

*"The work of rehabilitating a people who had experienced moral breakdown, and whose culture had been undermined, requires going back and revisiting what had happened."*

Autobiography of HIM Haile Selassie 1st (Vol. 2) pg 169

**Greetings in the name of His Imperial Majesty Haile I Selassie I and Empress Menen**

## **POSITION PAPER OF THE RASTAFARI COMMUNITY IN BARBADOS**

**as represented by the**

Rastafari Reparations Repatriation Working Group (RRRWG) a sub-committee of ICAR

### Grounding

RRRWG welcomes the commencement by Caricom Governments of the process towards achieving reparations from the former slave owning and colonial European countries. We also endorse the view of the Caricom Heads of Government that our dialogue be diplomatic, conciliatory and morally uplifting.

Rastafari approves of the stance taken by CARICOM in recognition that implementation of the actions agreed upon within the legitimacy of the United Nations structure at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa is urgent and overdue. The countries that owe reparations are parties to the Declaration and Programme of Action. Rastafari is not supporting a new dialogue; rather, implementation of what has been agreed.

We are thus guided by the Declaration of the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances (WCAR) held in Durban, South Africa, particularly paragraphs 13, 14 and 34 of the General Issues, quoted below:

"13. We acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity not only because of their abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of their magnitude, organized nature and especially their negation of the essence of the victims, and further acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade and are among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of these acts and continue to be victims of their consequences;

14. We recognize that colonialism has led to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of colonialism and continue to be victims of its consequences. We acknowledge the suffering caused by colonialism and affirm that, wherever and whenever it occurred, it must be condemned and its reoccurrence prevented. We further regret that the effects and persistence of these structures and practices have been among the factors contributing to lasting social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world today;

34. We recognize that people of African descent have for centuries been victims of racism, racial discrimination and enslavement and of the denial by history of many of their rights, and assert that they should be treated with fairness and respect for their dignity and should not suffer discrimination of any kind. Recognition should therefore be given to their rights to culture and their own identity; to participate freely and in equal conditions in political, social, economic and cultural life; to development in the context of their own aspirations and customs; to keep, maintain and foster their own forms of organization, their mode of life, culture, traditions and religious expressions; to maintain and use their own languages; to the protection of their traditional knowledge and their cultural and artistic heritage; to the use, enjoyment and conservation of the natural renewable resources of their habitat and to active participation in the design, implementation and development of educational systems and programmes, including those of a specific and characteristic nature; and where applicable to their ancestrally inhabited land;"

We also take note of paragraph 72 of the Programme of Action of the said Declaration where states are urged at a **national** level "to design, implement and enforce effective measures to eliminate the phenomenon popularly known as "racial profiling" and comprising the practice of police and other law enforcement officers relying, to any degree, on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin as the basis for subjecting persons to investigatory activities or for determining whether an individual is engaged in criminal activity;"

and paragraph 158, at an **international** level, having recognized "that these historical injustices have undeniably contributed to the poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion, economic disparities, instability and insecurity that affect many people in different parts of the world, in particular in developing countries. The Conference recognizes the need to develop programmes for the social and economic development of these societies and the Diaspora, within the framework of a new partnership based on the spirit of solidarity and mutual respect, in the following areas:" "Facilitation of welcomed return and resettlement of the descendants of enslaved Africans;" as an effective remedy for recourse, among other areas such as "Infrastructure development; Human resource development, including capacity-building; Education, training and cultural development".

## Foreground

The Rastafari Reparations Repatriation Working Group (RRRWG) is a representative committee of Rastafarians in Barbados. It was formed in 2011 in the context of observing the International Year for Africans and People of African Descent, by members of the Ichirouganaim Council for the Advancement of Rastafari (ICAR).

In 2001, ICAR, a Rastafari community based organization and founding member of the Caribbean Rastafari Organisation (CRO), participated at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances (WCAR) in Durban, South Africa. Among its proposals to the conference were that (a) the African slave trade and slavery be recognized as a crime against humanity (b) reparations be paid to the victims of the descendants of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonial period (c) repatriation to the African continent by those who so desire be facilitated as part of the compensation process being discussed and (d) that legislation be enacted to eradicate the abuse of human/religious rights of Rastafari especially as this relates to (i) the use of herb/cannabis-sativa and (ii) access to employment, housing, school and travel requirements.

ICAR also participated in the WCAR follow-up conference of “African and African Descendants” held in 2002 at Sherbourne Conference Centre, Barbados that created the Global African Congress. In 2005 ICAR/CRO participated in the first African Union (AU)-South Africa Caribbean Conference held in Kingston, Jamaica. At that meeting Rastafari was recognized for its unique role in keeping Africa alive in the minds and hearts of people worldwide. Also, in 2007 ICAR/CRO attended the African Union (AU)-South Africa Regional Consultative Conferences held in Barbados.

