

SORROW AND REGRET ARE NOT ENOUGH. BRITAIN MUST FINALLY PAY REPARATIONS FOR SLAVERY

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When Jamaica's prime minister, Andrew Holness, announced to Prince William last week that Jamaica was "moving on", the irony of his statement was lost on most. Visiting the country in 2015, Britain's then PM, David Cameron, told Jamaican politicians making the case for reparations to "move on".

5 Republican ideology has been given renewed energy since 2021 when Barbados, led by Mia Mottley, became the latest Caribbean island to remove the Queen as head of state, replacing her with a female president.

Mottley had strongly opined that the Caribbean had won political independence but was denied any developmental compact. Outlining the strides the Caribbean had made in reversing legal inequalities, 10 she made the case that only reparations could help tackle the psychological, sociological and economic inequalities that still exist within Caribbean countries and between them and their former colonisers.

Reparation seems a dirty word whenever Caribbean leaders utter it, and talks have taken on a farcical narrative. In 1834, reparations of over £20m were paid, not to the slaves but to the plantation owners, in compensation for their loss of free labour after emancipation.

15 Talks over the last 60 years or so, since independence began, have offered no cause for celebration. Britain has been remorseful in words but not emphatic in action. In August 2020, the UK government's response was: "The UK deplores the human suffering caused by slavery and the slave trade. They are among the most abhorrent chapters in the history of humanity."

Sound familiar? Prince William reiterated this in Jamaica. The statement went on: "While reparations are not part of the government's approach, we feel deep sorrow for the transatlantic slave trade, 20 and fully recognise the strong sense of injustice and the legacy of slavery in the most affected parts of the world. We also believe that we have much to do today and in the future to address the reality of slavery in the UK and around the world."

Voicing "sorrow and regret" is indeed a start but money talks far more than platitudes.

25 Citizens of Belize and Jamaica protested during the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's visit. A petition proclaimed that there was absolutely nothing to rejoice over for the last 70 years of the Queen's role in Jamaica.

Some of the last significant bastions of the British empire lie in Caribbean waters. These tiny island paradises, thousands of miles away yet still tied to the British empire, have been plagued by natural 30 disasters which have impacted infrastructure and economies.

Two years of the pandemic have severed any hope of a quick recovery. In addition, there is political corruption by captured states, and the inertia of successive governments that seem hellbent on destroying their economies and enriching themselves, moving their ill-gotten gains through British tax-haven territories, with the final destination being London, to be hidden in real estate and other investments.

35 Reparations to bring real, impactful development initiatives in infrastructure, education, health and transportation could change the destiny of the descendants of slavery in the Caribbean.