



SEMINAR REPORT

Approaches to Reparations from Africa and Europe

The AU–EU Experts’ Seminar on
Transitional Justice, Abuja, Nigeria,
June 2025



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About ICTJ

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) works across society and borders to challenge the causes and address the consequences of massive human rights violations. We affirm victims’ dignity, fight impunity, and promote responsive institutions in societies emerging from repressive rule or armed conflict as well as in established democracies where historical injustices or systemic abuse remain unresolved. ICTJ envisions a world where societies break the cycle of massive human rights violations and lay the foundations for peace, justice, and inclusion. For more information, visit www.ictj.org

About the Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa

The Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa (ITJA) is a three-year project jointly launched by the African Union (AU) and the European Union. The project is coordinated by ICTJ and co-implemented in collaboration with the African Transitional Justice Legacy Fund and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. The primary goal of the ITJA is to promote the implementation of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) and support the roll-out of the AU’s roadmap for the implementation of the AUTJP through the provision of technical assistance and capacity building, knowledge generation, and supporting civil society and victims’ groups to promote and meaningfully influence transitional justice processes on the continent.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AU	African Union
AUTJP	African Union Transitional Justice Policy
AW4TJ	African Women for Transitional Justice
AY4TJ	African Youth for Transitional Justice
CAR	Central African Republic
CSO	Civil society organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ESC	Economic, social, and cultural
EU	European Union
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
IER	Equity and Reconciliation Commission (Morocco)
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission (South Africa)
TRRC	Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (The Gambia)
UN	United Nations

Introduction

In the wake of armed conflict, dictatorship, and systemic historical injustices, victims have persistently called for reparations as a core element of justice. Reparation goes beyond monetary compensation to encompass acknowledgment of harm, restoration of dignity, and redress for both individual and structural injustices. It is equally a moral demand and a firmly established legal right under international human rights law, as well as African and European regional human rights frameworks. States therefore bear the responsibility to provide adequate, effective, prompt, and appropriate remedies as part of the reparation afforded to victims of gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Reparations stand as a cornerstone of transitional justice, central to addressing legacies of gross human rights abuses and fostering reconciliation. The transitional justice policies of the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) both emphasize the need for reparations to be victim-centered and transformative, targeting the root causes of violence and exclusion.¹ Similarly, the 2023 United Nations (UN) Secretary-General’s guidance note highlights the importance of reparations in healing both immediate harms and long-term, intergenerational trauma.² The UN’s “Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation” outline five forms of reparations—restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition—each contributing to a holistic approach to justice and repair.³

Despite this clear legal and moral foundation, significant conceptual and practical challenges persist in the implementation of reparations. Questions around eligibility, responsibility, inclusion of historically marginalized groups, and sustainable financing remain unresolved. The need for innovative solutions is particularly urgent in contexts marked by poverty and competing development demands. Additionally, historical injustices such as colonialism and slavery demand new approaches to reparations that can address deep-seated harm and ecological devastation. A coordinated response by key actors, including the AU, EU, and UN, is essential to overcoming these challenges and advancing meaningful reparations efforts across Africa.⁴

The 2025 edition of the AU–EU Experts’ Seminar on Transitional Justice, held in Abuja, Nigeria, from June 19–20, 2025, provided a critical space for policy dialogue and collabora-

1 African Union (AU), “Transitional Justice Policy: An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa,” (February 2019); European Union (EU), “Policy Framework on Support to Transitional Justice,” (2015).

2 UN, “Guidance Note of the Secretary General on Transitional Justice: A Strategic Tool for People, Prevention and Peace,” (2023).

3 UN General Assembly, 60th Session. *Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*, 2005 (New York: Official Record A/RES/60/147).

4 AU–EU Experts’ Seminar Concept Note.

tion on reparative justice, recognizing it as a central pillar of transitional justice. The focus on reparations aligned with the AU’s theme for 2025: “Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations.” Building on previous seminars, 2025’s gathering focused specifically on achieving the following objectives:

1. To facilitate a platform for African and European experts to share and compare national and regional reparations processes, drawing from lessons on what has worked, where, and why.
2. To create opportunities for policymakers, practitioners, scholars, and civil society actors to build new collaborations and joint initiatives focused on reparations.
3. To encourage creative and innovative thinking to improve the design, financing, and implementation of inclusive, victim-centered reparations programs.
4. To consolidate recent research and field insights to enhance understanding of the impacts, challenges, and innovations in reparations.