Furthermore, in 2011 (with follow-up letter January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014) CRO wrote to CARICOM, in the context of that year being the United Nations declared Year for African and African Descendants, requesting closer dialogue on matters pertaining to Rastafari, including a census on Repatriation; because the AU had asked to know the numbers, professions, and skills of ones who would like to come home. African countries at the forefront of welcomed return and resettlement include Ethiopia, Benin, Ghana, and South Africa.

Rastafarians have always agitated for Repatriation as an essential component of reparatory justice. The Rastafarian communities of Barbados and worldwide will continue our role as a catalyst for reparatory justice for crimes against humanity. We will maintain our unique sense of reasoning as a community within the wider Caribbean. We know that our history as a minority community within Caribbean populations gives us insights to contribute and help to guide deliberations towards achieving the goals of the Caricom Reparations Commission.

The reparatory demands recommended in this paper highlight the aspects that are important to Rastafarian communities, but will also accrue benefits to the wider society. We emphasize our need for resettlement in Africa. We are energized by the momentum that reparations can give to this desired move to Africa and will vigorously seek reparations for this purpose. In this position paper we focus on matters that are of a global concern as well as matters of local importance that will all lead to social justice and human decency.

### Proposals

The following contributions are made within the aforementioned historical context.

**Settlement in Africa:** This goal is of greatest importance to most Rastafarians and others of the African Diaspora.

We are encouraged by the Final Declaration of the Global African Diaspora Summit, Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa May 25, 2012, which states under the caption **Intergovernmental Cooperation** “m) Encourage AU and CARICOM to create a conducive environment for the African Diaspora to invest, work, and travel on the African continent and the Caribbean”.

Rastafari therefore calls on CARICOM to establish strong partnerships with the AU in pursuit of this objective.

We propose use of the proceeds of reparations to facilitate settlement in Africa by those beneficiaries desirous of welcomed return to Africa. The facilitation is by way of transportation to Africa, access to land, housing, business pursuit, investment and personal development in Africa. Debt cancellation is also essential as part of reparations for Africa, and its capacity to absorb the skills and experiences we are anxious to invest in our motherland. We are of the view that as the African continent lost many of its productive citizens by their forced removal during transatlantic slavery Africa became under-resourced as a result. In this regard, the human resources that were forcefully removed from Afrika must be replenished by their descendants. Reparations should compensate by resourcing and returning individuals of the African Diaspora who so desire to the continent.

We note that *“the Commission affirms the principles of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action that call for an acknowledgement by former slave-owning nations that slavery and slave trading were crimes against humanity; and calls upon these nations to issue statements of formal apologies and commit to a reparatory process that includes, among other actions, the facilitation of the repatriation programme.”*

RRRWG will provide an outline of a process for settlement in Africa under our separate proposal **Reparations for Settlement in Africa Project (RSAP)**. This project looks at aspects of

economic cooperation detailed in the Final Declaration of the Global African Diaspora Summit, Sandton, Johannesburg, South Africa May 25, 2012 where commitment was made to the following:

**“Government Action to Foster Increased Economic Partnership**

- a) Develop effective regional integration mechanisms that would enhance closer interaction between the African Union and the Diaspora;
- b) Take concrete measures that would promote and sustain linkages between AU and the Diaspora in the following priority areas: trade and investment, science and technology, travel and tourism, communication and transportation infrastructure, energy, information and communication technology and cultural industries; and
- c) Create an environment conducive for the growth and development of Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprise and promote entrepreneurship in Africa and the Diaspora;”

We are further encouraged by item 8 of **IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP** of the said Declaration that “Agree to set up a Diaspora Advisory Board, which will address overarching issues of concern to Africa and its Diaspora such as reparations, right to return and follow up to WCAR Plan of Action”

We welcome CARICOM/AU dialogue on this specific proposal in due course.

**Reparations for the atrocities committed against Rastafari by the State must be paid!**

A number of matters affecting the Rastafari community should be taken into account at this time of dialogue on reparations. The Rastafari community urges action as contained in the year 2000 report of the Committee for National Reconciliation at paragraphs 67 and 68 of the executive summary, and in the Minority Report submitted by committee member Mr. David Commisong at page 106, paragraph 13) captioned “The Rastafarian Community.” Further,

1. The Rastafari have endured stigma and discrimination for practicing a way of life premised on self-repair from the legacies of slavery. Many have been committed routinely to the psychiatric hospital with adverse effects to their mental health and daily lives. Rastafari has not been protected by the state from discrimination in education, housing, employment, and enforcement of the law based on religious intolerance.
2. Rastafari exists in an ambiguous relationship with the wider society wherein certain practices of our faith are not respected, and one aspect is deemed illegal, at the same time that Rastafari is sought out for its many positive contributions to national life. Of particular concern is the lack of respect, when certain picture identifications have to be

obtained, for the head-covering which forms an essential part of the dress code of Rastafarl women.

3. Also of concern is the absence of designated spaces with appropriate infrastructure, in strategic locations throughout Barbados, for the conduct of Rastafari business enterprises. We consider the allocation to the Rastafarian community of permanent space in Bridgetown for the operation of micro and small businesses as appropriate for reparatory action. The temporary/uncertain nature of present tenancy arrangements with respect to the Temple Yard, Bridgetown area prevents proper business investments and development.
4. In light of scientific research and legal reform unfolding worldwide on ganja, *Cannabis Sativa L*, the decriminalization of myriad Barbadian youth is critical to improved social cohesion and economic productivity. The Rastafarl community will make a substantive submission on this issue in the near future.

