



DAVID COMISSIONG INTERVIEW

Key:

EHdK: Dr Eve Hayes de Kalaf (Interviewer)

DC: His Excellency David Comissiong (Respondent)

Date/Location:

2nd March 2023. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Bridgetown St. Michael, Barbados.

EHdK 00:01 I'm here with David Comissiong who is the ambassador to the Caribbean Community, CARICOM. Thank you for agreeing to this interview today.

DC 00:11 Yes, I was saying that we should start at the beginning to look at Barbados' connection with the UK. As we all know, Barbados was Britain's mother colony in the Caribbean. One of the...Britain's earliest colonial acquisitions in the Caribbean going back to 1625. But it became the mother colony after Barbados pioneered or the British settlers in Barbados pioneered the sugar revolution installing sugar, a sugar plantation culture in Barbados. One of the world's earliest capitalist enterprises based on the super exploitation of African labour to generate super abundant profits. It produced virtually the first billionaire class and Barbados generated enormous wealth for Britain. So, that is the history of Barbados. Barbados has a colonial history that is singularly British unlike other most other Caribbean territories that changed hands, went through various European colonialisms. French and Spanish. Barbados was a British colonial possession from 1625 to its independence in 1966. So, Barbados helped to fuel much of Britain's development. In that 300-year span, the Black Barbadian population, several generations of the Black Barbadian population, lived out their lives as slaves on British plantations here. All of the fruits of their labour was syphoned off to British families, British companies, the British royal family, ultimately to the British government and to Britain itself. So, the Black people of Barbados played a very important role in developing that wonderfully wealthy, industrial and modern industrial civilised society that constitutes current day UK. Also of significance is that when Britain entered the Second World War, many Barbadians made their way to the UK either to fight for Britain in the war to serve as air force men, soldiers. Most famous of all, our first prime minister Errol Walton Barrow who served in the British Air Force. Fought something like 40...flew 40 something missions over Europe as a navigator in during the Second World War. But, as you know, during the Second World War and thereafter, there was a great demand in Britain for labour. First of all, labour to help with the wartime industries. After the war, labour to help rebuild Britain and Barbados being the most densely populated British colony of the Caribbean and not just one of the most densely populated but one of the most oppressive. Barbados was the centre of white power. Very oppressive plantation society. And so, the black masses of Barbados were always seeking some place to run to greener pastures where they could live less restrictive lives. And so, Barbados probably vies with



Ireland as the country that on a per capita basis has provided the most migrants. So, Barbados has a tremendous record of outward migration. And many Barbadians went to Britain in the post-World War Two period in search of greener pastures but also answering Britain's call for labour to help rebuild the society. And it's important to understand that the Britain that these Barbadian migrants were going to was a Britain that their ancestors' labour had helped to construct. So, they were simply following the resources of their ancestors. Yes, so 1966 we become independent. We are now juridically equal to the UK. The independent government of Barbados from 1966 sees its UK counterpart as its equal and Barbados, soon after achieving independence in 1966, Barbados becomes part of a Caribbean integration organism known as CARIFTA in the first instance, the Caribbean Free Trade Association. Established in 1968. By 1973, CARIFTA has evolved into the Caribbean Community, CARICOM. So, from 1973 Barbados is negotiating its relationship with Britain both bilaterally in terms of Barbados-UK relations but also multilaterally as part of the Caribbean community. So that is a bit of the background that takes us to, you know, the framework for considering the Windrush scandal. The rigorous incident.

EHdK 07:46 I'd also like to learn a bit about yourself as well because you're a very well-known Pan-Africanist. And I just wondered how much of that has entered into kind of your activities, basically, and your work? And because, as I understand it, that's absolutely central to your career.

DC 08:13 Yes, I got involved in political life in Barbados at a very young age. In 1985/1986, I was appointed to the Senate of Barbados. At that time, I was the youngest senator in the history of Barbados.

EHdK 08:40 You're also from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, is that correct?

