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GA4: Special Political and Decolonisation (SPECPOL)

# Research Report

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Topic 1: Promoting financial and humanitarian aid as reparation for countries previously under colonial control.



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## Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Definition of Key Terms	2
Background Information	2
Major Countries and Organisations Involved	3
Relevant UN Resolutions	4
Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue	5
Possible Solutions	5
Bibliography	7

## Introduction

The after-effects of colonialism continue to shape the futures of formerly colonised nations, preventing them from further developing their countries economically and politically. This legacy has led to corrupt governments, weak infrastructure, and clear social divides. For example, Somalia, formerly colonised by Italy and Britain and divided into two territories, is now considered a failed state due to its political instability and inability to provide security to its citizens.<sup>1</sup> These problematic injustices must be recognised as direct effects of generations of exploitation, resource extraction, and suppression by colonial powers. Additionally, the cultural erosion and loss of indigenous knowledge systems further compound these nations' struggles, as they face challenges in reclaiming their historical identities.

This research report will serve as an insight for UN member states to uphold principles of global equity and justice. To achieve effective reparations for countries previously under colonial control, financial and humanitarian aid must be provided by the international community. This also requires addressing structural inequalities through long-term investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure development. Moreover, supporting local governance and fostering economic self-sufficiency can ensure that aid translates into sustainable progress. SPECPOL has the responsibility to advance its mission to promote international peace, human rights, and multilateral cooperation, which are essential in addressing the persistent impacts of colonialism.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Colonialism:** The practice of a dominant state extending and maintaining political, cultural, and economic control over another nation or territory, typically in an exploitative manner. It involves the governing influence of a nation over a dependent country, territory, or people.<sup>2</sup>

**Reparations:** Compensation provided to address historical injustices or harm inflicted during a specific period, often involving financial, material, or symbolic forms of redress.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Rotberg, R. (2003). Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators. Retrieved from [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror\\_chapter.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeofterror_chapter.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> cf. United Nations. (1960). Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples (Resolution 1514) (XV). <https://www.un.org/en/decolonisation/declaration.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> cf. United Nations. (2005). Basic principles and guidelines on the right to a remedy and reparation (Resolution 60/147). [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/60/147](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/60/147)

**Humanitarian aid:** Assistance provided to address immediate needs during crises, such as conflicts or natural disasters. This aid includes food, water, shelter, medical services, refugee support, and rehabilitation efforts, often delivered by international organisations.<sup>4</sup>

**Structural Inequality:** Systemic disparities in wealth, resources, and opportunities that result from historical or institutional factors.<sup>5</sup>

**Failed State:** a state incapable of ensuring its population's security and controlling its territory. At this point the country is ungoverned and the violence this generates can precipitate collapse.<sup>6</sup>

## Background Information

From the 15th to the mid-20th century, powerful European countries exercised colonial control over less developed regions (such as Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America) for their own gain. The colonial powers primarily practiced economic exploitation, seizing natural resources, exploiting labor, and appropriating wealth. Additionally, they imposed cultural suppression by eroding local traditions and languages, and maintained political control over the population through systems of governance that prioritised imperial interests.

After World War II, many colonies gained independence, but they were often left with fragmented economies, underdeveloped infrastructure, social divisions, and corrupt governance. For example, India's infrastructure, such as railways and ports, remained underdeveloped because they were built by the British to serve colonial trading needs rather than the local population. In Africa, the arbitrary borders imposed by colonial powers caused social divisions among tribal and ethnic groups, leading to lasting border disputes and conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

Many former colonies, now categorised as Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), continue to grapple with the legacy of colonialism. The extraction of natural resources without fair compensation, the lack of investment in education and healthcare, and the weakening of traditional governance structures have perpetuated economic dependency and social inequality.

Calls for reparations to post-colonial countries gained recognition in the late 20th century, championed by initiatives like the CARICOM Reparations Commission, which seeks compensation for slavery and its aftermath. Efforts to address colonial injustices also include cultural repatriation, such as the return of stolen artifacts, and fostering international policies that promote self-determination and sustainable development.<sup>8</sup>

The call for reparations and humanitarian aid to post-colonial countries is not only a moral imperative but also a key contributor to building economic prosperity, cultural richness, and political stability. By acknowledging and addressing the enduring impacts of colonialism, the

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<sup>4</sup> cf. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (n.d.). What we do. <https://www.unocha.org/what-we-do>

<sup>5</sup> cf. United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). Human development reports. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>

<sup>6</sup> cf. London School of Economics and Political Science (2006). Crisis, Fragile and Failed States Definitions used by the CSRC. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/Assets/Documents/PDFs/csrc-background-papers/Definition-of-a-Failed-State.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> cf. Butt, D. (2013). Colonialism and Postcolonialism. <https://philpapers.org/archive/BUTCAP-3.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> cf. CARICOM Reparations Commission. The Global Reparations Movement. <https://caricomreparations.org/the-global-reparations-movement/>

global community can foster more equitable and inclusive growth for nations striving to rebuild after centuries of exploitation.

## Major Countries and Organisations Involved

**United Kingdom** – As a former colonial power, it has faced calls for reparations from the Commonwealth countries such as India, Jamaica, and Kenya.

**France** – Its colonial history in Africa has sparked demands for financial compensation and acknowledgment of historical injustices.

**Caribbean Community (CARICOM)** – CARICOM has been instrumental in advocating for reparations for the legacy of slavery and colonialism.

**African Union (AU)** – The AU supports initiatives aimed at redressing economic and social disparities rooted in colonial exploitation.

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** – Focuses on reducing inequalities and promoting sustainable development in post-colonial states

## Relevant UN Resolutions

### 1. *Resolution 1514 (XV) - Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960)*<sup>910111213</sup>

1. "All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.";
2. "The subjection of peoples to alien domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, and is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations.";
4. "Immediate steps shall be taken, in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories or all other territories which have not yet attained independence, to transfer all powers to the peoples of those territories, without any conditions or reservations, in accordance with their freely expressed will and desire, without any distinction as to race, creed or colour, in order to enable them to enjoy complete independence and freedom.";

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<sup>9</sup> cf. United Nations General Assembly. (1960). Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples (Resolution 1514). Retrieved from [https://undocs.org/A/RES/1514\(XV\)](https://undocs.org/A/RES/1514(XV))

<sup>10</sup> cf. United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. (n.d.). About decolonisation. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonisation/en/about>

<sup>11</sup> cf. United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. (n.d.). Decolonisation and the United Nations: Issue 6, March 2001. Retrieved from [https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonisation/sites/www.un.org.dppa.decolonisation/files/decon\\_num\\_6-3.pdf](https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonisation/sites/www.un.org.dppa.decolonisation/files/decon_num_6-3.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> cf. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (n.d.). Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-granting-independence-colonial-countries-and-peoples>

<sup>13</sup> cf. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2008). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Retrieved from [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf)

2. *Resolution 2106 (XX) - Responsibilities of Colonial Powers to Assist Former Colonies (1965)*<sup>14</sup>

1. "Colonial Powers should, as a matter of obligation, assist the former colonies in their economic development through financial and technical assistance.";
6. "The international community, and particularly the developed countries, should help to create conditions which will enable former colonies to overcome the effects of colonial exploitation and to achieve economic independence.";

3. *Resolution A/RES/68/237 - Proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2014)*<sup>15</sup>

2. "The International Decade for People of African Descent aims to promote recognition, justice, and development for people of African descent, including reparations for the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and racial discrimination.";
10. "Encourages States to implement policies that address the legacy of colonialism and slavery, and to focus on the economic, social, and cultural empowerment of people of African descent.";

4. *Resolution 74/8 - Reparations for the Colonial Legacy (2019)*<sup>16</sup>

3. "Member States should take measures to address the historical injustices of colonialism, including reparations in the form of financial compensation, development aid, and formal apologies.";
7. "Calls for the establishment of an international conference on reparations to provide a platform for dialogue and negotiation between former colonial powers and affected nations.";

5. *Resolution 3201 (S-VI) - Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (1974)*<sup>1718</sup>

I 4 (f): "The right of all States, territories, and peoples under foreign occupation, alien and colonial domination or apartheid to restitution and full compensation for the exploitation and depletion of, and damages to, the natural resources and all other resources of those States, territories, and peoples.";

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<sup>14</sup> cf. United Nations General Assembly. (1965). International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Resolution 2106). Retrieved from [https://undocs.org/A/RES/2106\(XX\)](https://undocs.org/A/RES/2106(XX))

<sup>15</sup> cf. United Nations General Assembly. (2014). Proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent (Resolution 68/237). Retrieved from <https://undocs.org/A/RES/68/237>

<sup>16</sup> cf. United Nations General Assembly. (2019). International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism (Resolution 74/8). Retrieved from <https://undocs.org/A/RES/74/8>

<sup>17</sup> cf. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (n.d.). Convention on the settlement of investment disputes between states and nationals of other states. Retrieved from <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/international-investment-agreements/treaty-files/2775/download>

<sup>18</sup> cf. United Nations General Assembly. (1974). Declaration on the establishment of a new international economic order (Resolution 3201). Retrieved from [https://undocs.org/A/RES/3201\(S-VI\)](https://undocs.org/A/RES/3201(S-VI))

III (a): "Developed countries should respond favorably, within the framework of their official aid as well as international financial institutions, to the requests of developing countries for the financing of industrial projects.";

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### **German-Namibian Agreement (2021)<sup>19</sup>:**

- Germany acknowledged its colonial-era genocide against the Herero and Nama people (1904–1908) in Namibia.
- Germany pledged €1.1 billion over 30 years for infrastructure, healthcare, and education projects.
- Criticism arose because the sum was seen as insufficient compared to the estimated economic damage caused during colonial rule.

