# Descendants of slave owners and enslaved people meet at UN to discuss reparations



Descendants of both slave owners and enslaved people from former British colonies in the Caribbean convened for a historic meeting at the United Nations headquarters in New York last week, marking a significant step in the ongoing global conversation about reparations for slavery. This unprecedented gathering brought together individuals sharing their personal family histories alongside diplomats and experts from affected nations, fostering dialogue on how to address the legacies of slavery and colonialism.

The meeting occurred during the U.N. Permanent Forum on People of African Descent's weeklong session. It was moderated by Laura Trevelyan, a former BBC journalist who discovered that her ancestor, Sir John Trevelyan, owned sugar plantations and about 1,000 enslaved people in Grenada, a fact she only learned after the records of Britain’s Slave Compensation Commission were made public in 2013. Trevelyan described the event as “historic,” highlighting the significance of descendants of slave owners and enslaved people coming together for dialogue.

Among those present was Charles Gladstone, the great-great-grandson of 19th-century British Prime Minister William Gladstone, who spoke of his horror upon learning seven years ago that his ancestors were slave owners in Jamaica and Guyana. “I felt a profound sense of guilt,” he said, acknowledging that much of his family's privilege was tied to what he described as a “criminal past.” Gladstone has publicly apologised to Guyana and Jamaica and expressed a commitment to contribute positively moving forward. He pointed out that while Britain’s role in abolishing slavery in 1833 is well recognised, its involvement in the slave trade itself has largely been overlooked. “The history must be told, because the evils of this crime against humanity are not historical, they’re felt very, very profoundly today,” he told the gathering.

The event also featured the participation of Aidee Walker and her sister Kate Thomas, who learned through a DNA test and genealogical research that their great-great-great-grandfather was the son of a Jamaican slave owner and an African housekeeper. Inspired by Trevelyan’s work, they contacted Verene Shepherd, a vice chair of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) reparations commission, which supports education and advocacy around reparatory justice. Thomas remarked, “If we can get the numbers, then that could influence institutions and governments to act.”

This meeting unfolded against the backdrop of broader international developments related to slavery reparations. U.N. human rights chief Volker Türk highlighted that an estimated 25 million to 30 million Africans were forcibly uprooted for slavery from around 1500 onwards. The Human Rights Council has for years urged global measures including reparations, formal apologies, and educational reforms to address the historic injustices experienced by people of African descent. He also referenced the European Union’s 2023 statement expressing profound regret for the suffering caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the African Union’s designation of 2025 as the “Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations.”

The Caribbean Community, representing 15 nations, has adopted a 10-point plan for reparatory justice, calling on former European colonial powers to issue formal apologies among other actions. Arley Gill, chairman of Grenada’s National Reparations Commission, spoke positively about the growing global momentum toward recognising these historical crimes. “We are on a good path to ensure these crimes against humanity are being recognised by the colonial powers,” he said.

At the meeting, Trevelyan shared that her family had visited Grenada to apologise and pledged a contribution of 100,000 British pounds (approximately $133,000) to support education on the island. She acknowledged the challenges faced, including local protests claiming the apology was insufficient.

The British deputy U.N. ambassador, James Kariuki, attended the meeting but did not speak publicly. The British government has maintained a position against making direct financial payments to Caribbean nations for slavery reparations. A statement from Development Minister Anneliese Dodds to Parliament in late February reiterated that neither she nor Prime Minister Keir Starmer supports cash transfers for reparations.

Ending the meeting, Antigua’s U.N. ambassador and chair of the Caribbean ambassadors’ caucus, Walton Webson, declared that reparations are no longer a taboo topic. “Now, it’s time to put reparations ‘on the lips of every child, every person’ and start to take action,” he said, signalling a shift toward more open and sustained engagement on this issue internationally.

The meeting at the U.N. represents a vital new chapter in acknowledging and addressing the enduring impacts of slavery, as descendants of both enslaved peoples and slave-owning families engage in dialogue alongside reparations advocates and officials from Caribbean states.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/descendants-slave-owners-enslaved-people-caribbean-call-reparations-120988417> - This article corroborates the historic meeting at the United Nations where descendants of slave owners and enslaved people from the Caribbean convened to discuss reparations, including the participation of Laura Trevelyan and Charles Gladstone sharing their family histories.
* <https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/international/2025/04/20/fgn26-un-slavery-reparations.html> - This source confirms the details about the UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent session, the estimated 25 to 30 million Africans uprooted for slavery, and the statements by Volker Türk and Walton Webson regarding reparations.
* <https://www.caricom.org/caricom-reparatory-justice-10-point-plan/> - The Caribbean Community's official website detailing their 10-point plan for reparatory justice, which calls for formal apologies and reparations from former colonial powers, supporting the claims about CARICOM's leadership in this matter.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-59060454> - BBC reporting on Laura Trevelyan’s research and revelation about her ancestor Sir John Trevelyan owning plantations and enslaved people in Grenada, validating her role and personal family history mentioned in the article.
* <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1133537> - United Nations news article covering statements from UN human rights chief Volker Türk on the history and impact of slavery, including calls for reparations and the African Union's 2025 Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations.