



Office of the President

**Speech by His Excellency José Maria Pereira Neves,
President of the Republic of Cabo Verde,**

**at the Opening of the 2025 Judicial Year
of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights**

Theme: "Advancing Justice through Reparations"

Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania
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(All Protocols Observed)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with profound gratitude that I extend my sincere thanks to the Most Honorable Justice Imani D. Aboud, President of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, for her invitation to deliver the Opening Remarks for this Judicial Year. This occasion is of immense significance, as it compels us to reflect on justice and the role of reparations on the African continent. These issues are deeply intertwined with our history, dignity, and common future.

Allow me to commend this honorable Court for its thoughtful choice of the theme "**Advancing Justice Through Reparations**", **in line with the African Union's broader theme for this year: "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations"**. Such an approach is an unequivocal acknowledgment of the need to confront, with both courage and resolve, the historical injustices that have shaped our continent.

The issue of reparations extends far beyond mere material compensation. It encompasses a holistic approach to include fundamental pillars such as health, education, and culture, essential for healing the wounds of the past and for building a future defined by equity and prosperity.

With a deep sense of respect and historical responsibility, I stand here before you today to reflect on the conflicts in Africa and the pressing need for reparations. Our Continent - the cradle of humanity - still bears the scars of multiple scourges - fratricidal wars, instrumentalized ethnic divisions, including the apartheid system, and injustices created, imposed, and perpetuated - that have not only marked its past but continue to compromise its present and its future.

The consequences of these conflicts that have crossed our continent - many of which, unfortunately, persist in regions such as Sudan, the borders of the Republic of Congo, or the Sahel - go beyond physical destruction. These wars uproot communities, dismantle social, economic, and political structures, and inflict intergenerational traumas that endure through time.

I think of the children who have been deprived of their childhood and right to education, of the women who have been subjected to unspeakable violence, villages that were devastated, and the cultures that have been devalued or erased. These wounds, both visible and invisible, demand more than words from us - they demand effective reparations.

Conflicts and reparations are not merely about politics, diplomacy, or numbers. They are also about human lives, restoring dignity, and addressing unspeakable pain. Rebuilding roads, and houses, or offering material compensation is not enough. It is necessary to go further and beyond. It is necessary to invest in the true foundation of a sustainable future.

Reparation is an act that must encompass all dimensions of human beings and their communities, constituting a holistic process grounded on the restoration of dignity and the promotion of truly inclusive development.

When conflicts erupt, schools are often the first to close doors. Children, deprived of the right to education, become hostages of war, witnesses of loss, and victims of poverty. The surrounding violence robs them of their childhood, condemning them to an existence where dreams are replaced by fear and uncertainty. By neglecting to repair destroyed education systems, we perpetuate a vicious cycle of conflict and marginalization, compromising not only the present but also the future of these generations.

Education transcends the status of a fundamental right - it is a powerful weapon against ignorance, discord, and violence. Where conflicts sow fear and hatred, education has the gift of cultivating understanding, unity, and hope. More so, education is a primary tool for reconciling communities that once were divided. For inside a classroom, there is no place for ethnicity or religious distinctions - there are only students, children - each with dreams to fulfill and hopes to feed.

Each book that is opened, each concept that is learned, represents a victory towards understanding, unity, and hope.

Reparation through education means truly investing in the future. It involves not only the rebuilding of schools that were destroyed but also the training of properly qualified teachers, capable of transmitting and instilling much more than academic knowledge. These teachers must be bearers of universal values - teaching of peace, tolerance, the shared history of our peoples, and the inestimable richness of our cultural diversity.

However, education alone is not enough to heal all the wounds left behind by these conflicts. For integral and lasting transformation, it is imperative to complement this effort with a careful look at what constitutes the essence and soul of our continent: **its culture**. If education is the foundation

for building cohesive societies, culture is the fire that preserves identity and keeps the collective memory alive, ensuring that no people are lost in oblivion.

