

ETHIOPIAN WORLD FEDERATION INC.



RESEARCH AND REPATRIATION COMMITTEE.

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Draft Strategy Paper on Reparations & Repatriation.

18th November 1993.

Greetings in the name of the Ethiopian World Federation Inc. Our Constitution was established during the Italian Ethiopian war of 1935 - '41. In order to effect Unity on this subject of Reparation & Repatriation, we are pleased to outline the way forward for the Black Peoples of the World.

Reparation... The Question of the wrongs done to the African nation by the European Colonial Powers and the Government of the United States of America, have been brought to the top of the agenda by the Chairman of the Organisation of African Unity in 1991.

On the 4th August 1992, the EWF Inc was requested to present a Position Paper on Repatriation to the O.A.U.

On April 27th - 29th 1993, the Abuja Proclamation sponsored by the O.A.U calls upon Heads of States and Governments in Africa and the diaspora itself to set up National Committees for the purpose of studying the damaged Black experience, disseminating information and encouraging educational courses on the impact of enslavement, colonization and neo-colonialism on the present day Africa and its diaspora.

Convinced that the claim for Reparations is well grounded in International Law.

In this traumatic experience of our people from the Continent of Africa, today 500 years later, such experiences both physically, psychologically, mentally and spiritually are disposed. If the Japanese who were imprisoned in the U.S during the II World War can be given Reparations, due to the inhuman manner by which they were treated by the U.S Government and equally the 'Jews' of the state of Israel who claim 6 million of their peoples perished at the hands of Hitler and his facist regime - are still today being compensated by Germany for these atrocities that were committed on the said people with monies that is assisting the state of Israel in the name of Reparation. It is therefore inadmissable and justifiable that the Africans who lost 100 million of our people in the transition from the Continent to the Americas and equally there descendants who managed to survive this holocaust be compensated for this brutal and ihuman destruction of the Continent and its peoples, through Reparations& Repatriation.

We are not here talking about money alone, but the legacy of enslavement and colonialism on us and on the Caribbean and Africa. The legacy of the past, for which there has been not so much as an apology from Britain, is in the continued economic dependency, and the democratic deficit left by British Imperialism. Neither are we confining ourselves to a distant history but one that lives on in the attitudes and responses to black people of African origin in Britain.

It may prove easier for the British Government to agree to make payment for slavery and colonialism than it will be to get an apology because in many quarters of British society the view that we as Africans are inferior and that "they did us a favour" still runs deep within the culture and fabric of Britain.

That is why we must mount a massive and all embracing campaign for reparations because to do so strikes at the very heart of racist mythology. We will no longer be at the receiving end of paltry handouts, what we demand is justice and repair for real damage inflicted. This is a campaign to lift the heads and the spirits of all African peoples in which we take the initiative. The legal precedents already exist. We have seen the United Nations demand and obtain reparations from Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait, and before that we saw the Federal Republic of Germany pay reparations to Jews who suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

There already exists a body to spearhead the campaign in Britain, linked to the Organisation of African Unity but what is now required is that this campaign is grounded firmly within the grass-roots African communities in Britain.

That is why we have organised this first conference for activists. It will not have reached everyone, but it is our hope that by organising a working conference for a small number we will have a well informed debate within our wider community.

If we had reliable means of communicating with each other it would not be necessary to exclude anyone at this formative stage, but we are aware that there is currently much misunderstanding about what reparations are and what it could mean. So by having a small gathering to share information we may have the basis for that wider debate.

The case for reparations that needs to be developed must consider all aspects of the case. We as a planning group do not intend to dictate to our community exactly what shape the case should take, that is a matter for the whole community to determine. That is why we have organised workshops to explore the range of options open to us.

From our focused and informed discussions we will be able to go back to our existing organisations or set up new ones to spread the word within our communities and add to the campaign outside it.

We are convinced that the campaign for reparations is the means to address racism in Britain and elsewhere against people of African origin. By researching and documenting the case of the systematic exploitation and appropriation of Africa and Africans we provide for ourselves an argument that is about justice and equity. It is an issue that goes to the core of racism. What we will show by our campaign is that the ways that we have been viewed as Africans is fundamental wrong. But we will not be asking for charity or tolerance, we are demanding justice. This for once puts us on the offensive rather than the defensive.

