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REPARATIVE JUSTICE AND THE AFRICAN UNION

Movement for Freedom of Nations | Moscow, 16 November 2026

Distinguished Co-Chairs, Excellencies, fellow political leaders, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank our hosts for bringing us together and for giving reparative justice a place in the deliberations of this Assembly. The history we are discussing reached far beyond Africa. It joined continents through conquest, commerce and the forced movement of human beings, and it involved governments, institutions and commercial interests whose records and collections remain with us. Its consequences cannot be examined by Africa alone, and I welcome the opportunity for this wider conversation.

In Ghana, anyone who walks through Cape Coast or Elmina Castle encounters something more immediate than a chapter of history. The buildings remain, as do records of the ships, merchants and transactions that made human captivity an international business. Behind those records were families separated, communities weakened and generations denied the freedom to shape their own lives. When we discuss reparations, we must retain sight of these human consequences, even as we turn to the difficult questions of law and public policy.

The return of Asante royal regalia to public display at the Manhyia Palace Museum in Kumasi offers another lesson. Some objects were fully restituted, while others came from British museums on loan. We appreciate the negotiations that made those arrangements possible, but a loan is not the same as a transfer of ownership. That distinction matters to a community whose heritage is involved, and it reminds us that a remedy must be examined in terms of the rights restored and the obligations actually accepted.

Claims arising from enslavement, forced labour, dispossession and cultural seizure will require different remedies. An identifiable object calls for an inquiry into its provenance and title, while the wider history of trafficking raises questions of responsibility, applicable law and the people entitled to

benefit from redress. We should neither treat these questions as already answered nor use their complexity to postpone the work. A credible claim must rest on evidence, and a credible response must be capable of implementation.

Africa has already begun that work. Following the Accra Reparations Conference of 2023, the African Union designated 2025 as the Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations and carried that commitment into its Decade of Justice and Reparations for 2026 to 2035. Through the African Union Committee of Experts on Reparations and its Reference Group of Legal Experts, the Union is developing a Common African Position and examining legal, economic, cultural and institutional questions. This preparation is essential if historical claims are to become coherent positions that governments can negotiate.

The Union is also cooperating with the Caribbean, where descendants of enslaved Africans have their own experiences and claims. The joint engagement this year between the African Union expert mechanisms and the CARICOM Reparations Commission provides a means of coordinating legal analysis and diplomacy without pretending that every injury, or every remedy, is identical. Their cooperation gives the wider campaign a firmer institutional foundation.

In this connection, I recognise His Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana and the African Union Champion on Reparations, and Ghana's leadership in securing United Nations General Assembly Resolution 80/250 on 25 March 2026. The 123 votes in favour gave important international recognition to the gravity of the trafficking and enslavement of Africans. The consultations held in Accra in June advanced that discussion, which must continue through the African Union's established mechanisms.

The Movement for Freedom of Nations can assist this effort, but it should not create a second set of institutions alongside the African Union. Our members can encourage access to archives, assist dialogue with museums and public authorities, and use their relationships with governments and parliaments to support the work already being undertaken by African Union experts and CARICOM. We would accomplish more by lending those

institutions political support than by asking them to compete for attention and resources.

I have been involved in political organisation long enough to know how readily declarations are adopted and how difficult it can be to secure the action that follows. If legislation prevents the return of cultural property, a parliament must examine it. If an agreement is reached, a government must define and honour its obligations. And if a settlement is intended to benefit an affected community, that community must have a voice in its design and a means of holding those responsible to account.

We must also be careful about what we call reparation. An apology, restitution, compensation, access to archives, educational measures and institutional reform may each answer a different injury. But an ordinary development project does not become reparative justice merely because it has been given a new description. The connection between the wrong and the proposed remedy must be demonstrated, and the outcome must be open to scrutiny by those asked to accept it.

Our governments must meet responsibilities that belong to the present. Historical injustice does not relieve them of the duty to govern competently, create opportunity and account for public resources, just as the failures of present governments do not cancel legitimate claims arising from the past. Any reparative agreement should be negotiated carefully and administered transparently, with those whose rights are at stake able to see what has been promised and whether it has been delivered.

We have reached a point at which Africa need not merely repeat the case it has made for decades. The historical record exists, the African Union has established its mechanisms and cooperation with the Caribbean is under way. The task now is to give that work political weight and practical assistance, and to see that recognition is followed, where responsibility can be established, by remedies that endure. I hope this Movement will be remembered for what it helped to accomplish through those institutions, rather than for creating another forum in which the same grievances were simply restated.

I thank you.