I would now like to talk about this intangible treasure that transcends generations - the African culture - its traditions and its living legacy. If education is the pillar of material and intellectual reconstruction, culture is the sacred fire that preserves the identity, memory, and soul of a people. It is both a reflection of Africa's resilience and the key to its true emancipation.

Africa is undeniably a continent rich in stories, songs, dances, and symbols that have shaped its identity over millennia. Yet, conflicts and historical injustices have deeply wounded this heritage - sacred sites have been looted, languages have been silenced, and ancestral knowledge relegated to oblivion. Despite this, African culture resists. Like the embers that remain lit under the ashes, culture continues to burn, ready to reignite the flame of reconciliation and rebirth.

The stories told around bonfires teach the strength of unity; in dances, even in the darkest moments, life is celebrated; and in the gestures of artisans, objects that carry the memory and identity of a people are recreated. Valuing these cultural expressions is much more than repairing what has been destroyed - it is about restoring humanity to that which has been dehumanized.

Culture, like education, is a powerful bridge between generations, for it unites the past, present, and future, ensuring that our children and young people inherit not only the knowledge of their ancestors but also the confidence to preserve and expand this legacy. Integrating music, literature, arts, and local knowledge into the process of reparation is saying to our children: "Your legacy is an unparalleled strength. It is up to you to preserve it and make it prosper."

More than that, culture is a path to reconciliation. It has the power to unite once-divided communities, allowing them to reunite around shared symbols, common songs, and collective rituals. Through cultural appreciation, we transcend the wounds of the past and lay the foundations for lasting peace.

It is therefore imperative to put culture at the heart of reparation policies. This means supporting artists, preserving historical sites, rebuilding museums, and encouraging contemporary creation. It also means

returning the cultural property illicitly taken from the continent and celebrating Africa's cultural diversity as a source of wealth and never as a cause for division.

Reparation through culture is much more than re-erecting buildings or compensating for material losses. It entails revitalizing endangered languages, recovering forgotten traditions, and passing on to future generations the pride of a unique heritage. It entails reaffirming, before every African and the world, that culture is the soul of a people and that, without it, there can be no authentic rebirth.

As the African Union's "*Champion*" for the Preservation of the Continent's Natural and Cultural Heritage, I am committed to hosting a Summit of The Creoleness in 2025. From Cabo Verde's historic site - Cidade Velha - a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we will share with the world Africa's contribution to the humanization of the Atlantic. It was in this territory, Cidade Velha, marked by the slave trade, that African knowledge in the areas of agriculture, medicine, and spirituality was disseminated, becoming the basis of resistance and resilience for the oppressed. It was in this territory that the dialogue between cultures and peoples took place, giving rise to new languages, new experiences, and new identities. At the Summit, we want to convey a message of peace, social friendship, and possibilities for encounter, dialogue, and cooperation between nations. In fact, we want to tell the world that, only with development and prosperity can we rescue dignity and repair injustices and enmities.

Reparation through culture means giving back to Africa its humanity. It means ensuring that the drums of peace resound louder than the trumpets of war. It means building a future where Africa's cultural expressions inspire the world, and every African can take pride in their legacy.

It is up to us, as a global community, to ensure that this commitment is materialized. For in the preservation of our culture, lies the strength to transform pain into hope and the past into a future of justice and resilience.

We cannot talk about reparations without talking about **justice**, which is the mainstay of any society that claims to be dignified, harmonious, and stable. More than the simple application of norms, it is a pillar of civilization, ensuring that the rights of each individual are respected, and responsibilities are duly assumed. Without justice, the foundations of trust in institutions and respect for the Rule of Law crumble, giving way to disorder, insecurity, and the perpetuation of inequalities.

However, justice must extend beyond punishment - it must be an instrument of reconciliation, reparation, and transformation. The impartiality of judicial decisions, the accessibility of the courts, and the efficiency of dispute resolutions will help forge the citizens' trust in the system. Where justice is silenced, impunity will reign, cycles of violence are perpetuated, and despair is germinated.

Reparations through justice means acknowledging the suffering of victims, restoring their violated dignity, and ensuring that the crimes committed are not repeated. It means creating an environment where the wounds of the past can heal, and the future is built on mutual respect and equal rights. Without justice, there is no lasting peace, and without peace, development efforts will be in vain.

On the other hand, it is of little value if reparation is not conducive to equitable, comprehensive, and sustainable development, guided by a vision of social justice and intergenerational and international solidarity.

Africa's history is deeply marked by the devastating impacts of the transatlantic slave trade. For centuries, millions of Africans were brutally uprooted from their lands, stripped of their freedoms, and forced to feed the economies of other nations with their sweat and suffering. The repercussions of this historic crime are immeasurable and continue to echo in the present - perpetuating structural inequalities, social marginalization, and wounds that have yet to heal.

Reparation for this legacy is not an option - it is rather a moral, political, and social obligation. As the Vice Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Monique Nsanzabaganwa, stated: "The demand for reparations is not an attempt to rewrite history or to continue the cycle of victimization. It's a call to recognize the undeniable truth and right the wrongs that have gone unpunished for far too long and continue to thrive presently." This recognition is the indispensable starting point for reparational justice, but it cannot be its limit.

Reparation means to act. It is not enough to remember the sufferings or regret the mistakes of the past; It is necessary to translate this acknowledgment into concrete initiatives that promote inclusive development, education, health, and the strengthening of justice institutions. The return of cultural property illicitly removed from the continent, investment in public policies that address historical inequalities,

and support for the most vulnerable populations must be at the heart of this effort.

However, this process requires not only the active solidarity of the countries that benefited from the slave trade but also the responsibility of Africans themselves to lead the transformation of their future. As a continent, Africa needs to roll out a second decolonization – a mental decolonization that frees its societies from dependence on neocolonial narratives.

We still rely on stories that do not belong to us, narratives that subjugate us, and systems that perpetuate inequality. This new decolonization must courageously face the challenges of the present: hate speech, anti-immigration policies, the resurgence of xenophobic, racist, and supremacist ideologies, and the persecutions that threaten to repeat the darkest episodes in the history of mankind.

Rather than resigning ourselves to an attitude of lamentation, it is imperative to put Africa first, with dignity. This implies that African resources are to be put to the service of Africans, that regional institutions such as the African Union are reformed and strengthened, and that electoral processes are normalized to ensure stability and representativeness. African leaders have a responsibility to act with vision and resolve, promoting a new attitude that values sovereignty, good governance, and the mobilization of domestic resources for sustainable development and the dignity of the human person.

Reparational justice, in turn, must be an unavoidable priority. Structures such as the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights symbolize the continent's commitment to justice and reconciliation but they must be fully operationalized and endowed with the necessary resources to address the atrocities of the past and promote confidence in the future.

I am convinced that the best reparation is mental decolonization. Without it, it will not be possible to transform the legacy of oppression into collective strength and emancipation. As Ghana's former President Nana Addo Akufo-Addo put it, "It is time for Africa - whose sons and daughters had their freedoms controlled and were sold into slavery - to also receive reparations."

Now is the time for action. Reparations for Africa mean ensuring that the suffering of past generations becomes a transformative force. It means enabling every African, child or adult, to live on a continent that honors its

past and moves forward with determination toward the future. It is also a call to humanity, for in the reparation of Africa lies the possibility of a fairer, more solidary, and more dignified world for all.

As we proceed, let us be guided by the principles of *ubuntu* - the belief in a universal bond that connects all humanity. Our pursuit of justice should be seasoned with wisdom; our demand for accountability should be balanced with compassion; and our vision for the future should be rooted in the strength of our shared history.

May this judicial year be marked by bold steps towards justice. May our deliberations lead to action plans that bring us closer to the realization of reparations. And may our collective efforts lead to a future where historical injustices are acknowledged, addressed, and healed.

Thank you very much.