The ends we seek of financial compensation for slavery and colonialism are important, but we must also see the means by which we achieve those ends as equally important.

This must be a campaign that involves and includes all people of African origin, it will not be undertaken by any self-appointed leaders. Democracy and participation must be the methods of our actions. Our past attempts to forge a united movement have foundered when we have made unreasonable demands on those who assume leadership positions. This time therefore we will need to make formal demands and be explicit about them so that we can hold elected leaders to account.

This conference is part of an explicit process of involvement for all Africans. Starting here, we have knowledge, and we recognise that knowledge is power. We must share our knowledge and we must seek more. We must share our skills and experience so that together we build a movement for justice and equality that is worthy of the name.

In the past some of us have tended towards a degree of self-criticism which has been destructive. Whilst we must rightly continue to look critically out our each and every action, it is essential that we rid ourselves of the negativism that has been the product of racism about ourselves as Africans. We are not our own worst enemies as I heard one brother say at a recent meeting. Our enemies are those with power who seek to deny us our expression and our identities.

There are real differences between us, ones that have in the past brought us dissent and disagreement. We cannot ignore the differences nor should we but we must learn the lessons of the past. If this movement is to be successful it must not be dogmatic. None of us has a monopoly of what it means to be African. Our experience within the Diaspora has demanded that we adopt appropriate strategies for our survival. Some of us have, especially in recent years become religious. We are Muslims, Christians and Jews, some of us have developed religions that are modelled upon ancient African traditions, and some of us are deeply suspicious of all organised religion. What is clear however is that unless we accept the pluralism of our faiths we shall flounder as countless brother and sisters have done before us.

Our African origins were plural, they were diverse, and this Movement must understand that we must develop means of accepting and honouring our differences in the traditions that have preceded us.

In reality there are many ways that African peoples in the Diaspora express and organise ourselves, some of these ways react to and reflect the racism we face, some are more successful than others. If we are to move forward as a people we are charged with the responsibility of finding ways of negotiating those real differences, without putting each other down or name calling. How for example will we handle situations in which African brothers and sisters decline to call themselves African but prefer instead the term, black British? If we accuse them of having a slave mentality will we be likely to get them to take pride in their heritage and identities? No, we must put energy into persuading them of our point of view rather than condemning them. If we do not do this we will be a movement of like-minded people but not a movement which includes all African people.

It is important that we clarify our relationship with people of Asian origin because this issue will be exploited by those who have long practised divide and rule. In organising as Africans many of us will continue to work closely with Asian peoples around our shared experience of racism in Britain. But we have a right and a duty to work on our own specific experience to the extent that it is distinct from that of Asian people. The theft of our peoples and our languages marks the African experience as different from that which occurred for others. It would be a fruitless and meaningless competition to try to measure who's experience was the worst. It is sufficient for us to say that we demand justice for what has happened to us and in doing so we do not deny the justice that others many also demand.

An issue that has arisen on the speaking tour that Bernie Grant has conducted has been what should our relationship be with white supporters, and this is a question that has important implications at this stage of our movement. It must be addressed here and now.

Our movement must be by for and about African people of that there must be no doubt or ambiguity. To succeed we must persuade a significant section of white British society of the justice of our case. Not all of us will want to be engaged in that task, many of us because of past experience will not work closely with white groups again. But others such as myself do see the need to win the support of elements in the Labour Party, the Churches and others with influence. This does not mean that there should be a direct role for white people within our Movement, but it does recognise that there will be those who have a role, one that is clearly outside our movement but informed by it. It would be a grave error to seek support from white people before our African autonomous movement is established. But equally it would be a grave error to think we can succeed entirely on our own.

In the spirit of the pluralism referred to above we may have to hold both positions that of an African only organisation and also working with sympathetic white people. We will not be compromised so long as white people remain outside our movement. If they are truly sympathetic they will understand why we must organise this ourselves.

One of the many manifestations of the impact and legacy of racism on African peoples are the ways that we have become so deeply suspicious and critical of each other. It is easy to bad-mouth another brother or sister by calling them an Uncle Tom or a coconut, but in some ways the even more damaging aspect of our suspicion is to assume that others are not to be trusted with the same integrity that we ourselves possess. I am thinking here of the suspicion that exists towards black professionals, or academics. It is as though they are not to be trusted because they work in the "white man's world". Where this view exists it often assumes that the prevailing eurocentric ideology is uncontested, when in reality the opposite is the case.

