



Policy Brief

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## AU and the New Scramble for Africa: Conflict, Reparations and Resource Sovereignty

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# 1 Introduction and Context

Agenda 2063, coupled with the African Union (AU) General Assembly’s designation of 2025 as the *Year of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations*, reflects a shared recognition that Africa’s historical injustices, most notably slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and resource exploitation, continue to shape contemporary challenges in governance, peace, and development. The transatlantic slave trade alone forcibly displaced more than 15 million Africans, many of whom perished during the Middle Passage or in systems of coastal confinement. In 1749, approximately 8,560 enslaved individuals, shipped as cargo between the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin and Bristol, were collectively valued at £149,400.[1] Evidence suggests that the average African country’s per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would have been approximately 72 per cent higher in the absence of the transatlantic slave trade.[2] The legacies of these atrocities have inflicted enduring environmental, socio-economic, political, and psychological harm on Africans, constraining their current development trajectories. The demand for reparations for the historical dehumanisation of Africans and the illegitimate exploration of their natural resources have become a critical corollary to the pursuit of inclusive development across the African continent and among people of African descent globally. Within this context, the AU’s advocacy for reparations, pursued in partnership with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), constitutes a strategic justice agenda closely linked to the quests for inclusive development, climate justice, debt relief, and resource sovereignty.

These historical injustices intersect with a rapidly evolving geopolitical environment characterised by intensified external competition for Africa’s strategic resources. Contemporary engagement between Africa and foreign powers, often channelled through official development assistance (ODA), peace financing, security cooperation, and infrastructure investment, frequently reproduces patterns of the militarisation of politics, dependency and unequal trade, and exploitative economic relations. The renewed global race for critical minerals central to the green energy transition, combined with the growing presence of foreign security forces and mercenaries in Africa, has contributed to heightened instability in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Such dynamics place increasing strain on the capacity of the AU’s Peace and Security Council (PSC) to ensure continental peace and security.

**“ The legacies of these atrocities have inflicted enduring environmental, socio-economic, political, and psychological harm on Africans, constraining their current development trajectories. ”**

Despite the efforts of the AU, its agencies, and regional economic commissions (RECs), persistent conflict, poverty, and inequality indicate that prevailing responses have not sufficiently addressed underlying structural drivers, including extractive economic models, weak resource governance, and external political and economic influence. Notwithstanding Africa’s abundant natural and agricultural wealth, the continent continues to experience multidimensional poverty, food insecurity, and financial vulnerability, undermining progress

[1] The National Archives (nd) The transatlantic slave trade, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/explore-the-collection/explore-by-time-period/georgians/transatlantic-slave-trade/>.

[2] United Nations (2025: 5) Learning from the Past: Transatlantic Slave Trade, Colonialism, Extractive Economies and Institutions in Africa, [https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org/osaa/files/sub-theme\\_1\\_-\\_policy\\_brief\\_-\\_draft.pdf](https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org/osaa/files/sub-theme_1_-_policy_brief_-_draft.pdf).

toward the aspirations of Agenda 2063. Over 20 per cent of Africa’s population experiences hunger, around 600 million Africans remain without dependable electricity, and close to 40 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa’s population survives on less than US\$2.15 per day. At this critical juncture, the renewed scramble for Africa’s resources, and growing demands for reparatory justice, reinforces the need for a more coherent, coordinated, and assertive continental strategy.

It is within this context that the Department of Politics and International Relations and the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa, in partnership with TrustAfrica in Senegal, with the support of Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) in Zambia, and AUDA-NEPAD in South Africa, convened the 3rd African Union Studies Annual Symposium titled “The AU and the New Scramble for Africa: Conflict, Reparations and Resource Sovereignty” on 9–10 October 2025 in Johannesburg. The symposium brought together 89 participants, both in person and online, and featured keynote addresses by H.E. Dr Ibrahim A. Mayaki[3] and Mr Makmid Kamara[4], as well as seven high-level panels and three paper sessions.



**H.E. DR. IBRAHIM A. MAYAKI GAVE THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON DAY ONE OF THE SYMPOSIUM**

Source: <https://au.int/en/image/dr-ibrahim-mayaki-smalljpg>.



**MR MAKMID KAMARA GAVE THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON DAY TWO OF THE SYMPOSIUM.**

Source: <https://x.com/Makmid>.

Drawing on intensive deliberations during the symposium, this policy brief argues that reparations, resource sovereignty, and security are mutually reinforcing and central priorities towards the attainment of Agenda 2063.

## **2 The AU and the New Scramble for Africa**

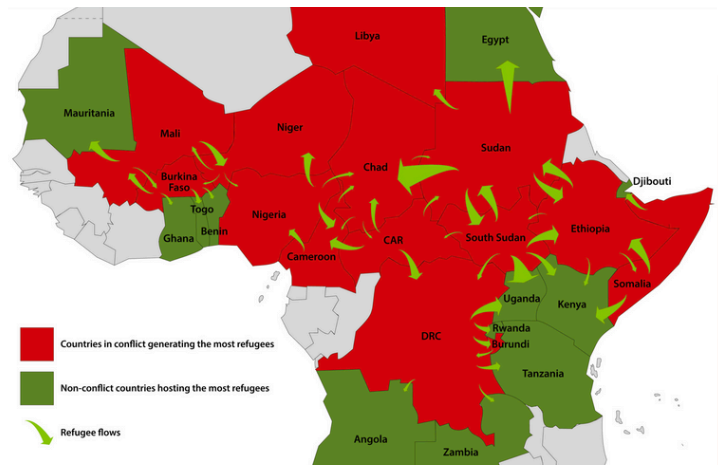
Even as Africa continues to grapple with the legacies of slavery, the partition of the continent in 1884–85, and the destructive consequences of colonialism, the current phase of global engagement with Africa mirrors a more aggressive scramble for its resources. This is driven less by global scarcity than by persistent weaknesses in African sovereignty, fragmented governance, and asymmetric power relations

[3] Former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister of Niger, and Former CEO of the NEPAD Secretariat and AUDA-NEPAD.

[4] Founder and Director of Reform Initiatives, Ghana.

with foreign powers. Despite growing awareness of the long-term costs of external exploitation on African states and continental institutions, structural vulnerabilities continue to expose the continent to extractive economic arrangements, militarised partnerships, and unequal trade relations. These realities impede Africa's ability to define its own governance, security and development pathways.

These trends are particularly evident in eastern DRC, where armed groups, including the March 23 Movement (M23), have exploited the state's fragility to control mineral-rich areas containing coltan, cobalt, and lithium, which are critical inputs for global technology and energy supply chains.[5] Competition over strategic resource corridors around Goma illustrates how control over resources can finance armed mobilisation, perpetuate violence, and undermine state authority. As insecurity intensifies, civilian populations face large-scale displacement, humanitarian crises, and deteriorating access to basic services. Across the continent, Africa hosts an estimated 45.7 million forcibly displaced persons, with nearly 70 per cent originating from Sudan, the DRC, Somalia, and Burkina Faso.[6] This scale of displacement, which reflects the combined



**AS AFRICA'S CONFLICTS BECOME MORE REGIONALIZED, FORCIBLY DISPLACED POPULATIONS INCREASINGLY FACE THE PREDICAMENT OF FLEEING INTO NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES ALSO EXPERIENCING CONFLICT.**

Source: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/africa-conflicts-compound-forced-displacement/>

“**... Africa's contemporary conflict environment is defined by global resource competition.**”

effects of violent conflict, underdevelopment, and climate-related crises, heightens competition over land, water, and livelihoods, thereby increasing the risk of instability and human vulnerability.

In this context and as experienced in many conflict zones in Africa, conflict functions not merely as a by-product of resource competition but as a facilitating condition for continued extraction. In several fragile and conflict-affected countries such as Sudan, DRC and the Sahel region, external actors protect economic interests through private security arrangements, geopolitical leverage, and contractual mechanisms that insulate extraction activities from local instability. This is evident in the destabilising operations of private military companies, including the Wagner Group/Africa Corps, in countries such as Mali, Mozambique, and Libya. While African states and communities bear the social, economic, and humanitarian costs of violence, the material gains of extraction primarily accrue outside the continent. For instance, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, decades of oil extraction have generated significant revenues for multinational corporations (MNCs) and foreign governments. For instance, Shell recorded a profit of almost \$40bn in 2022, which fell to \$23.7bn in 2024 due to instability in oil-resource countries.[7] However, the exploration has caused severe environmental degradation, massive oil spills, poisoned land and water, as well as destroyed livelihoods, fuelled militancy, and reduced life expectancy.

[5] Paravicini, G. & Lewis, G. (2025). Inside the mine that feeds the tech world – and the funds Congo's Rebels, 13 August, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/investigations/inside-mine-that-feeds-tech-world-funds-congos-rebels-2025-08-13/>.  
[6] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2025). Africa's Colliding Conflicts Compound Forced Displacement Crisis, 22 September. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/africa-conflicts-compound-forced-displacement/>.  
[7] Ambrose, Jillian (2025) Shell investors in line for multibillion-dollar windfall despite weak profits, 30 January, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/jan/30/shell-investors-in-line-for-multibillion-dollar-windfall-despite-weak-profits>.

At the national level, governance deficits continue to sustain extractive political economies, while weak institutions, limited accountability, and elite capture have, in some cases, facilitated resource exploitation and deepened inequality. Across the Sahel, military coups and insurgencies in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have been closely linked to contestation over land and mineral resources, contributing to widespread violence and human displacement. These cases demonstrate how governance fragility, compounded by the externalisation of African security and the aggressive exploitation of its resources, disrupts local livelihoods, distorts governance, and entrenches instability.[8]

The legacies of colonial extraction and post-independence failures in resource governance continue to produce stark inequalities in resource-rich states. Despite substantial mineral wealth, large segments of the Congolese population remain impoverished. At the same time, the Niger Delta has endured decades of conflict linked to oil extraction, environmental harm, and inequitable revenue distribution. This persistent gap between resource endowment and human development highlights the durability of extractive economic structures that generate grievances without delivering broad-based benefits. Within African normative frameworks, including the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), governance is understood not simply as procedural compliance, but as a developmental and political process that shapes institutional legitimacy, social cohesion, and the state’s ability to protect the public interest. Without addressing internal governance weaknesses and strengthening accountability, efforts to counter external exploitation, promote inclusive development and prevent conflict would be compromised.



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM DAY ONE OF THE SYMPOSIUM**

**From the top left** - Dr Ebima Sall: Executive Director of Trust Africa, Dakar Senegal; Ms Pamla Gopaul: Head Policy Bridge Tank, African Union Development Agency-NEPAD, Midrand, South Africa; Prof Adeoye O. Akinola: Department of Politics and International Relations and Associate: IPATC, UJ, South Africa; Dr Gowtam Raj Chintaram: Programmes Officer, ECOSOCC, Zambia.

**From the bottom left** - H.E Amb Jerry Matjila: Former Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations; H.E Dr. Ibrahim A. Mayaki: Former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister of Niger as well as former CEO of the NEPAD Secretariat and AUDA-NEPAD; Prof. Sam Ewusi: Regional Director, Africa Regional Programme, University for Peace (UPEACE), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Prof Fritz Nganje: Head of Department, Politics and International Relations, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Source: IPATC

[8] Thurston, A. (2024). Military Coups, Jihadism, and Insecurity in the Central Sahel, April, Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/05/military-coups-jihadism-and-insecurity-in-the-central-sahel\\_4f7f928f/522f69f1-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/05/military-coups-jihadism-and-insecurity-in-the-central-sahel_4f7f928f/522f69f1-en.pdf).

Against this backdrop, reparations have re-emerged as both a historical justice claim and a contemporary policy imperative. Anchored in the AU's declaration and CARICOM's intensive efforts, the agenda has gained momentum in Africa and beyond. However, for reparations to move beyond symbolism, they must be supported by political cohesion, institutional credibility, and strengthened internal governance. Resource sovereignty, therefore, constitutes a central link between conflict prevention, development, and reparatory justice. It extends beyond legal ownership to include control over extraction terms, local value addition, community consent, and the productive use of revenues. Export-oriented growth models inherited from colonial powers and reinforced by the Bretton Woods institutions have failed to generate inclusive growth or employment, contributing to social instability. The continent's average unemployment rate is estimated at 8.9 per cent, with Eswatini and South Africa experiencing the highest levels at 34.4 per cent and 33.17 per cent, respectively.[9] With over 80 per cent of Africa's exports concentrated in primary commodities, many economies remain exposed to price volatility and limited value addition.[10] Case studies of export-oriented growth models in Africa include Zambia's copper export dependence and the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1990s, which accelerated privatisation of mines, reduced state involvement, and liberalised exports. Copper production accounts for 70 per cent of export earnings but employs only 2 per cent of the labour force. This is also evident in Nigeria's crude oil-led export growth, where the natural resource contributed over 80 per cent of export revenues, yet employs less than 1 per cent of the workforce, and revenues are concentrated at the elite and federal level. By contrast, industrialisation strategies grounded in local and regional value chains, particularly through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), offer more sustainable pathways for converting resource wealth into development gains and peace dividends.

The economic costs of conflict further compound these challenges. In sub-Saharan Africa, conflict is estimated to reduce economic growth by an average of 2.5 percentage points annually in affected countries, undermining investment, employment, and long-term development prospects.[11]. Combined with weak state capacity and intensified competition for strategic resources, these pressures reinforce geopolitical engagement that continues to prioritise external interests over continental priorities.

Despite Africa's substantial natural and agricultural potentials, food insecurity remains widespread. Many countries rely heavily on imported staple grains, increasing exposure to global price shocks. In Senegal, for example, rice is a key urban staple, yet domestic production meets only a portion of national demand, necessitating large-scale imports from Asia. During periods of global price volatility, including 2007–2008 and 2020–2022, food prices rose disproportionately, affecting low-income urban households. This dependence exposes long-standing structural inequalities rooted in colonial economic models that prioritised raw exports over local



H.E. AMB. LAZAROUS KAPAMBWE: FORMER PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ZAMBIA

Source: IPATC

“**...Nigeria's crude oil-led export growth, where the natural resource contributed over 80 per cent of export revenues, yet employs less than 1 per cent of the workforce, and revenues are concentrated at the elite and federal level.**”

[9] The Global Economy (2025) Unemployment rate - Country rankings, [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/unemployment\\_rate/Africa/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/unemployment_rate/Africa/).

[10] UNCTAD. (2025). Commodity dependence runs deep. Developing Countries must add value to turn the tide. 21 July, United Nations Trade and Development, <https://unctad.org/news/commodity-dependence-runs-deep-developing-countries-must-add-value-turn-tide>.

[11] Fang, X, Kothari, S., Mcloughlin, C., & Yenice, M. (2020). The Economic Consequences of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, IMF Working Paper, WP/20/221.

production and value addition.

Thus, these patterns of extraction and asymmetrical relations accentuate the urgent need for stronger national and continental responses that advance strategic autonomy, accountable governance, and inclusive development, laying the foundation for coherent and effective policy action by the AU and its Member States.

### 3 The Geopolitics of the New Scramble for Africa and the Quest for Reparations

Africa is currently confronting heightened global competition for resources, strategic influence, and technological power. Although formal colonial rule has ended, the continent continues to experience post-colonial domination through militarisation, economic asymmetries, surveillance technologies, and unequal governance arrangements. This contemporary “new scramble” represents a break from the past and a reconfiguration of longstanding patterns that have shaped Africa’s engagement with the global political economy for centuries.

Resource-rich countries, particularly the DRC, exemplify these dynamics. The country holds over 70 per cent of global cobalt reserves, a critical input for batteries and advanced electronics, yet the bulk of value addition and profits remains externalised.[12] More broadly, Africa’s resource endowments, strategic maritime corridors, and expanding markets have positioned the continent at the centre of global power rivalries involving both foreign and non-state actors. Despite this strategic significance, African states and regional institutions exercise limited influence over economic policy and governance, thereby impeding resource beneficiation. Colonial extraction frameworks persist in the form of unequal trade agreements, continued dependence on raw material exports, and rising external debt. External engagement, often framed as development cooperation, frequently obscures deeper power asymmetries that undermine state sovereignty and developmental autonomy.

The contemporary scramble for Africa is therefore not an aberration to foreign actors, but a continuation of extractive political-economic structures under new modalities of global power. Despite independence and formal sovereignty, many African economies remain underdeveloped. These challenges are reinforced by imbalances embedded within the global financial and trade architecture. The current multilateral financial system has failed to provide Africa with adequate access to long-term, concessional development finance. International Monetary Fund (IMF) quota and voting systems, mainly based on economic stature and GDP, determine access to special drawing rights, lending capacity, and decision-making power in ways that perpetuate global inequality. Africa controls roughly 6.5 per cent of IMF voting power while hosting the largest number of IMF programmes.[13] As a result, African countries remain underrepresented in core financial institutions while facing high debt-servicing costs and restrictive loan conditions. By 2024, more than half of African low-income countries were in, or at high risk of, debt distress, reflecting the structural constraints of global financial governance rather than domestic fiscal policy alone.[14]

[12] United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2021). Producing Battery Materials in the DRC Could Lower Supply-Chain Emissions and Add Value to the Country’s Cobalt, 24 November, <https://www.uneca.org/stories/producing-battery-materials-in-the-drc-could-lower-supply-chain-emissions-and-add-value-to>.

[13] Miriri, Duncan and Karin Strohecker (2024) Africa leaders see extra IMF seat as starting block for bigger voice, 31 October, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/africa-leaders-see-extra-imf-seat-starting-block-bigger-voice-2024-10-31/>.

[14] IMF (2024). Harnessing Sub-Saharan Africa’s Critical Mineral Wealth. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/04/29/cf-harnessing-subsaharan-africas-critical-mineral-wealth>.

These dynamics give rise to neo-paternalistic power relations in which external partners position themselves as guardians of stability or development, often at the expense of African agency. Conditional aid frameworks, prescriptive governance reforms, and externally driven security partnerships have frequently marginalised African leadership and weakened public accountability. This form of engagement not only constrains policy autonomy but also reproduces psychological and political hierarchies rooted in colonial governance.