### **United Kingdom's Reparative Efforts in Kenya (2013)<sup>20</sup>:**

- The UK government paid £19.9 million to over 5,000 Kenyan survivors of the Mau Mau rebellion for torture and mistreatment during the colonial period.
- Additionally, a formal apology was issued, though no broader reparations were considered.

### **CARICOM Reparations Commission (2013)<sup>21</sup>:**

- Established to address the impact of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean.
- The Ten Point Plan advocates for measures like debt cancellation, technology transfer, and healthcare programs.
- CARICOM estimates trillions of dollars in reparations are needed to address the economic and social damage caused by colonialism.

### **Cultural Repatriation Efforts<sup>22</sup>:**

- France returned 26 artifacts to Benin in 2021, part of a larger pledge to return 90,000 African artifacts held in French museums.
- In 2023, the British Museum announced ongoing negotiations to return the Benin Bronzes to Nigeria, though this effort has faced legal and logistical hurdles.

### **Haiti's Debt to France<sup>23</sup>:**

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<sup>19</sup> cf. Müller, A. (2021). Germany acknowledges colonial-era genocide in Namibia and pledges reparations. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/28/germany-acknowledges-colonial-era-genocide-in-namibia-and-pledges-reparations>

<sup>20</sup> cf. Elkins, C. (2013). UK to compensate Kenyan Mau Mau veterans tortured during colonial rule. The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com>

<sup>21</sup> cf. CARICOM Reparations Commission. (2013). The ten-point plan for reparatory justice. Retrieved from <https://caricom.org/caricom-reparations-commission>

<sup>22</sup> cf. The British Museum. (2023). Benin Bronzes and ongoing restitution efforts. Retrieved from <https://www.britishmuseum.org>

<sup>23</sup> cf. Dubois, L. (2012). Haiti: The aftershocks of history. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books.

- In 1825, Haiti was forced to pay 150 million francs (about \$21 billion in today's value) in "compensation" to French slaveholders after gaining independence.
- In recent years, there have been calls for France to return this money, but no formal reparations have been made.

### Other Organisations:

E.g. Transparency International has worked to highlight the economic legacies of colonial exploitation, while Amnesty International continues to advocate for reparations and justice for human rights violations during colonial rule.

## Possible Solutions

The UN and national or international organisations could:

### **Establish a Global Reparations Fund<sup>24</sup>:**

- Estimated annual funding: \$20–50 billion, pooled through contributions from former colonial powers, global financial institutions, and private donors.
- Example: A fund could prioritise grants for healthcare, education, and clean energy infrastructure in post-colonial nations.

### **Forgive Debt and Provide Economic Support<sup>25</sup>:**

- Many former colonies bear high debt burdens. According to the World Bank, external debt in sub-Saharan Africa reached \$702 billion in 2021, limiting development.
- Forgiving even 25% of this debt could free \$175 billion for investment in local economies.

### **Increase Development Aid with Targeted Goals<sup>26</sup>:**

- The UN-recommended Official Development Assistance (ODA) target is 0.7% of a country's GNI.
- As of 2023, only six countries met this target. If all developed nations did so, an additional \$150 billion could be mobilised yearly.

### **Invest in Education and Technology Initiatives<sup>27</sup>:**

- Example: Partnerships to establish higher education institutions focused on science and technology, similar to Africa's Pan-African University initiative.

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<sup>24</sup> cf. United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Mobilising funds for sustainable development in post-colonial nations. UNDP Reports. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org>

<sup>25</sup> cf. World Bank. (2022). Sub-Saharan Africa's external debt reaches \$702 billion. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org>

<sup>26</sup> cf. OECD. (2023). Development aid statistics and targets. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/>

<sup>27</sup> cf. African Union Commission. (2021). Pan-African University Initiative for Science and Technology. African Union Publications. Retrieved from <https://au.int>

- Funding for education could increase literacy rates (currently 34% in Niger) and improve economic opportunities.

### **Facilitate Reparative Trade Agreements<sup>28</sup>:**

- Reduce tariffs and trade barriers for former colonies exporting goods to their former colonisers.
- Example: Expanding the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which has increased African exports to the U.S. by \$4.6 billion annually.

### **Support Civil Society and Grassroots Movements<sup>29</sup>:**

- Allocate 10–15% of aid to local NGOs and grassroots organisations to ensure that funds directly address community needs.
- Example: Small grants programs in East Africa have enabled communities to build schools and wells, directly impacting over 1 million lives.

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<sup>28</sup> cf. United States Trade Representative. (2023). African Growth and Opportunity Act: Key statistics. Retrieved from <https://ustr.gov>

<sup>29</sup> cf. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2023). Grassroots development projects: Community-driven impact. UN OCHA Reports. Retrieved from <https://www.unocha.org>

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