I have myself been wondering who benefits from this belief, since it is evident that in cutting off black professionals and academics from the grass roots of our communities they are less able to serve the whole of our community. But I also know that whatever the suspicions that exist about those working in the "mainstream" there is a pride and a satisfaction from much of the work they do. For example the black social workers in the early 80's who critiqued the impact of transracial fostering and adoption of black children put facts where our anecdotes existed.

The black teachers and academics who went into the institutions that under-valued and sought to destroy us blew the whistle on what we knew was happening to our children.

The question that is uppermost in my mind on this artificial divide is a strategic one. Who can we bridge the divide in a way that brings in and strengthens the work being done by isolated black professionals without allowing them to dominate the Movement.

It is an important question because it is clear to anyone who has looked at the history of past black struggles that we need to conduct our campaign on a broad front. We need activists and organisers, and we need historians and lawyers. We need research not only into the legal case for reparations but the documentary proof of the involvement of individuals and companies in slavery. And in the search for this information in the towns and cities of Britain all of our community will need to be involved. The skilled academic researchers will need to share their knowledge of research techniques with us so that we can go to the libraries and companies to get the evidence we need to make our claim.

Margaret Thatcher in the early 1980's made clear her intention to promote a black bourgeois, to some extent she may have

succeeded but at this juncture of our struggle we should not allow her achieve her purpose. By creating a strong movement for reparations we have the means of providing support and focus to those black people who are placed in the mainstream, so that their energies are directed as far as possible on work that is to the benefit of the African community.

The question of leadership is one that is often raised within our communities, we have suffered in the past from self-appointed, or worse, white appointed leaders. There should be no automatic assumption that anyone, because of their current position will automatically assume a leadership position within our movement. Professionals will not automatically lead, neither will men automatically lead women. This must be a movement that values and respects our different but equal contribution to the struggle. It follows therefore that a formal and explicit means must be adopted to select our leadership. For it is clear that we need leadership now more than ever. But we have fallen out and down in the past on not looking at our mechanisms. It is as though we have relied entirely on the rightness of our cause and neglected to consider the means of achieving our aims. This time therefore we must elect leaders and they should reflect not one view but the range of views that exist within our community. They should together compliment each others skills and attributes and they must be made accountable to us once elected.

It is from this process of developing a structure we may establish ways of working which are inclusive of all, or at least most African peoples. It will necessarily be a learning process for all of us. Many of us have spoken with passion about the implication of the reparations campaign, we know that if it is successful as we believe that it will be, it will not only transform those of us engaged within it, but it will transform Africa and the Caribbean. Many of us have no doubt that we would not be happy to see some of the corrupt and backward (ie. Western supported) leaders continue to misrule. And if many of us are to go or return to Africa and the Caribbean to rebuild, we must take with us skills that will be of practical use. Amongst those skills and maybe foremost amongst those skills will be our organisational and professional qualities.

The justice of our cause is evident, but we must turn our clarity and unity into action. The intellectual effort of all of our people will be a crucial part of that campaign. For example what economic relationship should exist between Africa and the Diaspora? What would Pan-Africanism be like in practical reality at an economic level? How do we create sustainable growth and have the benefits of Western technology? These are profound issues that need to be considered alongside our claim for reparations. We do not wish to be surprised or overwhelmed with our success in achieving reparations by not preparing for it.

So the case for reparations will require skills and expertise that few of us at present possess. If we can cast aside our learned suspicions of each other we will learn and share so that together we may grow.

Our relationship with the press is also an issue which must be considered now. There are many of us who are rightly cynical about the press, even the black press, the Voice for example has done our movement few favours. But it is also the case that many black people especially in areas of small communities continue to rely upon the newspapers as the only means of being in touch with other black people. It is against this background that our relationship with publicity has to be considered.

We need to use the media and in doing so we recognise that it will never be accurate or honest, but use of the press must be an means to an end and not an end in itself. The press however inaccurate provides opportunities to argue our case to black people who might otherwise not hear us. It is from the press that many people contacted Bernie Grant to find more information about the reparations issue and this a lesson to be learned by the more purist amongst us who would refrain from using the press. Our movement should not insist that everyone must use the press but neither should it insist that none of us does so. For the build a mass movement of African people we must reach all of them, and even negative publicity enables us to make contacts.