Externalisation of Africa’s security architecture, which has militarised its socio-political environment, has become a defining feature of the contemporary scramble. External powers have expanded their security footprints across Africa, often under the banner of stabilisation, regime security, or counterterrorism. Russia’s security engagements in Mali and Libya, Turkey’s military presence and diplomatic expansion in Somalia[15], and China’s overseas military base in Djibouti[16] illustrate the consolidation of foreign strategic interests across the continent. While these interventions are framed as security cooperation, they frequently deepen dependency on external military support, marginalising African-led peace and security mechanisms and aggravating human rights concerns.

**“ Externalisation of Africa’s security architecture, which has militarised its socio-political environment, has become a defining feature of the contemporary scramble. ”**



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM DAY ONE OF THE SYMPOSIUM**

**From the Left** - Dr Kofi Asante: Senior Research Fellow at ISSER at the University of Ghana; Mr. David Omozafoh: Regional Governance & Rule of Law Advisor, UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Prof Elias Phaahla: Department of Politics and International Relations, UJ, South Africa; Prof. Wenceslaus Mudyadzozo: Professor of Politics and Public Administration, Women's University in Africa and Managing Director Managing Director Research and Policy Consultancy Pvt Ltd, Zimbabwe; Dr. Alexander Rusero: Head of Department, International Relations and Diplomacy, Africa University, Zimbabwe.

Source: IPATC



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM DAY TWO OF THE SYMPOSIUM**

**From the left:** Prof Waris Attiya: Fiscal Law at the Faculty of Law, University of Nairobi in Kenya; and UN Independent Expert on Foreign Debt; Dr Hesphina Rukato: Africa Director, Crisis Action, South Africa; and Former Deputy CEO of AUDA-NEPAD, Midrand, South Africa; Mr. David Omozafoh: Regional Governance & Rule of Law Advisor, UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Prof. Khabele Matlosa - Former Director, Political Affairs of the African Union Commission; Director at the Strategic Institute for Research and Dialogue, Maseru, Lesotho.

Source: IPATC

Within this complex geopolitical environment, reparations have gained renewed prominence as both a historical justice claim and a contemporary structural policy agenda. Reparations, as framed by the AU and constituencies, extend beyond financial compensation to encompass the restoration of Africa’s strategic autonomy, equitable integration into the global economy, strengthening of African agency in multilateral institutions, climate justice, and inclusive development.

[15] Al Jazeera (2017). Turkey sets up Largest Overseas Army base in Somalia, 1 October, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/1/turkey-sets-up-largest-overseas-army-base-in-somalia>.

[16] Mwangi, D. (2025). African Country that hosts China’s only Confirmed Foreign Military Base and Why, 22 December, Pulse, <https://www.pulse.co.ke/story/african-country-that-hosts-chinas-only-confirmed-foreign-military-base-and-why-2025122209264797026>.

## 4

## Economic Sovereignty and Reparatory Justice as Human Rights

Reparatory justice is central to advancing human rights, dignity, and sustainable development across Africa. Reparations further extend beyond financial compensation to encompass the restoration of dignity, the redress of structural inequalities, and the prevention of future harm through strengthened African self-determination. For instance, due to the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, South Africa is often regarded as the most unequal society in the world. A victim-centred approach ensures that reparatory processes prioritise historically marginalised communities, including women, youth, and other affected groups.



### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM.

From the Left - Prof Adeoye O. Akinola: Department of Politics and International Relations and Associate: IPATC, UJ, South Africa and Ms. Ratidzo C. Makombe - Researcher, IPATC, UJ, South Africa.

Source: IPATC

In response, the AU's establishment of an African Credit Rating Agency (AfCRA), headquartered in Mauritius, would offer a continent-focused, independent alternative to global credit rating agencies for evaluating African economies and corporations. Comparable regional mechanisms, such as the European Stability Mechanism, demonstrate that alternative institutions can enhance financial credibility when supported by strong political commitment and regulatory coherence.

The absence of a transparent and equitable global sovereign debt management mechanism further disadvantages African economies. Existing systems prioritise creditor repayment over development outcomes, constraining fiscal space. A reformed global financial architecture, potentially through an independent Global Financial Authority, could assess debt sustainability, address illicit financial flows, and account for historical exploitation and ecological harm. At the national level, underutilised domestic resources, including pension and sovereign wealth funds, could be redirected toward productive investment in infrastructure and industry to support employment creation and economic resilience.