This seminar report reflects the main conversations that emerged during the two-day event and highlights key recommendations from the experts and practitioners in attendance.

Opening Session

The opening session of the seminar set the tone for a thoughtful and ambitious two-day seminar. Both the AU and EU reaffirmed their political, financial, and technical commitment to implementing inclusive transitional justice across Africa. The two institutions emphasized partnership and local ownership as cornerstones of success and pledged continued support to member states in the implementation of transformative transitional justice processes.

The EU expressed gratitude to the Government of Nigeria for hosting the event and extended appreciation to the AU for its steadfast commitment to justice and reconciliation. It emphasized that transitional justice is not only about addressing past abuses but also about restoring dignity, building accountability, and laying a firm foundation for peace and sustainable development. For the EU, transitional justice is deeply connected to human rights and the rule of law, as framed in its policy framework on transitional justice and its broader human rights and democracy action plan.

The EU highlighted its support for transitional justice processes in countries such as the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), The Gambia, Lesotho, and South Sudan. It noted that EUR 5 million has been committed to support the implementation of the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) and welcomed the progress being made across the continent. It underscored that transitional justice must be inclusive and locally owned, while also aligning with international legal standards. It further welcomed the seminar’s broad agenda, which extended beyond legal and policy frameworks to address critical, yet underexplored themes such as mental health, gender justice, and other related issues. The remarks concluded with a reaffirmation of the EU’s commitment to effective multilateralism and continued partnership with the AU in supporting justice and reconciliation efforts in Africa.

The AU provided an African perspective on transitional justice. It acknowledged the shift within the AU from policy development to tangible implementation, noting that, with EU support, technical assistance is currently being provided to member states such as CAR, the DRC, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Lesotho, and South Sudan. It also highlighted ongoing efforts to support the development of regional transitional justice strategies by regional economic communities, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The AU further emphasized investments in capacity building, including the training of youth and women and the creation of continental platforms, such as African Women for Transitional Justice (AW4TJ) and African Youth for Transitional Justice (AY4TJ).

While reflecting on the global and historical dimensions of injustice, the AU noted that transitional justice is a vital mechanism for repairing social fabrics, correcting structural and

intergenerational harm, and promoting reconciliation. It recalled the shared AU–EU commitment made in the previous seminar in Brussels to maintain momentum through joint and coordinated action. It further noted that the designation of 2025 as the year for justice for Africans and people of African descent through reparations signals a growing prioritization of reparations, not only as compensation but as a broader strategy for redress, restitution, and truth telling.

ICTJ highlighted the expanding scope of transitional justice over the past decades and applauded the shared commitment of both the AU and EU to its advancement, as reflected in the adoption of robust continental policy frameworks to guide justice, accountability, reconciliation, healing, and institutional building in Africa and Europe. It underscored how both frameworks converge on key principles, including a comprehensive and victim-centered approach, strong civil society involvement, local ownership, and attention to vulnerable groups, especially women and children. ICTJ further emphasized that reparations are a right, not a political choice, and they must remain a priority even when political or economic considerations risk sidelining them. Reparations were described as having transformative potential in unequal societies, particularly for victims of corruption and systemic abuse. Delivering reparations to victims does not require prior recommendations from a truth commission, nor must reparations be tied to criminal prosecutions or litigation; rather, they should be understood as stand-alone measures capable of catalyzing truth-seeking and criminal justice processes.

Beyond supporting victims’ groups, ICTJ works with transitional justice processes, state institutions, and non-state organizations to identify ways to meet victims’ needs and implement reparations programs. It provides advice to truth commissions, supports institutions responsible for implementing reparations, and engages with state agencies to help mobilize funding and build capacity. Its work also extends to promoting non-judicial reparations, addressing violations of socioeconomic rights, and tailoring approaches to local contexts of violence and marginalization. Reference was made to comparative work in Colombia, The Gambia, Tunisia, and Uganda, illustrating both varied progress and shared challenges in implementing reparations. From this perspective, reparations were framed as a political project aimed at advancing recognition, civic trust, and social solidarity, provided they are transparent, inclusive, and transformative. It was further emphasized that reparations must confront social inequalities rather than reinforce the conditions that enabled violations and should be guided by a broader societal vision.

