic approach to foreign policy', London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 2025, https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2025/03/algerias-quixotic-approach-to-foreign-policy/
[24] 'Saudi Arabian media steps up attacks on UAE as Gulf rift deepens". Financial Times. 21 January 2026, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20260122-saudi-media-escalates-attacks-on-uae-as-gulf-rift-deepens/

regarding criticism of Israel. Arab League states are likely to see debate on almost any issue in terms relevant to their support for Palestine. On most other issues, each state's parallel membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (below) can be a more reliable guide to their national positions.

CARICOM and its 15 Member States have led development of a detailed Ten-Point Plan for Reparatory Justice which was originally adopted in 2014 and revised and approved by CARICOM Heads of Government in July 2026, encompassing measures such as public health, education, psychological rehabilitation, cultural development, debt cancellation and monetary compensation[25]. Cooperation between the African Union and CARICOM has become an important component of efforts to coordinate African and Caribbean positions and advance reparatory justice through multilateral institutions.

China supports the African Union's reparations agenda. It frames slavery and colonialism as historical injustices that continue to affect Caribbean and African development. In the 2024 Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China noted the AU proclamation calling for justice through reparations[26]. China voted in favor of Resolution 80/250[27]. China has situated reparatory justice within its broader support for African positions on colonialism, historical injustice and reform of global governance.

While others are reducing their reliance on the UN, China is increasing its UN engagement. The great appeal is the UN Charter's emphasis on national sovereign equality, which China sees as supporting its authority at home, and facilitating working with other countries as legal equals.[28] China supports goals established by the UN and international institutions.[29] In the UN, China emphasizes solidary with the Global South and the member states of the Non-Aligned Movement.[30] China stresses the UN as a tool for increasing its influence over global values, a key element in its campaign to make the world more like China itself.

China's UN policy is not without concerns. It fears the UN will be used to create precedents for international action in the domestic affairs of Member States, precedents that could be used against it. As a Chinese UN diplomat said in another context, 'China's continuing and vehement insistence on respect for other nations' sovereignty is not only a cornerstone of its foreign policy but a foundational ethos for the government of a nation that has traditionally struggled to maintain control...'[31]

China examines all proposals to be certain they cannot infringe its sovereignty. It rejects proposals that limit its freedom of action. China defends the sovereignty of all countries, fearful that any chip in the wall of state sovereignty and control could create a precedent that might someday be used against China.

[25] CARICOM. 2026. The CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice: A Manifesto for the Coming Enlightenment. Revised and approved by the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM, July 2026 https://caricom.org/documents/the-caricom-caribbean-community-ten-point-plan-for-reparations-a-manifesto-for-the-coming-enlightenment/
[26] FOCAC. 2024. "Beijing Declaration on Jointly Building an All-Weather China-Africa Community with a Shared Future for the New Era." September 5, 2024. http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/202409/t20240905_11485719.htm
[27] UNGA. 2026b. "Declaration of the Trafficking of Enslaved Africans and Racialized Chattel Enslavement of Africans as the Gravest Crime against Humanity." A/RES/80/250, March 25, 2026. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4107547
[28] 'Xi says China always a trustworthy partner of UN', *Xinhua*, 1 September 2025, http://en.cppcc.gov.cn/2025-09/01/c_1120831.htm
[29] Wen Sheng, 'China leads global efforts to realize UN sustainable development goals for 2030', *Global Times*, 27 June 2023, https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202306/1293251.shtml
[30] 'China calls for more Global South voices to be heard at United Nations', Reuters, 17 June 2026, https://www.internazionale.it/ultime-notizie-reuters/2026/06/17/china-calls-for-more-global-south-voices-to-be-heard-at-united-nations
[31] Ted Anthony, 'China, at UN, warns against 'expansion of the battlefield' in the Ukraine war', *Associated Press*, 28 September 2024, https://apnews.com/article/china-united-nations-general-assembly-51ea58a6cd821656382f06ad0b3b93bc

The European Union (EU) recognizes the historical injustice of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its continuing consequences but does not maintain a common reparations policy for its 27 Member States. Their differences were reflected in the March 2026 General Assembly vote on Resolution A/RES/80/250. EU Member States abstained. In its explanation of vote, Europeans condemned the trans-Atlantic slave trade and affirmed the importance of addressing its enduring effects. They also expressed concerns about the resolution's approach to retroactive legal responsibility and reparations claims[32]. At the same time, recent initiatives involving Germany, France and the Netherlands demonstrate European engagement with specific forms of reparatory action, particularly cultural restitution, provenance research and related institutional cooperation.

For the 27 Member States of the EU, multilateral politics is primarily about universal values, ideas that apply to all states equally. EU Member States can be expected to stress an approach that serves the entire international community, not the interests of any particular state, with all countries working toward agreed goals and standards. It often is the most visionary group in the UN system. The EU also is the most generous funder of global development projects, offering grants or subsidized, low-interest loans for major initiatives.

But even the European Union is not as generous as it used to be. Aid money is going down, as it switches funding to defense against Russia. And European aid is highly conditional, to ensure it is spent as planned, efficiently, without fraud. Many EU donor states also make their aid conditional on national goals, like strengthening democracy, rule of law, respect for minorities and female equality. EU member states are committed to multilateral decision-making, but will work for their distinct national interests. For example, they opposed a UN declaration on international collaboration for pandemic response, because its language on vaccinations threatened to undermine the copyrights of European pharmaceutical firms.[33] Unlike the United States, the EU supported the multilateral goals, but it insisted that intellectual property rights be respected.

The Non-Aligned Movement supports reparatory justice for colonialism, slavery and historical injustices. In its 2024 Kampala Final Outcome Document, NAM called on former colonial powers to provide full compensation for the economic, social and cultural consequences of colonial rule and supported the return of cultural property taken from peoples subjected to colonialism[34]. The Movement also urged implementation of UNESCO decisions on cultural restitution and called for the return of stolen or illegally exported cultural property to countries of origin. In 2025, NAM further welcomed the African Union's theme, "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations", and supported initiatives addressing the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonization and apartheid.

The 120 Member States and 18 Observer states of the NAM, the UN's dominant voting bloc, are primarily interested in issues that serve their needs as developing economies and post-colonial states. They seek to reduce poverty and demand faster economic development. The NAM generally supports universal values, such as Chinese or EU efforts to create global standards on these issues. Most are post-colonial states, demanding compensation for past colonial rule.

[32] EEAS. 2026. "EU Explanation of Vote – UN General Assembly: Action on A/80/L.48 – Declaration of the Trafficking of Enslaved Africans and Racialized Chattel Enslavement of Africans as the Gravest Crime Against Humanity." March 25, 2026. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-explanation-vote-—-un-general-assembly-action-a80l48-declaration-trafficking-enslaved-africans_en

[33] Apoorva Mandavilli, 'U.S. Rejects U.N. declaration on preparing for future pandemics', New York Times, 25 September 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/25/us/politics/us-rejects-un-declaration-on-preparing-for-pandemics.html

[34] NAM. 2024. Kampala Final Outcome Document of the 19th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement. Kampala, Uganda, January 19-20, 2024. https://nam.go.ug/sites/default/files/2024-02/Kampala%20Final%20Outcome%20Document.pdf

Where the NAM departs from the EU and other advocates of multilateral action, is on funding and national control. Although many of its members are not poor—its membership includes wealthy oil exporters—the NAM routinely demands that any proposal for action come with increases in foreign aid from wealthier Western countries.

While the NAM welcomes foreign assistance, they can resist the oversight and control that normally comes with it. Such oversight—whether to ensure program goals, to prevent fraud, or support democratization—is seen by some MAN members as a threat to their independence. This sets up a confrontation, a diplomatic challenge, as sides struggle to advance their goals.