Global financial governance structures continue to reproduce colonial power imbalances. International credit rating agencies such as Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch assess African economies using narrow macroeconomic indicators that overlook historical extraction, climate vulnerability, and social development needs. Consequently, countries such as Ghana and Kenya<sup>[17]</sup> have faced credit downgrades despite economic progress, leading to higher borrowing costs and capital outflows, pressures compounded by external shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

[17] The World Bank acknowledges that some macroeconomic indicators have improved since 2024—including declining inflation, a stabilised exchange rate, and stronger international reserves—but the overall pace of economic growth has slowed, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/05/27/despite-improvements-afe-kenyas-fiscal-path-is-fragile-amid-high-debt-vulnerabilities-and-weak-revenue-growth#:~:text=Despite%20improvements%2C%20Kenya's%20Fiscal%20Path,protests%20and%20reduced%20development%20spending.>

Reparatory justice also requires addressing entrenched injustices in resource and security governance. Colonial patterns of extraction persist through the activities of private military and security companies (PMSCs) operating in fragile environments. In communities such as eastern DRC, northern Mozambique, and the Sahel region, armed contractors have been linked to serious human rights abuses and the facilitation of illegal resource exploitation. While many cases were unreported, between May and December 2024, Malian forces and the Wagner Group killed at least 32 civilians and destroyed over 100 homes in central and northern Mali.[18] Weak enforcement of existing legal frameworks, including the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) 1977 Convention on the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, has enabled these practices to evolve under corporate security arrangements. While international initiatives such as the Montreux Document exist, fragmented and non-binding regulations continue to limit accountability. The current review of the 1977 OAU Convention by the AU, and the ongoing UN deliberations on a binding treaty, has the potential to limit the illicit activities of foreign fighters in Africa.

Cultural sovereignty is equally integral to reparatory justice. Education systems that privilege colonial languages and epistemologies have weakened the transmission and development of African knowledge, history, and identity. Evidence from contexts such as Tanzania illustrates that education in African languages can enhance learning outcomes, civic participation, and social cohesion. Promoting African languages, heritage, and cultural industries can also stimulate growth in creative sectors, tourism, and digital innovation. Yet, the predominance of foreign languages, cultures, and value systems has deeply permeated society, including the structures and operations of the AU.



**PROF EDDY MALOKA - FORMER CEO, AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM.**

Source: IPATC



**PROF OLAYINKA AJALA: LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY, UK.**

Source: IPATC



**MR ABDARAHMANE WONE: COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, TRUSTAFRICA, DAKAR, SENEGAL.**

Source: IPATC



**PROF BHASO NDZENDZE: VICE DEAN OF INTERNATIONALIZATION, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UJ, SOUTH AFRICA.**

Source: IPATC

The AU has recognised the limits of deeper integration with advanced economies and shifted toward promoting continent-led initiatives to drive growth. Regional integration through the AfCFTA has become a critical pillar of economic recovery, with intra-African trade accounting for less than 20 per cent of total trade. [19] Developing regional value chains in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, energy, textiles, and food processing is essential to reducing import dependence and retaining value within the continent. Initiatives like the Guided Trade Programme demonstrate the feasibility of cross-border trade in value-added goods.

[18] Human Rights Watch (2025) Mali: Atrocities by the Army and Wagner Group, 12 December, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/12/mali-atrocities-army-and-wagner-group>.

[19] Abdel-Latif, H., Khandelwal, K., & Zhang, L. (2025). Understanding Trade Dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa. IMF Working Papers, 2025(045), Article A001, A001.

Fiscal and tax reforms are also essential to advancing reparatory outcomes. Extensive tax incentives for MNCs have generated limited local benefits while contributing to significant revenue losses through profit shifting and illicit financial flows. Furthermore, informal traders and small enterprises, especially women-led businesses, often face disproportionate tax burdens and limited state support. More equitable and transparent tax systems would strengthen domestic revenue mobilisation and promote inclusive growth.

These measures highlight the transformative potential of reparations as a framework for shifting Africa’s development trajectory from dependency toward self-reliance, dignity, and equitable global partnerships. Reparatory justice is therefore not only a response to historical injustice, but a strategic pathway for reclaiming economic, political, and cultural sovereignty.

**“ More equitable and transparent tax systems would strengthen domestic revenue mobilisation and promote inclusive growth. ”**



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM.

**From the Left:** Prof Dorcas Ettang - Acting Director, International Centre of Nonviolence, Durban University of Technology, South Africa and Dr Tolulope Adeogun: Research Fellow, The Centre for the Study of Race, Gender, and Class (CSRGC), UJ, South Africa.

Source: IPATC



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM.