Our external relations within Britain will be of strategic importance to us, they have the potential to divide us because of our different approaches to achieving our goals. If we are to succeed it is essential that we find means of holding the range of approaches that exist within our community.

Our external relationships with Continental Africa and the Diaspora will need to be developed so that we grow apace with International developments. That we are placed in the heart of the Imperialism and neo-colonialism will be of significance to the Movement as a whole. We owe it to our brothers and sisters in Africa and the Caribbean to play our part in this historical Movement.

So far this campaign has attracted the support and enthusiasm of African peoples politically active in a range of campaigns and activities. No one means has thus far proved successful despite the efforts of countless committed African activists so we must move forward drawing from our past experiences of achievement with optimism and realism.

Recommendations to be considered by Conference.

1. That the Africa Reparations Movement ARM(UK) is an organisation open only to people of African origin.
2. That ARM(UK) should form a structure which reflects the breadth and depth of the African community in Britain.
3. That ARM(UK) is Pan-Africanist in it's outlook.
4. That local groups should be set up which have constitutions

approved by the Steering Committee, and that such groups must affiliate to ARM(UK) if they are to be recognised.

5. That ARM(UK) develop close working relationships with the International Movement for reparations sponsored by the Organisation for African Unity.

6. That the steering committee will be replaced by elected representatives by no later than November 1994, and that the steering committee and local groups will prepare the ground for the adoption of a Constitution and structure by that date, including the planning of the Inaugural Annual General Meeting of ARM(UK) open to all people of African origin.

7. That nominations for executive positions will be open only to individuals nominated by affiliated groups by the 31st May 1994, elections to take place at the AGM.

8. That the work of the Movement in Britain will be on many levels including academic research, outreach within our communities, public speaking, letter writing etc, and that no one mode of activity is deemed more important than any other.

9. That the movement will aim to be inclusive of all people of African origin and will therefore try muster the support of prominent African personalities such as those involved in sports and the entertainment field as well as those who currently describe themselves as "black British".

10. That the financing of the Movement will come primarily from within the Movement.

11. That the Movement will be pluralist and democratic and that we shall learn from the range of approaches to reparations which have been developed over the years.

Action Plan

December 1993

Briefing for Activists

Return to groups, spread information about reparations to grass roots.

January 1994

Series of local meetings- formal groups set up.

Establish network, probably London to coordinate information and campaign (newsletter?).

February 94

Local Groups undertake local research using public records of involvement with slavery, which Industries, factories were based upon produce from the "colonies" in 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Are there monuments to Local white colonialists, such as Henry Tate, Cecil Rhodes etc.

March 94

Continuation of outreach and research.
Draft Constitution for African Reparations Movement (UK).
Constitutions for local groups

April 94

Local Groups affiliate to ARM(UK)

May/June 94

Nominees selected for Executive Committee of ARM(UK)

September 94

Inaugural Annual General Meeting of ARM(UK)
adoption of Constitution
Election of Executive Committee

This Draft Action Plan outlines the steps we think are necessary

to transform an idea into a movement, one that is for and about the African community in Britain. We have anticipated organisational realities for example the time it takes to agree a formal constitution.

We have given consideration to a number of issues which we know from our past experience as activists can cause difficulties such as funding and at this stage have concluded that as far as possible we will finance all running costs for the movement on a shoe-string. We do not wish to be side-tracked into extensive fundraising and accounting. Instead we want to get on with the task in hand which is making the case for reparations.

How we work within this movement will have a direct impact on our goals. We resolve therefore to be inclusive, that is to say that we shall not seek to exclude anyone of African descent who wishes to identify with and work with this campaign. There are many strands within our community, our political maturity is demonstrated by our capacity to embrace all of those strands.

The task before us is huge, it will need to be conducted on many levels, locally, nationally and Internationally. It will require a range of skills that few of us have been called upon to demonstrate in the past. In undertaking the task we recognise the need and importance of sharing our skills and insights so that the case for reparations includes the acquisition of new skills by all of us that will be of use to the movement as a whole, both here and in African and the Caribbean.

This is a historic duty, one that we owe to our children and grandchildren, when we finally lift the yolk of slavery and its legacy from our shoulders. Clear and open organisation is the means by which we accomplish it.