The Russian Federation supports the reparatory justice agenda of the NAM. It places primary responsibility on former colonial powers. Russia voted in favor of General Assembly Resolution 80/250 and reinforced this position during the 81st General Assembly. At the 23 September 2026 high-level event on reparatory justice, Kirill Logvinov, Director of the Department of International Organizations of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called for legal assessment of colonial-era actions, determination of material and non-material damage, and the establishment of reparation mechanisms[35]. Russia therefore supports moving the debate beyond historical recognition toward mechanisms for assessing harm and providing redress.

Russia can be unpredictable in UN bodies. Its primary goal in all UN fora is insulating Russian freedom of action in its war with Ukraine, the *Special Military Operation*, to ensure other issues cannot become a wedge allowing discussion of the war or its effects.

Russia's general goal at the UN is defeating the West: Europe, Japan, the United States and other English-speaking democracies. In the words of Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, 'The Western minority, which dominated for 500 years thanks to others' resources, continues to try to maintain its privileges and impose its own rules on everyone else.' Quoting President Vladimir Putin, he said 'the dictatorship of one hegemon is spiraling out of control – it's dangerous for everyone else'.[36]

Russia usually votes with the Non-Aligned Movement. It can rely on support from socialist countries like Belarus, Cuba, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua and sometimes Vietnam. South Africa and African countries that depend on Russian military help also are sympathetic. On particular issues the Russian Federation can work with China, Iran and North Korea.[37] Under the leadership of President Trump, the United States cooperates with Russia, albeit unpredictably.[38]

The United States recognizes and condemns the historical injustice of slavery, while opposing reparations. In March 2026, the United States was one of three countries to vote against General Assembly Resolution A/RES/80/250. Domestically. Proposals for a study of reparations center on US House Resolution. 40 (H.R. 40), to establish a commission to examine the history and continuing effects of slavery and recommend remedies[39]. The legislation has not passed. The Trump Administration is strongly opposed.

The United States generally strives to minimize the role of the UN. Cutting UN budgets is a

[35] Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations. "Statement by Director of the Department of International Organizations of the MFA of Russia Kirill Logvinov at the High-Level Event 'From Commitment to Action on Reparatory Justice.'" 23 September 2026. https://russiaun.ru/en/news/6092026
[36] Russian Federation. His Excellency Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs, 26 September 2026, https://gadebate.un.org/en/81/russian-federation
[37] 'General Assembly debates Russian Federation's Security Council veto of European amendments seeking 'Just' Peace in Ukraine', *United Nations*, 6 March 2025, https://press.un.org/en/2025/ga12677.doc.htm
[38] James Landale and Patrick Jackson, 'US sides with Russia in UN resolutions on Ukraine', *BBC News*, 25 February 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c7435pnle0go
[39] U.S. Congress. House. Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act. H.R. 40, 119th Cong. 1st sess. Introduced January 3, 2025. https://www.congress.gov/119/bills/hr40/BILLS-119hr40ih.pdf

prominent American goal on any issue.[40] Expect American diplomats to emphasize reducing the cost and impact of any UN initiative. The US votes against resolutions unless they clearly serve the policies of President Trump. The ideal UN initiative, for the US, allows Member States to do as they please.

Under President Trump, the United States rejects core values of the UN Charter, stressing instead the maximization of American power. In the President's words, 'The United Nations has great, great potential. I've said that for many years, but it must stop imposing the far left agenda of globalist bureaucrats who nobody ever elected.'[41] It gets international support from conservative governments in countries like Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, Ecuador and Israel, and sometimes from dependent countries like Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova and Ukraine.

A major US goal is defeating initiatives it associates with Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI, or *wokeness*), usually meaning support for previously marginalized social groups, like women, ethnic and gender minorities.[42] U.S. officials at the UN also oppose resolutions that could help marginalized groups.[43]

American UN diplomacy often is personal, seeking to enhance the wealth of President Donald Trump, his family and friends. The US often prefers working with authoritarian leaders who can be more responsive than democracies. A real estate deal with the President's family, involving land in a host country, might bring American support on other issues.[44] Regardless of the topic, American leaders welcome money-making opportunities through real estate, cryptocurrency and control over oil and mining.[45]

Proposals for Action

Below are some major proposals for action to be considered. The Member States of the UN General Assembly are free to choose any path of action—or non-action—that they prefer. As sovereign states, they are not bound by the precedence of past UN resolutions, or even by their own votes. But they are limited by the UN's preference for consensus decisions when possible, and a majority vote when necessary. Unlike the Security Council, General Assembly resolutions are not enforceable. A Member State that votes against a GA resolution is likely to ignore it even if it passes.

Develop common standards for national reparations assessments. Encourage Member States to establish independent processes to document historical involvement in slavery, identify continuing harms, improve access to relevant archives and consider nationally appropriate forms of redress.

A voluntary reparatory justice fund. Member States could explore a voluntary financing mechanism supported by participating states, institutions, foundations and other contributors. Funded activities should be explicitly connected to documented historical harms rather than treated as ordinary development assistance.

Strengthen cultural restitution and archival access. Expand international cooperation on provenance research, digitization and access to archives, mediation of restitution claims, and technical assistance for museums and cultural

[40] Amy Mackinnon, Waltz vows to take Trump's chainsaw to the United Nations', *Politico*, 15 June 2025, https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/15/mike-waltz-un-ambassador-hearing-00454617
[41] United States of America. His Excellency Donald Trump, President. New York: United Nations, 22 September 2026, https://gadebate.un.org/en/81/united-states-america
[42] Carter Sherman, 'Trump administration to block aid from subsidizing DEI and trans rights overseas', Guardian, 22 January 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/22/trump-foreign-aid-dei-trans-rights
[43] Sarah Davis, 'US only country to oppose UN resolution correcting Africa's size on world maps', The Hill, 5 September 2026, https://thehill.com/policy/international/6072979-us-opposes-un-map-resolution-africa/
[44] Isaac Stanley-Becker, 'The Trump family sparks a revolution in Albania', The Atlantic, 23 July 2026, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/2026/07/trump-kushner-flamingo-revolution-albania/688030/

institutions in countries of origin. This builds on Resolution A/RES/80/250, which calls for the prompt and unhindered return and restitution of cultural property of spiritual, historical and cultural value.

Encourage acknowledgment and formal apologies. States and institutions could examine their historical roles and, where appropriate, pursue acknowledgments or apologies in consultation with affected communities as one component of broader reparatory measures.

Ensure meaningful participation by affected communities. Reparatory processes should provide opportunities for affected communities, civil-society organizations, diaspora communities, women and youth to contribute to defining harms, priorities and appropriate remedies.

Establish monitoring and follow-up arrangements. Member States could develop measurable reporting mechanisms to track actions on reparatory justice and identify areas of progress and continuing disagreement. This could build on Resolution 80/250's existing request for the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its 82nd session on implementation by states.

Conclusion

The international debate over reparations for Trans-Atlantic slavery has entered a new phase. Decades of remembrance, regional advocacy and recognition of historical injustice have been followed by increasing attention to how reparatory justice might be implemented. General Assembly Resolution A/RES/80/250 represents an important development in this process, but it has not resolved fundamental disagreements over responsibility, beneficiaries, legal liability, financing or the appropriate forms of redress.

The challenge before Member States is therefore to identify areas in which international cooperation is possible despite these differences. Reparatory justice may encompass multiple approaches, including restitution, acknowledgment and apology, economic and development measures, institutional reform, education and, where agreed, financial compensation. The General Assembly must consider how the United Nations can support practical and inclusive approaches while respecting differing national positions on historical and legal responsibility. The central question for delegates is how to move from recognition of historical injustice toward forms of redress that are credible, workable and capable of sustained international cooperation.

[45] Anatoly Kurmanaev, Tyler Pager and Rebecca R. Ruiz, 'Trump brought Venezuelan gold to the U.S., but refiners won't touch it', New York Times, 28 September 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/28/world/americas/venezuela-gold-trump.html

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