

ARM Activities Letter

13 February 1996

Dear Sister\Brother,

Thank you for your recent E-mail regarding A.R.M (UK). The organisation was founded in

April 1993 after I returned from the First Pan-African Congress on Reparations held in Abuja, Nigeria, which was hosted by Chief Abiola, who as you know, is currently in a Nigerian jail, when in fact he should be president of Nigeria having won the elections.

In December 1993 a conference was convened in Birmingham, England, which launched the UK branch of the Africa Reparations Movement with a declaration which I will let you have in due course. At the same time I put down a motion in the British Parliament calling for support for the principle of Reparations for enslavement and colonisation. The motion was supported by 90 Members of Parliament and it is "lying on the table" for future activation. The organisation is run by a Board of Trustees that includes academics, activists, lawyers and politicians. In the first phase we have concentrated on the structure of the organisation and it's constitution which is unique - this due to the Black British "disease" of splitting and in-fighting which has prevented us from building a strong national organisation. However, we hope that we have now overcome this.

The new structure of the organisation is as follows; There is a Board of Trustees, of which I am the Chair, and which consists of prominent members of the community of African origin. We also have a Management Committee and a Secretariat, responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation. Finally A.R.M (UK) has several sub-sections, for example a Student's section and a Musician's section. We are also hoping to establish Trade Union's, Women's and Youth sections very soon. In addition, we are hoping to establish branches across the UK.

Now let me tell you a little of what activities we have been involved in during the past year. Firstly, we have been involved in much educational work, and have held public meetings on Reparations, including talks at Universities, local community centres and to women's groups. In 1994, I conducted a tour Britain, speaking on reparations across the country.

Last Summer, we held a picket of the Museum of Mankind, which is the Ethnographic section of the British Museum, and which holds several of the Benin Bronzes that were plundered during the British Punitive expedition in 1887. The picket was very well attended and received much media coverage. We will be continuing with the campaign for the Benin Bronzes in 1997, on the 100th anniversary of their capture. A.R.M (UK) also held a picket of an exhibition of the Royal Academy of Art entitled, "Africa; The Art of

a Continent." This exhibition was the biggest collection of African Art ever displayed and I understand that it is on it's way to New York to be exhibited there. We would encourage you and members of your organisation to see the display if possible, as the works of art it

contains are simply stunning. As you know, most of these pieces were stolen from Africa during colonialism.

A.R.M (UK) is also currently working with the African Embassies, to encourage them to pressure the British Government to return the artefacts, and we have been seeking general support from them on Reparations.

This is part of A.R.M (UK)'s ongoing campaign to return all African artefacts. As part of this we also tracked down Abuna's Crown and Chalice and visited it at the Victoria and Albert Museum where it is currently being held. Research was also carried out into the Fante flags, taken from Ghana.

Research is an important aspect of our organisation's work, and we have begun several projects. For example, we have uncovered the British Parliamentary papers that cover most of the period of enslavement and colonisation. These papers contain a wealth of information - for example, they list how many slaves were captured from which particular town, what their names were changed to, where they were taken to and how much they were sold for. As you can imagine, we are very excited about these papers! It may even be possible for people to trace their ancestors, or at least the region or country from where they originate. As an MP, I also have access to papers on slave rebellions, salvers and the companies involved in shipping slaves and compensation given to slave owners. This is an opportunity that can't be missed!

As part of our activities, we arranged a trip to Liverpool to see the new Transatlantic Slave Gallery on Slavery. During this trip we established several important links with Liverpool's Black Community.

We are also holding a competition for Black architects to design a Museum to hold these artefacts until such time as they will be returned to Africa - details of this competition are on the Internet. We are also applying for funding to enable us to build the finished design.

A.R.M (UK) is involved in many other activities, too numerous to mention, but I hope I have given you a flavour of what we are about! I also do not distinguish between the work of A.R.M (UK) and other activities that I am personally involved in, for example establishing links with South Africa and other African and Caribbean countries as well as with the African Diaspora, looking at trade, economic and political links aimed at empowering Africans throughout the world through our own efforts and not depending on others to feed, house, clothe and protect us.

We would be very interested in collaborating with you in these matters. Could you tell us about your organisation's activities - for example, how it is structured etc, if you belong to one.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Yours Sincerely,
Bernie Grant MP.