The Government of Nigeria expressed profound gratitude to the AU and EU for selecting Nigeria as the host of the seminar. It emphasized that the gathering represented more than a meeting of experts. It symbolized a shared commitment to move from conflict to reconciliation, from injustice to accountability, and from division to cohesion. It acknowledged the pressing transitional justice challenges across both continents and underscored the importance of dialogue that transcends borders, engaging fundamental questions of justice, reconciliation, and institutional transformation.

Nigeria’s evolving transitional justice trajectory was also highlighted, particularly in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast. The Borno Model, focused on deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration, was presented as an example of a non-military approach to peacebuilding. It was noted that over 93,000 individuals, including former fighters and their families, have surrendered under Operation Safe Corridor. Sustainable peace was framed as requiring attention to legal, psychosocial, economic, and social dimensions. Emphasis was placed on the need to embed AUTJP principles into national frameworks, promote grassroots engagement, and ensure adaptive and inclusive mechanisms. A call was made for stronger collaboration between Africa and Europe, urging a shift from analysis to solution building and encouraging participants to act not only as partners but co-architects of just and peaceful futures.

The opening session underscored the importance of political will, local ownership, and public engagement in ensuring the success of transitional justice efforts. It also called for a stronger role for civil society, youth, and the African diaspora, while encouraging participants to approach the seminar as a platform for bold ideas, collective learning, and concrete action.

Session 1. Reparations as Transitional Justice and Reparations as Legal Obligation: The Conceptual and Legal Foundations for Reparations

During discussions on this topic, experts Honorable Remy Ngoy Lumbu (African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights), Professor Tim Murithi, Dr. Deborah Ruiz Verduzco (Trust Fund for Victims, International Criminal Court), and Ruben Carranza (ICTJ) sought to establish a shared understanding of the legal and conceptual foundations of the right to reparation within international human rights law and to explore how these principles can be effectively operationalized in practice. What follows are the key takeaways from these discussions.

The panel focused on situating reparations as a central pillar of transitional justice rather than a complementary measure. Opening the session, the moderator underscored that there can be no meaningful justice without reparations, drawing on African normative frameworks such as those developed by the AUTJP and the African Commission’s soft law instruments.

Panelists placed reparations within Africa’s broader historical struggle for justice, referencing the enduring legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. They traced the evolution of continental advocacy from the 1993 Abuja Proclamation to more recent milestones, including the Accra Declaration (2022) and the African Reparations Conference (2023). These developments reflect sustained efforts by African institutions and civil society to articulate a unified and assertive position on reparative justice, including growing collaboration with Caribbean actors and proposals for joint institutional mechanisms.

From an institutional and practice-oriented perspective, discussions highlighted that reparations are grounded in victims’ rights and the broader right to an effective remedy. Drawing on the jurisprudence of the International Criminal Court (ICC), including prominent cases such as that of Dominic Ongwen, panelists outlined key principles guiding reparations: inclusion, quality, appropriate modalities, sensitivity to harm and vulnerability, and procedural safeguards. At the same time, they identified a persistent structural challenge: the inability of many convicted individuals to fulfill reparations orders due to indigence. As seen in the case of the September 28 stadium massacre in Guinea, victims may secure convictions yet receive no compensation because perpetrators lack the means to comply with reparations orders. Discussions in this and related sessions emphasized that, where perpetrators are unable to pay, states bear a complementary or solitary responsibility to ensure the implementation of reparations. This principle, reflected in the 2005 UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation and increasingly recognized in state practice and customary

international law, continues to inform advocacy for stronger state accountability and sustainable reparations mechanisms.

Panelists also challenged the global legal framework for reparations, particularly its exclusion of economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights. The genealogy of international reparations law was traced to two 1993 UN initiatives: one focused on civil and political rights that became foundational to current reparations law and another—led by Senegalese jurist El Hadji Gissé—focused on ESC rights, which has been largely forgotten. The failure to adopt principles advocating for reparations for violations such as economic pillaging, state corruption, and systemic impoverishment was criticized for skewing global reparations frameworks away from the lived experiences of the Global South.

The dominant restitution model—built on the idea of returning victims to their status before a violation—was also challenged. While useful in some cases, this approach fails to capture the realities of displaced rural communities, informal workers, or historically excluded groups who never had access to land titles, employment rights, or state services to begin with. Panelists urged a more transformative approach that recognizes social class, racial and gender

“The law must be harnessed, not evoked as an obstacle to realizing justice and reparations.” — Seminar participant

disparities, and structural inequalities. The improvements made in the 2010 and 2023 UN Secretary-General’s guidance notes on transitional justice, which now call for addressing root causes of conflict and violations of all rights, including ESC rights, were welcomed. Still, it was emphasized that legal frameworks must evolve further.

During plenary discussions, several speakers cautioned that governments often hide behind gaps in statutes or treaties to avoid reparative duties. When the law is silent, it should be amended, not treated as a barrier. They urged victims and advocates to insist that the rule of law remain “subservient to justice,” pushing legislatures and courts to expand existing norms rather than accept inaction.

Participants warned against treating colonial-era atrocities and current mass violations as separate issues, arguing that structural legacies of domination persist in modern conflicts. Reparations programs must explicitly tackle inequality, marginalization, discrimination based on gender, and racism, etc. In this regard, participants noted that cash compensation can be a crucial instrument of agency for marginalized groups. Experts recommended linking debt swaps, recovered corruption assets, and conditional cash transfer schemes to reparations funds, drawing on write-offs from the International Monetary Fund (as Ghana once did) or confiscated illicit wealth (such as the assets of ex-dictator Hani Abacha in the case of Nigeria) to finance programs for victims in resource-strained states. Overall, participants called for stronger state substitution mechanisms, creative financing (both globally and domestically), and a reparations toolkit that marries symbolic measures with material redress to rebuild trust and prevent cyclical violence.

Overall, the first session of the seminar laid a strong conceptual and normative foundation for understanding reparations as both a transitional justice mechanism and a legal obligation. The speakers and participants collectively emphasized that reparations are not merely acts of charity or discretionary political gestures; rather, they are rooted in binding legal standards and moral imperatives. By highlighting the experiences of African countries such as Morocco, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, and drawing from international legal frameworks, the session underscored the urgent need to center victims’ rights, agency, and lived experiences in reparations processes.

Session 2. Reparations for Historical Injustices: Can the Consequences of Slavery, Colonialism, Apartheid, and Occupation be Repaired? What Lessons Can Be Learned from Shared African and European Histories?

During discussions on this topic, experts Angela Naa Afoley Oda (AU Commission), Sima Luipert (Nama Traditional Leaders Association of Namibia), Karfa Diallo (*Mémoire et Partage*), and Dr. John Ikubaje (AU Commission) aimed to build a comprehensive understanding of reparations by linking contemporary human rights violations to enduring legacies of historical injustices. Guided by the AUTJP and the EU’s Policy Framework on Support to Transitional Justice, the session sought to unpack the root causes of conflict and structural violence rooted in exclusion, discrimination, and marginalization. Panelists explored both the legal and moral imperatives behind the demand for reparations for atrocities such as slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and systemic exploitation. The session posed critical questions about the impact of these historical harms on present-day conflicts, the lessons learned from African experiences with reparations, and the extent to which European states have responded to African demands. Drawing on case studies from the DRC, France, Namibia, and Nigeria, the session examined ongoing and past efforts at restitution, compensation, and memorialization, offering insights into the complex pathways toward justice and acknowledgment of historical wrongs. The main takeaways are set out below.

The rationale for the AU declaring 2025 as the “Year of Justice for Africa and People of African Descent” was explored in detail, highlighting a series of institutional efforts—beginning with the Accra Summit and Assembly Decisions 847 and 884—aimed at building a united front for reparations. Central to these efforts is the development of a continental roadmap that includes advocacy, capacity building, a committee of experts, legal advisory structures, and strong transcontinental partnerships, including with the Caribbean community and diaspora communities beyond the Atlantic. Reparations, it was emphasized, must encompass truth telling, healing, and inclusivity. They must recognize the scars of transatlantic and trans-Indian Ocean slave trades, genocide, and neocolonial violence and involve multiple generations and sectors of society in shaping a just and dignified reparative future.

A sobering reflection was offered on Namibia’s experience with Germany regarding reparations for the 1904–1908 genocide. The process created a rift between community-led advocacy for reparations and the government-to-government negotiations that ultimately excluded victim communities. The 2021 joint declaration between Namibia and Germany was criticized for failing to recognize genocide unequivocally and for offering development

aid instead of reparations. Structural inequalities rooted in the colonial era—particularly land dispossession and political marginalization—continue to shape contemporary realities. The Namibian case highlights the pitfalls of top-down, state-led reparations and the danger of repeating colonial patterns of silencing and objectifying victim communities. True reparations require community ownership, recognition, and justice.

Reflections on how EU member states, particularly France, have approached African demands for reparations drew attention to the unresolved trauma of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. Haiti’s forced indemnity to French slaveholders in 1825—an injustice that advocates are actively seeking to reverse—and the 1944 massacre of Senegalese Tirailleurs by the French army were cited as examples requiring comprehensive and unflinching reparative processes grounded in memory, justice, and historical truth.

“Monetary reparations are essential. They serve not just as symbolic recognition but also as legal acknowledgment of wrongdoing.”
— Seminar participant

During plenary, participants offered a wide range of insights and recommendations on how to concretely advance reparations for historical injustices. One participant emphasized that monetary reparations are essential, as they serve not just as symbolic recognition but also as legal acknowledgment of wrongdoing. The Lumumba case was cited as an example of partial reparative progress through parliamentary inquiry, criminal investigation, and restitution of remains, but it was stressed that financial compensation remains

a missing and critical component.⁵ Another participant from North Macedonia pointed to the precedent of the German Forced Labour Compensation Programme, arguing that if Europe could establish reparations mechanisms for injustices committed from 1939–1945, then reparations for Africa, whose colonial oppression persisted well beyond that period, must also be feasible.

Others raised the urgency of civil society resistance to state-to-state processes that exclude affected communities. In Namibia, for example, Sima Luipert shared that affected communities have taken both the Namibian and German governments to court, advocated through UN mechanisms, and used AU platforms to demand recognition and justice. This reinforces the need for community-led action as a strategy of resistance and self-determination.

Further interventions raised critical questions for institutions like the AU and EU. Participants challenged the AU to go beyond calls for reparations to support ongoing legal cases, such as the Matisse massacre, Namibian genocide, and Senegalese atrocities, by helping victims access justice and ensuring cultural artifacts are not only returned but preserved and protected. They also urged the AU to help mediate disputes over the custodianship of returned artifacts, as seen in Nigeria.

Calls were made for the AU to ensure cross-continental linkages between memorialization efforts in Africa and those in the diaspora, highlighting, for instance, the disconnection between Gambia’s Kunta Kinte Island memorial and its counterpart in Maryland, United States. It was emphasized that diplomatic engagement must give way to more assertive transnational demands capable of holding both colonial and postcolonial states accountable. In response, the AU’s commitment to operationalizing reparative action through concrete mechanisms was reaffirmed, including the establishment of a Reparations Coordination Team, the development of a model law, and the institutionalization of an African Day for Victims of Colonialism and Slavery. These initiatives are now subject to regular progress reporting before

⁵ In June 2022, Belgium returned a tooth to the family of Patrice Lumumba, the DRC’s first prime minister. The tooth is the only known remains from his body.

the executive council and the Heads of State Summit, signaling a shift from rhetorical commitments to measurable implementation.

Closing reflections underscored the complexity and shared responsibility inherent in advancing reparations for historical injustices. The necessity of joint efforts between African and European actors was highlighted, with a focus on ensuring that reparations remain victim-centered, even in international contexts. Comments stressed that while development aid is valuable, it often fails to address victims’ specific needs, hence the importance of collaborative, holistic, and multi-layered interventions. The contributions of civil society actors and individual legal practitioners were acknowledged as crucial, alongside the call for deeper engagement with institutions like the AU and the ICC.

Together, the panelists and the participants emphasized that while the consequences of historical injustices are profound and complex, they are not beyond repair if addressed through inclusive, community-led reparations processes that seek both justice and healing.

Session 3. Reparations After War and Authoritarian Rule: Insights from Selected European and African Experiences

In addressing this theme, experts Ida Persson (Special Adviser on Transitional Justice, Gambia Ministry of Justice), Professor Mohammed Abdelhay Moudden (Advisory Council, National Human Rights Council, Morocco), and Igor Cvetkovski (Senior Advisor on Reparations and Transitional Justice, International Organization for Migration) sought to explore the design, implementation, and impact of reparations initiatives across post-conflict and post-authoritarian contexts, drawing on comparative insights from Africa and Europe. The following section outlines the main insights that emerged.

The panel discussed the similarities and differences in how reparations are conceived and delivered across contexts and interrogated whether post-war and post-authoritarian reparations programs can be truly transformative—that is, capable of addressing the root causes of conflict, such as marginalization and inequality. Critical questions were also raised about the role of memorialization and commemoration in contexts of war and political violence and whether remembering or forgetting can serve a constructive purpose.