Source: IPATC

## **5 Africa and the Reparations Questions: By Whom and for Whom?**

The contemporary debate on reparations in Africa centres on accountability for historical and ongoing injustices and on determining the appropriate beneficiaries of reparatory measures. Reparations must move beyond symbolic gestures or discretionary foreign aid to address the systemic harms caused by slavery, colonialism, racial capitalism, and their enduring legacies. These harms are rooted in global political and economic systems that generated prosperity for the Global North, while producing long-term underdevelopment, social dislocation, and environmental damage across Africa. Reparations are fundamentally distinct from development aid or humanitarian assistance. Aid frameworks often obscure

historical responsibility and frame justice as charity, allowing beneficiaries of exploitation to retain structural power while offering limited and conditional support. Reparations, by contrast, are grounded in principles of accountability, restitution, and structural transformation, aimed at acknowledging harm and tendering a genuine apology, providing meaningful redress, and reforming the global systems that reproduce inequality.



**DAY ONE OF THE 3RD AFRICAN UNION STUDIES ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM, TITLED “AFRICAN UNION AND THE NEW SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA: CONFLICT, REPARATIONS AND RESOURCE SOVEREIGNTY”**

Source: IPATC

Over the years, debates have intensified over who and what institutions should bear responsibility for the historical wrongs committed against Africa and its people. The beneficiaries of slavery and the slave trade – individuals or corporate institutions and governments – have the responsibility to respond to the quests for reparations. Former colonial powers also bear primary responsibility, having administered African territories through land dispossession, forced labour, and extractive, racialised economic systems that generated enduring patterns of global inequality. In the contemporary era, MNCs, financial institutions, and private industries that continue to profit from Africa’s labour and resources also carry responsibility, particularly where social and environmental costs are externalised. Their activities remain closely linked to misgovernance, poverty, debt dependency, illicit financial flows, capital flight, and constraints on African policy autonomy.

While the calls for reparations have continued to vibrate across Africa, the objectives, purpose and management of reparations are equally critical. Reparatory measures should prioritise African communities whose social, economic, and political development was systematically disrupted, rather than serving elite interests or focusing solely on individual compensation. This includes addressing land dispossession, racialised labour regimes, the discrimination against women within extractive economies, and the marginalisation of youth whose life prospects have been constrained by historical neglect. As the demographic majority on the continent, African youth should be deliberately prioritised within reparations

[18] Global Forums on Remittances, Investment and Development (2024). Remittances from the African diaspora grew in 2023, set to exceed US\$ 100 billion in 2024. 31 January, <https://gfrid.org/remittances-from-african-diaspora-grew-in-2023-set-to-exceed-us100-billion-in-2024/>.

[19] Cassimon, D., & Mavrotas, G. (2021). Development finance in the post-COVID-19 era: implications, challenges and opportunities. *Africa growth Agenda*, 18(1), 4-9.

initiatives. Therefore, reparations must be collective, inclusive, intergenerational, and directed toward social redistribution.

African governments and continental institutions have a central role in advancing reparatory justice, but responsibility extends beyond the state. Reparations should support the strengthening of public services, such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and climate resilience, while enabling community-led development, cultural renewal, and the revitalisation of knowledge systems undermined by colonialism. People of African descent, shaped by histories of displacement and racial exclusion, must also be recognised as a key stakeholder, particularly regarding citizenship, mobility, and cultural belonging. The recognition of the African descent as the AU’s 6<sup>th</sup> region is commendable; however, this acknowledgement must extend beyond symbolism to ensure their meaningful integration and active participation in continental affairs.



**H.E DR. IBRAHIM A. MAYAKI ADDRESSING GUESTS AND PANELISTS ON DAY ONE OF THE SYPOSIUM.**

Source: IPATC



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SYMPOSIUM.**

**From the Left** - Ms Lebogang Ayobiojo: Community Engagement Specialist, University of Johannesburg (UJ), South Africa and Prof Emeritus Prof Stephanie Lawson: Macquarie University, Australia.

Source: IPATC

Clarifying who owes reparations and who should benefit is essential to moving beyond moral appeals toward substantive justice. When rooted in accountability, inclusion, and African agency, reparations are not retrospective, but they offer a framework for reshaping global relations, restoring dignity, and enabling self-determined development.



## 6 Policy Recommendations

The following ten key policy recommendations emerged from the meeting in October 2025:

1. **Strengthen AU Coordination and Collective Bargaining:** The AU Commission and its agencies, particularly the PSC, AUDA-NEPAD and ECOSOCC, should have the mandate to establish a 'Reparation Committee' to coordinate peace, development, and reparations agendas. This must aim to enhance Africa's collective bargaining power and advance a justice-centred development approach that prioritises African peoples within Africa and beyond.
2. **Adopt a Unified Continental Reparations Strategy:** Develop a comprehensive AU reparations framework that clearly articulates economic sovereignty, climate financing, debt restructuring, and structural justice claims, grounded in Agenda 2063 and international law, to guide negotiations with external partners.
3. **Advance Economic Transformation and Value Addition:** A shift from export-oriented extractive models by accelerating industrialisation and regional value chains through the AfCFTA, prioritising local value addition, job creation, and inclusive development.
4. **Build Public Trust and Integrate the Private Sector in the Reparatory Claims:** AU to strengthen public trust by ensuring transparency, accountability, and inclusive consultation in reparatory processes. Engaging the private sector through investment incentives, public-private partnerships, and co-financing mechanisms can deepen reparations initiatives, linking them to sustainable development, economic empowerment, and tangible benefits for African communities.
5. **Coordinate Unified African Positions in Global Governance:** AU to strengthen Africa's collective negotiating stance in international forums on trade, technology, and security to reduce power asymmetries and enhance African agency.
6. **Strengthen Regulation of Mercenarism and Private Security:** AU to accelerate the review of the OAU Convention on the Elimination of Mercenarism, Member States to establish clear national laws regulating private military and security companies and prohibiting mercenary activities on the continent. Achieving this necessitates that the AU bolster continental security frameworks to aid states in the effective promotion of peace and security.
7. **Strengthen partnership with RECs:** AU to strengthen partnerships with RECs by harmonising policies, coordinating security initiatives, and promoting joint development projects. Collaborative frameworks can enhance resource ownership, address cross-border security threats, and drive inclusive economic development.
8. **Prioritise Community-Centred Security and Resource Governance:** Centre security and resource governance on civilian protection, community consent, and local development, rejecting the securitisation of foreign investments at the expense of human rights. It becomes imperative to develop a

more integrated continental approach that links peace and security interventions with resource governance, protection of strategic autonomy, and development planning, in line with the mandate of the AU PSC

9. Promote Cultural and Linguistic Sovereignty: Mainstream African languages, histories, and knowledge systems in education, and support cultural and creative local industries as drivers of inclusive growth, identity affirmation, and economic resilience.
10. Integrate the Youth and Other Marginalised Groups into the Reparatory Process: AU to ensure the representation of youth and women in decision-making institutions, creating participatory platforms, providing targeted awareness programmes, and designing reparations initiatives that address their specific socio-cultural, economic, and political needs. This will foster equity thereby fostering equity, empowerment, and inclusive continental development.



### Highlights from the Symposium.

**From the Left** - Dr. Gowtam Raj Chintaram: Programmes Officer, ECOSOCC, Zambia; Prof Isaac Khambule: Department of Politics and International Relations, UJ, South Africa; Ms Lebogang Ayobiojo: Community Engagement Specialist, University of Johannesburg (UJ), South Africa; Prof Adeoye O. Akinola: Department of Politics and International Relations and Associate: IPATC, UJ, South Africa; Ms Mpule Kgetsi - African Union Youth Ambassador for Southern Africa, Botswana; Prof. William Gumede: School of Governance at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Source: IPATC

### Highlights from the Symposium.

**From the Left** - Prof. Anna Mbise: Project Officer Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Dar es Salaam Tanzania; Dr. Michelle Small - Department of International Relations, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg; and Special Procedures Mandate Holder on the UN Working Group on the use of Mercenaries; Prof Waris Attiya: Fiscal Law at the Faculty of Law, University of Nairobi in Kenya; and UN Independent Expert on Foreign Debt; Prof Fritz Nganje: Head of Department, Politics and International Relations, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Source: IPATC



### Highlights from the Symposium.

**From the Left** - Ms. Princess Ndlovu - University of Johannesburg, South Africa; Prof Shadrack Nasong'o: Professor of International Studies and former department chair at Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee, USA; Prof Adeoye O. Akinola: Department of Politics and International Relations and Associate: IPATC, UJ, South Africa; Prof Paulo M.A. Uache, Deputy VC of Universidade Joaquim Chissano, Mozambique.

Source: IPATC



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The Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) Policy Briefs are a series of reports from the Institute's research-based and policy-oriented seminars on relevant themes intended for policy practitioners and decision-makers in foreign policy, Pan-African issues, security, governance, aid and development. They aim to inform public debate and generate input into the sphere of policymaking. The perspectives expressed are outcomes from strategic engagements and those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute and the University of Johannesburg.



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## About the Institute

IPATC was established at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) in 2016 as one of nine flagship centres of excellence to conduct research. It provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, and civil society actors across Africa and its Diaspora to dialogue and contribute to the rigorous production and dissemination of Pan-African knowledge and culture. The Institute seeks to promote original and innovative Pan-African ideas and critical dialogue in pursuit of global excellence in research and teaching and to contribute actively to building an international profile for UJ on Pan-African issues.



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