

## March 25th a day to remember centuries of struggle

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International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, call us to remember that racism and xenophobia continue to exist, creating contemporary forms of slavery and oppression of the African people and their Diaspora in the world.

In Colombia, it is mandatory for Afro-descendants identified as Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquera people, (the historical and cultural construction of black people that have woven in the five centuries of resistance and struggle for self-determination), to take this type of remembrance, which, for some people become "celebration", as another moment to raise our voices and demand the reparations for the reborn children (renacientes) of Africa, now settled in the country's richest areas and yet with the higher indexes of poverty, impoverishment, and violence.

Colombia, the Latin American country that holds the title of the oldest democracy in the region, is also characterized by its racist and oppressive practices against Black people, concealed in rhetorical speeches and actions that include a sophisticated legislative framework hard led to practice, and a *mestizo* society that believes itself White and exercise the privileges of their supremacy. This is demonstrated by the statistics in education, health, basic services and employment, all rates far below the national average that, contrary to be reduced, have increased with the impacts of the war and the economic policies imposed by the State.

Facts, many facts, show us how in Colombia to BE Black, Afro-descendant, is a crime that has being paid with physical, psychological and cultural life. In Colombia, there is a genocide of the Afro-descendant population going on for which little is said.

The Afro-descendant population, about 10.5 million people, has been affected disproportionately by the internal armed conflict that has crushed Colombia in the past 50 years. Fourth of the population in situation of internal displacement are Afro descendant people, coming mostly from territories where Afro-Colombians won collective property with Law 70 of 1993. Violence has been exacerbated in Afro-descendants territories in the last 20 years with the presence of insurgency, paramilitary groups and forces of the State, on the one hand, and with the offensive of macro-economic projects promoted by the State after discovering in the late 80s that areas inhabited by Blacks, located mostly on the Colombian Pacific Region, contain 10% of the world's biodiversity. The ancestral lands have been taken over by monoculture plantations of coca, oil palm, sugar cane, by large scale infrastructure to provide access to modern free trade agreements with States where again the life of Afro-descendant people, as in the times of the transatlantic trafficking, is subject to the economic interests of the capitalist neo-colonial system.

Remembering the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, people from African descent should remember also that the environmental and cultural capital that the Colombian State negotiates with the world, is capital built up at the expenses of Afro-descendant's blood. Thus, the claim for reparations is not a grant or favor requested to the State and the society, but the collection of a historical debt to Africa and its Diaspora. The presence and advancements that the Afro-descendant

population has reached today in Colombia, is due to centuries of resistance and 20 years of organized struggle.

On days like these, people of African descent in Colombia, must remember that our strength has been built on the basis of solidarity, collective thinking, communal interests, respect for our traditions, and not on the basis of pettiness, individual interests and vicious political practices learned by some, subjects to a process of assimilation and forgetfulness.

We must remember and reinforce our commitment to move forward in the search for the comprehensive reparations that have mobilized us in the last twenty years. Issues such as the regulation of several chapters of law 70/93; the exercise of the right to prior, free and informed consultation and consent; differential and pertinent attention to our displaced population; restitution and return to our lands, and many more issues are still pending.

We must also remember that we have the historical responsibility to contribute to the construction of models of life based on equality, justice, respect for life and values and the sustainable use of our territorial heritage and resources.

People of African descent in Colombia must remember also that we have a political responsibility to keep alive the legacy of struggle inherited from the ancestors. Our route is self-determination not assimilation.

Finally, Colombia needs to understand that the gains that people of African descent have obtained through resistance and organized struggle are a gain for the country as it continues to evolve, through struggle, into State-nation that is more just, equitable and sustainable for all.

In order to prevent that crimes against humanity such enslavement and human trafficking will be repeated; for a Colombia and a world free of racism, discrimination and violence; for a just and better world for all, Afro-descendants in Colombia will maintain our determined fighting spirit until the world bring meaningful reparations to Africa and its Diaspora.

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