The Gambia’s experience was presented as a case study in ambitious transitional justice design. Following 22 years under an authoritarian regime, the Gambian population’s collective efforts in 2016 to remove the dictatorship catalyzed a wide-ranging transitional justice agenda built on grassroots consultations reaching every district, town, and village to understand what justice meant for the people. A noted shortcoming was the narrow temporal scope of the framework, which began looking at issues from 1994 and excluded the historical injustices of colonialism and slavery. Nevertheless, political will and external support from the AU, ICTJ, and UN enabled the government to pursue truth seeking, institutional reform, and reparations concurrently.

A standout feature of The Gambia’s Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) was the addition of “reparations” to its formal mandate. The TRRC not only conducted hearings but also issued interim reparations to victims, which were supported by a modest government fund and philanthropic contributions from the Gambian diaspora. These reparations included financial compensation, medical rehabilitation, livelihood support for widows and women caregivers, and scholarships for children of victims. Notably, the process recognized the specific needs of women, particularly those impacted by sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), although cultural norms made it difficult for many women to publicly acknowledge their victimhood. The TRRC’s final report contains 263 recommendations,

and a Victims Reparations Commission has been established to carry the reparations work forward. The commission is to reach both direct victims and representatives of marginalized communities. It is mandated to expand the reparations database and manage a fund financed through state budget allocations and the sale of seized assets from perpetrators, including former President Yahya Jammeh.

“Transitional justice must not be reduced to a top-down, state-led narrative. It must provide victims with the agency to articulate their own needs and visions for justice.” — Seminar participant

Morocco’s reparations process, stemming from the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER, 2003–2004), was presented as a landmark case covering 43 years of human rights abuses starting with its independence in 1956. Violations included enforced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary detentions that arose during conflicts between the state and a broad spectrum of political groups, including Marxists, Islamists, and Sahrawi activists. Morocco’s process was groundbreaking as it marked the first time the state officially acknowledged and compensated victims of its abuses. Nearly 30,000 victims were identified and compensated based on field investigations and limited

access to national archives. The reparations program disbursed approximately USD 300 million—an extraordinary figure at the time, considering Morocco’s GDP—and included financial compensation, medical care, social rehabilitation, and restoration of civil rights.

Drawing from over 25 years of work, including major post-Holocaust and Nazi-era compensation schemes, the session detailed how over 300,000 claims were processed for survivors of forced labor and other Nazi crimes through programs such as the German Forced Labour Compensation Program and the Holocaust Victim Assets Program. These large-scale efforts offered critical insights into designing reparations mechanisms rooted in administrative, judicial, or legislative frameworks. A cautionary note was raised about the real-world challenges of implementing reparations programs: only approximately 10 percent of such initiatives globally succeed due to lack of political will, weak donor support, and disproportionate international focus on criminal justice over reparative justice. As an example, the USD 200 million spent to prosecute 14 individuals through the Special Court for Sierra Leone was contrasted with the mere USD 9 million allocated to reparations for over 32,000 victims, illustrating how global priorities are misaligned with victims’ interests.

The growing threat of revisionist narratives and denialism in contemporary global politics was also addressed. Memorialization, it was argued, is not simply a matter of monuments but a crucial political act that safeguards truth and maintains public memory. Reparations can themselves serve as acts of memorialization when they formally acknowledge harm and document victims’ experiences.

The session highlighted the essential interplay between political will, public engagement, and institutional integrity in crafting reparative responses to past abuses. A strong emphasis was placed on the importance of a victim-centered approach and the need to tailor reparations to the lived experiences and needs of survivors. While experiences from The Gambia and Morocco illustrated both emerging and more established models of reparative justice, comparative global perspectives underscored the fragility of such processes and the difficulty of making them effective, particularly in the absence of sustained political and financial commitments. The session concluded with a sobering reflection: truth, memory, and justice remain tenuous and contested in many societies, and reparations must therefore be pursued as ongoing, inclusive, and historically-grounded processes capable of rebuilding trust and dignity.

During the plenary, participants raised a range of issues related to transitional justice and reparations, including the question of ecological reparations. It was noted that environmental

harms are often excluded from formal mandates, risking their erasure from official records. The possibility of revisiting such omissions to better address root injustices was likewise highlighted. Discussions also addressed youth participation in reparations programs, underscoring how institutional design can enable meaningful and inclusive engagement.