DC 08:41 I'm the son of a Methodist minister of religion. And if you know anything about the Methodists, they move around. So, my father served in eight different Caribbean territories. So, I happened to be born when he was serving in Saint Vincent. So, I was born in Saint Vincent. I left Saint Vincent at the age of six, I moved to Trinidad. I did my primary school education in Trinidad. And then I came to Barbados in 1971. And have been here ever since. So, I'm very much...I come from a Pan-Caribbean family and I've had a Pan-Caribbean experience but very much I'm a citizen of Barbados. So, I'm very committed to Barbados. Yeah, so a young politician but also, I guess, what distinguished me was that I had an ideological commitment to Pan-Africanism and to democratic socialism. So, that marked me from very young in my political career. And then for purposes of this interview, early around the turn of the nineties Mr. Bernie Grant, Member of Parliament for Tottenham, one of the first Black British MPs of the modern era made contact with me and introduced the issue of reparations to me. So, I actually have to credit Bernie Grant for introducing me to the to the issue of reparations.



EHdK 10:35 Why was...not why was Bernie Grant talking about reparations...But this was this was in the nineties. Where was this conversation...?

DC 10:45 Bernie had made a speech in England that had become quite controversial. I think the title of the speech was Reparations or Bust. Bernie had raised the issue of reparations and repatriation in Britain. And I think he had come under attack at the time. And I think he had he had launched into a programme to defend his views. And, I guess, as part of that programme, he reached out to a well well-known political activist of the Caribbean. So, I brought Bernie to Barbados, I arranged for Bernie to give a lecture in Bridgetown on reparations. And that became the organised reparations movement in Barbados. I subsequently became, so that's the very early nineties. By 1998, I was appointed chairman and director of Barbados, the Barbados government's commission for Pan-African Affairs. I was actually the foremost architect of the Commission for Pan-African Affairs. And this was a ground-breaking institution. It was located within the Office of the Prime Minister but it was the first example of any government that we knew of that established an institution, a governmental institution that was devoted to Pan-Africanism as an agenda.

EHdK 12:40 Can I ask, did you to meet with any British government representatives at the time or with the High Commissioner?

DC 12:47 As part of the Commission of Pan-African Affairs?

EHdK 12:49 Yes, in a formal capacity. Did you participate in any meetings?

DC 12:53 Well, the Commission was established in 1998. And almost immediately after the Commission was established I began the preparatory phase of the United Nations World Conference Against Racism. So I, as Head of the Commission, became deeply involved in that exercise on behalf of the Government of Barbados. I was involved in all of the preparatory conferences, the Americas regional preparatory conference in Chile, all of the preparatory meetings in Geneva, the United Nations in Geneva. And during the course of that process, yes, I came into contact with many British government officials, many European Union government officials because we, the Commission for Pan-African Affairs had made the pursuit of reparations one of its agenda items. And so, we embraced the United Nations World Conference Against [Racism] as a once in a lifetime opportunity to put the issue of reparations on the international agenda.

EHdK 14:16 Was it taken seriously at that time?

DC 14:18 It was taken very seriously. It was taken so seriously that the United States delegation walked out of the UN World Conference in Durban, South Africa. Because when we began the process, at the Americas region, preparatory meeting, around maybe 1999 or thereabouts, the US government made it plain that as far as they were concerned, the UN World Conference Against Racism would have nothing to do with declaring slavery and



transatlantic slave trade as crimes against humanity, would have nothing to do with the issue of reparations. That was their position. And from that very first preparatory conference we, Barbados and the Caribbean, we said to them, we totally disagree.

EHdK 15:20 Was that a united front from across the Caribbean?

DC 15:23 Very much so. The Anglophone Caribbean, we participated...okay. For most of the preparatory conferences, it was basically only Barbados and Jamaica making the effort to go to Geneva to participate. You know how a UN conference works. You do a lot of the work beforehand in the preparatory meetings but by the time we got to Durban, South Africa for the conference in 2001... there was a CARICOM delegation in place, you know. So, we crossed swords with the Americans from very early. We said, "No, you cannot have a World Conference Against Racism and not consider the very foundation of modern racism which is slavery, the transatlantic slave trade and, out of that, the demand of Black people for reparations. So, we successfully defied the United States. And we were successful in putting onto the agenda of the World Conference resolutions, speaking about slavery being a crime against humanity and the fact that reparations are in order. And the whether the US use as their justification for walking out of the conference, they claimed that the conference was introducing items pertaining to Israel and the Palestinian issue and that's why they were walking out but we knew that was just that was a smokescreen?"

EHdK 17:14 Very much a David and Goliath situation.

DC 17:17 Yes, but during those years of preparing for the World Conference and negotiating and all the preparatory meetings, we were confronted with the mind-boggling spectacle of British and other European Union diplomatic representatives actually getting up in an international forum in the 21st century and saying that they did not owe reparations to Black people because slavery was legal. That and, I mean, the moral blindness, the moral obtuseness of...

EHdK 18:10 The complete historical ignorance as well.

DC 18:12 Yeah, well, I mean, historical ignorance but what makes it so ridiculous is that even within the logic of the British and other European legal systems of the 19th and 18th and 17th century, slavery was deemed to be so-called legal because African human beings were determined not to be human beings. That they were a wild beast. They were animals. They were chattels. They were soulless chattels. I mean, if you go back to the Barbados slavery codes of the 1660s, that is precisely what...so in England, slavery had been abolished in England since the 12th century, right? In the Westminster Council, slavery had been abolished. And the criminal law system in England said that if you if you raped a woman, that was a crime, if you mutilated a person that's a crime, if you enslaved a person, that was a crime. So, the colonial houses of assembly passed legislation which said because these creatures from Africa are not human beings, they are wild beasts with a



different psychology from human beings, the normal legal regimen cannot be applied to them. Hence, we have devised these slavery regulations. Now, the thing about the Barbados House of Assembly, we had a House of Assembly, a white plantocratic House of Assembly from 1639. They could pass legislation, but that legislation had to be approved by the imperial government in England. So, the British government was complicit in a situation where slavery is illegal in England. Lord Mansfield says, "The air of England is too pure [an air] to be breathed by a slave." They permitted the colonial assemblies and they approved these pieces of legislation that determined that Africans were not human beings. So, for a British statesperson in the 21st century to get up in an international forum and say that slavery was legal. And it is because slavery was legal that they don't have to consider the question of reparations is just...is really mind-blowing. But that is what we had to contend with at the time of the World Conference Against Racism. And well, you know, the World Conference Against Racism, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action was a very important step forward in legitimising the issue of reparations. That was 2001. By 2007, we were commemorating the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade and that brought the issue of reparations to the fore once again. And by 2012, Barbados established a National Taskforce on Reparations. Jamaica had preceded Barbados. I think Jamaica had established, the Jamaica government had established their national committee about two years before Barbados, Antigua around the same time as Barbados, they established a committee. And then, the 2013 a remarkable thing happened. When at a CARICOM Heads of Government conference, our Heads of Government made the momentous decision to establish a CARICOM reparations campaign, to set up a CARICOM reparations commission and to pursue reparations against the governments of Europe that were implicated in enslavement and the slave trade. By 2016, CARICOM wrote, the prime minister who was head of the CARICOM Prime Ministerial Subcommittee on Reparations which happened to be the prime minister of Barbados. Barbados has lead responsibility for reparations within the CARICOM system. So, Prime Minister [Freundel] Stuart on behalf of CARICOM wrote to six heads of government of Europe. Heads of government of the UK, France, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain and Portugal informing them that CARICOM was formally making a reparations claim against them. Informing them about the CARICOM 10-point Reparatory Justice Plan and requesting then that they meet with CARICOM to discuss this issue and to negotiate a reparations package. All six of those heads of government responded and very, very noncommittal ways basically regretting this negative episode in the history but that is in the past and we must...we must go on to, you know.

EHdK 24:29 I can't remember when it was that Sarkozy, as well, I remember went to Haiti. I can't remember what year but that was [2010] but that was also received very badly.

DC 24:37 Well, David Cameron came to the Caribbean and told the Caribbean people to forget about it!



EHdK 24:42 That was about the Jamaican prisons as well.

DC 24:46 Yeah, he said to house deportees...Jamaicans deported from Britain. When we were trying to raise the agenda, the issue of reparations. He said that we should just forget about it. And then he went on to make this offer of money to build a prison, you know, very disrespectful.

EHdK 25:08 I was in Jamaica recently as part of this project and what I found fascinating was looking at how UK development funding is being spent. So, I went to a centre that basically houses returnees. So, people who've been deported from the UK. And I thought it was fascinating that we've built this...through the guise of the same old tricks, right, the guise of development and progress, is building an infrastructure that is essentially forcibly removing people from the UK. And, you know, the discourse around this is that this is a kind way of treating people, so I think my point there being the infrastructure that the UK has built, historically, is something that is continuing. And very much, I think, linked also to questions of repair and acknowledging harm done.

DC 26:15 Yes, well, it's tragic, really how Black people of the Caribbean who migrated to the UK have been treated. The original migrants but also their children and grandchildren. And as we know, I've made the point that many of our people migrated in the late 1940s and 1950s. And we all know the story. The hostile response that they faced. The racist abuse ultimately leading Notting Hill riots in, I think, 1958.

EHdK 27:14 I also find it fascinating speaking to the gentleman yesterday about the recruitment drives and how Barbados was very much a place to recruit nurses for the NHS to recruit, you know, conductors for London Transport.

DC 27:30 You know, Barbados was known as Little England! Little England yes...Barbados was always providing outward migrants and although the history of colonialism in developing education and so forth was really abysmal. Yet, Barbados was slightly ahead of the other territories in terms of the access to education and the educational standards of the Barbadian people. So, of all the British colonies in the Caribbean, the Barbadian people would have had a little edge over the others in terms of formal training and education. Therefore, being able to provide people who could be nurses and police. Well, not police in the case of Jamaica...of Britain but Barbados also provided migrants across the Caribbean as well...teachers. Panama, yes. I think about 60,000 Barbadians went to help build the Panama Canal. But that is testimony to how difficult life was in Barbados and so many just wanted to leave.



EHdK 28:56 I am interested in this question. As you know, we're working on the Windrush scandal and the correlation then between the Windrush scandal and the question of reparations. And that was the question I wanted to put to you.

DC 29:13 When we became aware of Windrush in 2018. At that time, I was not a Barbados diplomat.

EHdK 29:27 Were you not present at the CHOGM meeting of 2018?

DC 29:29 No, in 2018 when I became aware, I was in private practice as an attorney-at-law here in Barbados. And I was the president of a community-based organisation known as the Clement Payne Movement Letter. The document I have holding in my hand is a letter that I sent...a letter dated the 23rd of April of 2018. And it's a letter that I sent to the then Secretary General of CARICOM Ambassador Irwin LaRoque. And I signed the letter on behalf of the Clement Payne Movement, the Pan-African Coalition of Organizations and the Caribbean Chapter of the International Network in Defense of Humanity. And basically, the letter is informing CARICOM that on August 21 of April 2018 our organisations held a community grounding in Bridgetown, Barbados on the Windrush scandal.

EHdK 30:56 Which had just hit the front pages at that time.

DC 31:00 Yes. And as I said in the letter, "The said 'Community Grounding' benefitted from the personal testimonies of a number of Barbadian and other Caribbean nationals who had resided and worked for extensive periods of time in the United Kingdom, and who were therefore extremely knowledgeable about the plight of our predominantly black brothers and sisters of Caribbean origin resident in the UK."

And we went on to inform CARICOM that after a comprehensive discussion of the matter, that our organisations were mandated by the attendees at the meeting to inform CARICOM of the following and I'll just go through them quickly.

The first point we made was that "All persons of Caribbean origin in the UK - whether or not they be British nationals or be entitled to British Nationality - remain part and parcel of our Pan-Caribbean family, and are entitled to the interest, concern, solidarity and support of the Caribbean people and governments."

Secondly, we reminded CARICOM, "One of the core functions of CARICOM is to develop for the 15 member states of a collective foreign policy and a collective platform for dealing with the outside world and with powerful foreign governments such as the government of the United Kingdom (UK)."

Thirdly, "In light of the foregoing, CARICOM is obligated to take a collective position in relation to the plight of the members of the so-called 'Windrush Generation' who have been



subjected in the UK to a systematic state-orchestrated racist campaign of unlawful deportations, detentions in custody, denial of medical and other social services and denial of the right to gainful employment. (And it must be noted that there are several cases of the mental and physical stress generated by this racist campaign, resulting not only in physical and mental illness but also in actual cases of death!)”

And then we went on to make our main recommendation and I quote, “The affected members of the Windrush generation have suffered the type of racist group injury that requires the application to it of the concept and principles of Reparations: that is, the British government must be called upon to fully and unreservedly acknowledge the wrong that has been committed; to genuinely apologize to the victims; to immediately bring a halt to the injurious racist policies and practices; to put in place alternative and remedial policies and practices that are designed to genuinely assist the affected group with confirmation and certification of their legal status within the UK; to immediately extend to deportees the right of return to the UK at the expense of the British government; and to financially compensate all victims for the injuries and damage suffered. CARICOM is under a duty to seek justice for our UK based brothers and sisters, and to do so by speaking forthrightly to and engaging with the government of the UK in the terms outlined above.”

So that was...we were saying to CARICOM, yes. The reparation logic and principles need to be applied to the situation of the victims of the Windrush scandal. And we...you also made the point that while we appreciate that there were grassroots organisations in the UK fighting for justice for the Windrush victims that they were up against a very powerful adversary in the form of the British government and that they would need the active solidarity and support of CARICOM and of the governments of the member states of CARICOM.

EHdK 36:03 Did you yourself have direct engagement with the UK Government specifically about the Windrush scandal?

DC 36:09 Not with the government itself but I happened to be in the UK when they started holding community meetings pertaining to the proposed Compensation programme. I actually attended one of those meetings in London. I met Mr. Martin Forde QC, the lawyer who was...who had been, I think, contracted to help design the Compensation programme. And I did keep in contact with him. I remember, he asked me to investigate the case of a famous Barbadian and West Indian cricketer Collis King who was one of the victims. Had not been allowed to return to the UK and to his job as a cricket coach in the UK and was really languishing and suffering in Barbados. So, he was just one example of the victims. I also made...kept in contact with the Black British community organisers, who had in fact organised that meeting at which Mr. Martin Forde spoke. The names just momentarily slipped me now. This letter is April 2018. By August 2018. I am...by July 2018 I should say, I am Barbados' Ambassador to CARICOM. So, yes, having become ambassador, I of course had to give up much of the community activism that I had been engaged in.



EHdK 38:13 But this, I mean, this letter you responded incredibly quickly after the scandal erupted. Did you see any of the recommendations that you made in this letter? Do you think any of them were followed through?

DC 38:32 Needless to say, we got a response from the Secretary General of CARICOM telling us that...thanking us for the input and assuring us that the CARICOM and the High Commissioners in the UK would be not necessarily saying that they accepted the reparations logic that we were proposing but assuring us that they would continue to follow up on the issue. I don't know. You might be in a better position to tell me to what extent they did follow up seriously. To what extent the High Commissioners in the UK have really been of assistance to the Windrush victims.

EHdK 39:24 Did you ever meet with the British High Commissioner here in Barbados? Have you had any discussions?

DC 39:31 Not specifically on this issue. As I said, once I became CARICOM ambassador then, you know, my mandate became a different mandate. This was when I was wearing my political and community active and Pan-Africanist hat, you know. So, I'm not as familiar with what the current developments are.

EHdK 40:03 The Windrush Compensation Scheme, has been established Wendy Williams was commissioned to write a report with key recommendations for the UK Government. And there have been a number of problems with the Compensation Scheme. It has been widely discredited and criticised for its slow response. Also, for re-traumatising many people affected by the scandal by making a complex process even more burdensome as well as the compensation being either inadequate or non-existent. It's an ongoing issue. It's something that Suella Braverman, for example, recently announced that she was...two of the key recommendations from the Wendy Williams report were going to be dropped. The government was not going to follow through on them. So, yeah, that's what that's where we are at the moment.

DC 41:09 You know, the Windrush scandal and the way it's being handled, it really compounds the historical injury and, it thumbs its nose really at the claim for reparations. And I think this is something that the British government is really going to have to think very seriously about. Because the claim for reparations is not going to fade away. In a sense, the genie is out of the bottle.

EHdK 41:54 I really wanted to ask you about that because I was particularly interested that you said this was...about the interests around reparations in the 1990s. But would you argue that attitudes have changed and that this is becoming being taken more seriously? From this project and from the interviews that I've carried out, I think that particularly the diplomatic community, let's just say, are seeing this from afar



and are seeing that this is something that is coming. And I don't know how you see the future, really, in terms of reparations and in terms of policymakers and decision-makers in government actually taking this as a credible movement and something that will eventually lead to recognition.

DC 42:58 I think the European governments have to decide if they're going forward into the future. If they want a constructive and mutually respectful relationship with the Black and Brown people of the Caribbean and Africa and so forth. Because this is the age of information. And people are aware, people are becoming more and more aware of the history and of the atrocities committed and of the grave injustice that our people suffered and about how much was actually taken from them, right? So that information is out there and is only growing with every with every passing year. And, you know, we see our attitude...we see Britain as our friend. I mean, most of our tourists come from Britain. Britain is a development partner. So, we don't see Britain as an enemy or as an adversary. It's a friendly country that we have good relations with. So, we say to our friend, this is the history. This is what was done. You claim that you're our friend, you have our best interests at heart. But we are saying to you, you have to you have to account for this history. You have to atone for this history. You have to apologise, you have to make some gesture of atonement, you know, and to the extent that a British prime minister comes to the Caribbean and says, "Forget about it. Just get over it." That's insulting.

EHdK 45:10 I was reading recently that Tony Blair, for example, was...thinking back to the 1990s that he was offered an honorary degree by UWI [University of the West Indies] which he turned down because he said he was too busy. When [P.J.] Patterson travelled to the UK again, Tony Blair didn't meet with him because he said he was too busy. And I think it's fascinating...the strategy basically the UK government...even though Labour for example, the majority of its votes were from....sorry, [the majority of] Caribbean people and Caribbean-descended people in the UK would have voted for Labour. In fact, they have very little respect, really, and very little focus on actually fostering those relationships. So, I think the historical wounds go in many directions as well. I think it's one of neglect and one of a lack of interest and a lack of engagement.

DC 46:16 I remember meeting with Jeremy Corbyn in London when he was the leader of the opposition and preparing for the election and he was very open to the cause of reparations.

EHdK 46:36 He was also concerned about the stories of whose documentation wasn't being recognised as well. And he picked up on my issue. So, it was being flagged to the UK Government. But they weren't taking it seriously.

DC 46:51 Yeah, well, the thing is that it is not going to go away. And our reparations claim is rooted in justice and righteousness but also in law, you know, and in historical fact. When



you have all of that going for you, I think you are you are bound to win once you pursue your cause, you know, with commitment and determination. And as I said, I got involved in the reparations cause way back at the beginning of the 1990s when most people would not have taken us seriously. It would have sounded like a pipe dream back then. Now, when the CARICOM governments launched the reparations campaign in 2013, that gave a tremendous boost to the idea of reparations. That helped to establish its legitimacy.

EHdK 47:59 Can I ask about the role of Verene Shepherd and Hilary Beckles as well in the movement? Because they are big figures who have been very prominent.

DC 48:06 Once Sir Hilary was asked to chair the CARICOM Reparations Commission...Actually, the CARICOM Reparations Commission was basically an idea of the Barbados National Taskforce on Reparations. We had this idea of bringing the governments together in a conference and establishing a Regional Reparations Commission. And we shared that idea but we were very pleased when Prime Minister Gonsalves of Saint Vincent ran with the idea. And he and Sir Hilary, with the assistance of Sir Hilary, were able to get the other Heads of Government to accept it. So, they were critical in making that breakthrough and getting the Heads of Government to make the decision in July of 2013 to set up the ...to launch the reparations claim. So, Hilary has played a very important role. First of all, as Chair of the CARICOM Reparations Commission but also as an historian. And his book "Britain's Black Debt" you know, has really outlined...

EHdK 49:30 The one that was inspired by the Walter Rodney book [How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, 1972]?

DC 49:31 No, that's the more recent one. The more recent one is "How Britain Underdeveloped the Caribbean". But the real case for reparations, that one is more looking at the 20th century relationship. But the "Britain's Black Debt", the first major work that he did on this issue, goes deeply into the history of enslavement and the case for reparations. So, Hilary and I go back a long way. We were partners in struggle from way back in the 1980s. And we were together in Durban, South Africa, at the World Conference Against Racism. He actually led the Barbados delegation but he left the conference early and then I took over as leader. So, we have fought, you know, many battles together over the years. But yes, he is seen as the major driving force. And he's gotten a lot of help, yes, from Verene Shepherd when Verene went on to replace Rex Nettleford at the UN Commission for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and so forth.

EHdK 50:53 Another question I have for you is about the role of...well, the interest of the EU specifically because I just wondered what you thought about Brexit. The fact that Britain's becoming more insular, that it's separating itself from its European partners. And how you see that moving towards the future? What implication do you think that has for the UK not only in terms of its diplomatic relations but also its kind of approach to reparations? Do you think that has any kind of impact?



DC 51:29 There is an effort that has been made to approach the EU with the CARICOM reparations claim. And I know that...I've heard from diplomats within the EU saying that they will not support that approach because the EU is not only made up of countries that were involved in slavery and slave trade but several others that don't have that history. And that they feel they would be required to undertake burdens that are historically not their responsibility. So, I know where CARICOM is concerned, we are targeting all of the European governments and nations that were involved. So far, we have identified 10. We have identified 10. We wrote to six in 2016. But in the years since then, our research has indicated to us that there are four other European countries - Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and I am not clear, right, the fourth one now. But there are 10 that we that we are targeting. The others haven't been informed yet, but a second round of letters will be going off to the relevant European Heads of Governments. And we and we are confident. I mean, all of the signs are there. In December last year. Prime minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands who back in 2016, in response to CARICOM's letter, had responded with a very non-committal and, maybe you could even say, dismissive letter. By 2022, he was singing a different tune. By 2022, he was coming before the world community to see that, yes, his Dutch government had committed crimes against humanity and that those crimes had injured people, and that injury persists up to today and that they recognise that they have to be involved in a process of healing the injury.

EHdK 54:25 And I think that we are seeing a shift then.

DC 54:28 There's the Netherlands. There's the Anglican Church. The Church commissioners who have publicly acknowledged that the church was involved in investments in the slave trade through the South Sea Company and that benefitted financially and have apologized, issued a public apology and have said that they're setting up 100-million-pound investment fund to make investments in communities that would have been negatively impacted. Then there's the recent case of the Trevelyan family. Even before the Trevelyan family, there was another family, Bridget Freeman. Many people seem to be unaware. Bridget Freeman, in 2021 - a British woman - having learned that her family had been involved in enslavement in Barbados, she determined that she had to make a reparations gesture, a bequest of...property valued at 500,000 US dollars to the University of the West Indies. So, you can see a growing momentum. I mean, there's Harvard University. The University of Glasgow 20 million pounds to the University of the West Indies. A programme valued at 20 million pounds. And there are several British companies that have admitted that they have been in...they were implicated...they have benefitted, you know. And so, yes, I think we are on our way and the momentum is building.



EHdK 56:16 I think, though, if we take the Windrush Compensation Scheme as an example of repair...an example of an opportunity for repair, and see and compare that to basically how abysmally, how appalling the UK Government has fared really in compensating the victims, I think it's not a good...

DC 56:43 Well, Windrush should have been an excellent test case because, as we outline in the letter, you could easily have taken this and applied all of the reparations principles to it. And, my feeling is that from the time CARICOM decided to embrace reparations as part of our official policy, our High Commissioners in Britain need to be aware that this is now part of their mandate and that they have a responsibility not only to current day Caribbean citizens and nationals but they have a responsibility to the entire Black British community, you know. So, I think we probably haven't done enough yet to readjust our thinking and our practice to what it means to have reparations as part of your official institutional mandate. So, we have some work to do as well. I think we have to be more focused in how we are approaching the reparations campaign and this, actually, Windrush really presented an excellent opportunity to treat it as a test case. And to apply all the reparations principles state and to win an important victory. So anyway, I trust that all is not lost and that we can still retrieve the situation.

EHdK 58:48 Is there anything else you'd like to add before we end the interview?

DC 58:52 No, I think we've basically covered it. I mean, my ultimate point is that reparations, you can't sweep it under the carpet. You can't try to ignore it and hope that it will go away which is what I think seems to be the policy of some of these European governments. It is not going away. People are too conscious of the history and they're only going to become increasingly conscious. And if Europe has to come to terms with the fact that its history is an ugly history. It came into this hemisphere. It committed genocide against the Indigenous people. It launched that system of enslavement of African people and when you, anybody who really takes time to investigate the utter brutality of that system, how African humanity was devalued. The horrors of plantation slavery is an ugly, ugly history. And you can't sweep it under the carpet. Europe has to acknowledge it, has to come to terms with it and has to come to terms with the victims of those crimes. And has to show a genuine remorse, and a genuine willingness to try to transcend that ugly history. And you cannot transcend it by pretending it never existed. You can only transcend it by taking responsibility for it. And what we have seen, we don't see reparations in terms of individual cash payments. Although, you know, some of us are thinking that you may find a case where there are certain families that have been mired in intergenerational poverty that perhaps targeted cash payments might be appropriate. But for us, our fundamental idea is that Europe's development was purchased at the price of the systematic underdevelopment and the looting and plundering of the resources of our people over hundreds of years. And as a result of that history, we now have a fundamental right to development. And European nations and governments are under a corresponding duty to facilitate that development. So, if you look at the CARICOM 10-point Reparations Plan, it is about developmental...we are



calling for developmental compact with Europe and, you know, I break it down very simply. A few weeks ago, there was a town hall meeting in Barbados on the disabled, the disabled community. And there were all of these mothers of disabled children speaking about the fact that they were overwhelmed. Speaking about the fact that there are so many needs that their children have. Barbados doesn't have these support mechanisms. Barbados doesn't have these resources. And so many of them were saying, you know when you look at Canada, when you look at the UK and you look at what they have, and facilities for supporting disabled children and for supporting the parents, the families of disabled children. Why don't we have those things? And, of course, we don't have those things because we don't have the resources and we don't have the resources, because for hundreds of years, our resources went to European families, European companies and, ultimately, to the capitals of Europe. So why should a disabled child in Barbados not have access to the same support and resources that a disabled child in the UK or France...so, you know, any of these European countries have. So that is what reparations is about. It's about redressing that disparity and that injustice so you can bring it down to those basic human terms. That's what it's about.

EHdK 1:03:49 Thank you so much for your time today.

DC 1:03:51 My pleasure. Thank you.

[END OF AUDIOFILE].