#### **Six broad aspects identified by the Executive of the Caricom Reparations Commission**

With respect to these we offer our support and comment as follows:

1) Public Health: We see this aspect as crucial for our sustainable future. Whereas appropriate research is necessary as a preventative approach to ill health, and is rightfully included for reparatory diplomacy and action, we also recognize the need for new, better equipped health care facilities, accessible for the foreseeable future at nominal costs, to the beneficiaries of reparations. Also, sustainable educational programmes on public sanitation, waste recycling, water quality, and food and nutrition sovereignty as they relate to the upkeep of public health.

2) Education: We recommend use of subject matter and syllabuses that recognizes a global African presence and aims to uplift African people and the continent of Africa. Our history did not start with slavery. We are explorers, inventors, agriculturalists, conservationists, religionists and leaders of humanity. The introduction of African languages on schools' curricula will foster better relations and trading opportunities with Africans on the continent of Africa, as well as to lessen existing feelings of separation from Africa among Africans of the Diaspora. The need for retraining of persons involved in law enforcement, the judiciary, mental health institutions etc., so that they could gain a better understanding and respect for persons whose lifestyles exemplify retentions of their African and indigenous culture, is urgently required. In fact, at all levels of our education system, a comprehensive new paradigm of re-education might be necessary to repair much of the damage that has been inculcated by religious and academic institutions during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Education on the homogeneous dynamics of religion, politics, economies and development is recommended.

3) Cultural Institutions: We propose that one or more estates/plantations could be reassigned as “African Spaces” and converted into areas where a multiplicity of activities associated with African Barbadian culture could be carried out. Projects having to do with indigenous/cultural/heritage tourism can be conceptualized and executed.

Facilities with focus on indigenous populations of the Caribbean are also necessary.

4) Cultural Deprivation: This aspect speaks of the unjust behaviors towards Rastafarian communities throughout the Caribbean. Rastafarians have always promoted respect for Africa, things African and a black identity, yet face tremendous ridicule because of these values. The slave owners and colonial Governments were ruthless in altering the minds of their captives to become subservient mental slaves, hating themselves. Rastafarians are recusant and claim success in maintaining features of our African heritage. We need commendation from Authority under reparations. Removal of ambiguous laws that allow subtle discrimination, based on a culturally deprived bias against Rastafarians in schools or otherwise, or they replacement with clearly defined laws preventing discrimination is required.

5) Psychological trauma: Rastafarian communities are Afro-centric in character. This character has survived and persisted beyond the planned attempt by slave owners and colonial Governments to disenfranchise and attenuate African people and their achievements, throughout the African Diaspora. Our afro-centric orientation allows us to fully embrace spiritual strength and guidance from the mother continent of Africa. We cherish our African heritage which can be manifested in our hair styles, apparel, music and skills. These manifestations however have often caused negative or derogatory behaviors towards Rastafarl from individuals of the African Diaspora population and Diaspora Governments of Caricom. We seek reconciliation for acts that inhibit Rastafarians from full participation within Caricom societies with respect to educational and work opportunities, movement, business pursuit and religious expression.

Further to this we register our objection to actions of medical personnel within “drug abuse centers” that force some individuals that have used marijuana to admit to “addiction” or face extensions of their incarceration, and/or receive an “injection” that may seemingly cause permanent deterioration of one’s mental health.

6) Scientific and Technological Backwardness: the Rastafarl community will actively participate in reparatory dialogue on this issue. We propose that CARICOM facilitates weekly broadcasts of news directly from Africa, across the region in order to familiarize CARICOM nationals with all aspects of life on the continent and give an unbiased perspective of all sectors: economic, social, political, scientific, and technological. CARICOM should encourage direct dialogue between media houses in the region and in Africa to provide regular information that promotes

the commitment of the Global African Diaspora Summit at section: II Economic Cooperation, D. Science and Technology; to cooperate with Africans in the Diaspora to develop institutions dedicated to innovation and invention.

### **“Recognition, Justice and Development”**

Through a plethora of letters, petitions, declarations, committees and conferences over two centuries individuals and organisations in the global African Diaspora have initiated calls for reparations to be paid to the African and African Descendants victims of Trans-Atlantic Slavery. The WCAR and the UN Year 2011 for Africans and African Descendants has established the coherence and inter-connectedness of these prior efforts and solidified international networking among organisations working on Reparations in the Americas and other regions. In recognition of this dynamic worldwide alliance the Working Group of Experts on Peoples of African Descent have proposed that the United Nations declare a Decade for Peoples of African Descent and agree on a set of strategies designed to address some of the developmental problems faced by Africans and African Descendants. Rastafari urges each member state of CARICOM to sign their approval and give support this proposal as part of their mobilization towards reparations.

Selah.