“Reparation is what victims want most but get least.” — Seminar participant

Questions about guarantees of non-repetition prompted reflections on the limits of reform processes, particularly in contexts where institutional change remains incomplete or ongoing. While measures such as security sector reform were acknowledged, participants emphasized that assessing their effectiveness requires a longer-term perspective. A holistic and well-sequenced approach to transitional justice was therefore encouraged, integrating institutional reform, inclusive participation, and sustained political commitment.

Additional perspectives highlighted the challenges of ensuring non-repetition even within democratic settings, noting that patterns of abuse may persist and evolve alongside changes in civil society and state practices. The importance of adaptability and continued vigilance was emphasized, particularly considering new forms of repression and communication technologies. Reflections on memorialization further illustrated that such initiatives risk limited impact when disconnected from local contexts, infrastructure, and educational efforts. Participants also underscored the immense difficulty of implementing reparations in contexts affected by ongoing conflict and mass displacement, where millions remain forcibly displaced and basic conditions for justice processes are constrained.

The session provided a rich comparative analysis of reparations processes, highlighting both achievements and persistent obstacles. The examples from The Gambia and Morocco demonstrate how political will, inclusivity, and survivor-centered approaches are vital to an effective reparations process. The speakers recognized the fragility of these processes, especially in the face of limited funding and the shifting global political climate. The session also showed that donor priorities often do not align with victims’ needs, with a focus on prosecutions and an emphasis on symbolic rather than transformative reparations.

Session 4. The Economics of Reparations: Designing, Funding, and Sustaining Reparations

During discussions on this topic, experts Dr. Liliane Umubyeyi (African Futures Lab), Ruben Carranza (ICTJ), Abdul Tejan-Cole (The Gambia Reparations Commission), and Egbert Wesselink (Pax) sought to examine the roles of state budgets, international partners, and private sector actors (particularly corporations) in addressing economic injustices. Drawing on experiences from African and European countries, the panel highlighted lessons learned about funding reparations and recovering ill-gotten assets to support these programs.

The session opened by challenging the common narrative that reparations are “too expensive” or should be merely symbolic. Financial compensation is not just possible, panelists argued; it is necessary. Reparations are not an act of charity but a legal and moral obligation. The question is not whether money should be paid, but why states and perpetrators consistently escape accountability for financing reparative justice initiatives, even as billions are mobilized for post-conflict reconstruction, security, and economic development.

The panel addressed two major misconceptions related to reparations financing. The first is that reparations are only about money; the second, that there is insufficient money to fund and sustain reparations programs. Reparations take multiple forms—symbolic, memorial, and institutional—but monetary compensation does play a critical, empowering role. Evidence from Nepal showed how interim reparations enabled widows to escape oppressive family structures and make autonomous decisions. Research from Colombia demonstrated that monetary compensation shifted household priorities from emergency health needs to nutrition, and in many cases, enabled survivors to leave exploitative labor arrangements. The impact was not just personal, but transformative and communal.

Panelists shared global examples of creative and resourceful reparations financing. For instance, in South Africa, Desmond Tutu’s proposal for a wealth tax was rejected, but modest lump sums of about 30,000 South African Rand were eventually paid. In Ghana, reparations were funded through debt forgiveness, though poor logistics meant victims showed up on disbursement day only to be turned away. In the Philippines, USD 680 million in Marcos family assets were recovered from Swiss banks, of which USD 200 million was legislated for victim compensation and USD 10 million for memorialization, demonstrating that even stolen wealth can and should be redirected to serve justice.

Sierra Leone’s reparations process was examined as a cautionary tale of failed priorities and sequencing. Former combatants were disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated with support and resources, while victims were left waiting for reparations. The program was heavily

**“The man who chopped off your limbs
got training and funding before you got
anything.” — Seminar participant**

donor-funded, with the government contributing less than USD 300,000. Once donor fatigue set in, the program collapsed, revealing the dangers of over-reliance on external goodwill rather than national responsibility. Creative ideas such as debt swaps and tax reforms were ignored, and the state’s passivity stood in sharp contrast to the energy and funding channeled into the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

An overemphasis on punitive justice without parallel investment in reparative justice creates a distorted and incomplete form of transition. The reparations process, one panelist argued, should not come as an afterthought; it must be integral from the outset and built into the political and economic framework of post-conflict recovery.

The Lundin case was presented as a stark example of how corporations—not just states—can be deeply complicit in mass atrocities yet remain largely unaccountable. In the mid-1990s, