



ENGLISH

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“Haiti demands reparations on its own terms, not France's”: AfaLab statement on joint Commission for Haiti and the case for reparations.

In a [recent statement](#), French President Emmanuel Macron unveiled plans to establish a joint commission to examine the historical ties between the two nations, particularly the [‘double-debt’ Haiti paid over decades to its former colonial master](#). Composed of historians, the joint commission would examine the ‘shared past’ of the two countries, in particular the impact of the ransom treaty Haiti was forced to sign at gunpoint in 1825 plunging the only nation born of a successful slave revolt into a lasting debt crisis and effectively condemning the first black republic to a future marked by socio-economic collapse, political instability, insecurity and vulnerability to environmental disasters. The Joint Commission would also be tasked to formulate recommendations to both governments to ‘build a more peaceful nature’.

This commission approach has become the go-to response by President Macron when confronted with demands for reparations for the consequences of his nation's slavery and colonial past and the ongoing legacy of neocolonial regimes of the French state. Similar commissions have been established concerning Algeria and Cameroon, aiming to investigate historical injustices without committing to tangible reparations.

The establishment of this commission is particularly incongruous given Haiti's ongoing crises. Around [two-thirds of Haitians live on less than US\\$3.65/day, and nearly 5.4 million face acute food insecurity, with 6,000 internally displaced persons at risk of starvation](#). While many have tried to leave the country, [almost 195,000 Haitians are internally displaced](#) due to violence since 2022. Gang violence [killed over 5,600 people last year](#), with gangs now controlling 85% of the capital, Port-au-Prince. While national decision-makers must accept a proportion of the responsibility, the consequences of the country's ongoing resource extraction, population exploitation, and foreign-sponsored destabilisation over several centuries must also be considered.

Haiti's present situation is not coincidental nor merely the result of modern events. It is deeply rooted in a long history of extraction and exploitation. As numerous [historians and journalists have documented](#), the 1825 indemnity imposed by France, under threat of military force, plunged Haiti into a century-long cycle of debt and underdevelopment. The double debt not only drained the nation's resources but also entrenched economic disparities that persist to this day. Haitian scholars, such as Fritz Deshommes, president of the Haitian National Committee on Restitution and Reparations (HNCRR), have emphasized the enduring impact of this debt,

estimating its modern equivalent to be [between US\\$38 billion and US\\$135 billion](#), accounting for lost revenue and economic stagnation. Haitian journalists and activists, including Monique Clesca of the *Kolektif Ayisyen Afwodesandan*, have [highlighted](#) how this monstrous debt stifled Haiti's development and symbolically tethered the nation to its former colonizer.

Given this context, the formation of such a commission that may merely reiterate well-documented historical findings, without committing to tangible, effective, and just reparations, is both grossly inadequate and vastly disconnected from the urgent needs and demands of the Haitian people.

As a non-governmental organization committed to confronting racial injustice and the varices of the colonial past and its enduring legacies, AfaLab firmly opposes this commission approach as another hollow process. It will, at best, lead to a formal apology and token gestures of remembrance, along with vague development promises dictated by France. At worst, it deliberately deflects from the urgent need for concrete, meaningful reparations. This process is not a step forward; it is a calculated attempt to avoid accountability.

This is symbolism without substance. A commission instead of compensation. An apology with no accountability.

What we advocate for:

- At a very minimum, the immediate restitution of the estimated US\$525 million ransom unduly paid by Haiti to France, acknowledging the profound impact this debt has had on Haiti's development.
- Progressive restitution of the US\$ 135 billion as demanded by the [Haitian National Committee on Restitution and Reparations \(HNCRR\)](#).
- France to call for the cancellation of Haiti's debt to multilateral financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.
- A transparent and inclusive reparations process that involves Haitian civil society and government and meaningfully engages with the demands expressed by the nation over the past seven decades. This process should be initiated and led by Haitians and be conducted on Haiti's terms, not France's.
- Such a reparations process should also address climate justice, community-led adaptation, and land rights, grounded in the lived experiences of Haitian people, both in terms of historical extraction and present-day climate vulnerability (for in-depth analysis, see [the report *Bay Kou Bliye, Pote Mak Sonje* by NYU/UCLA in 2024](#)).
- Immediate financial support to address Haiti's current crises, including escalating gang violence, political instability, and acute food insecurity, including support to rebuild and empower Haitian institutions to respond effectively.

In sum, we call on the French government to assume its full responsibilities by restituting what it has robbed Haiti of, to comply with the demands and processes of justice and reparations initiated by the Haitian people over the last seven decades.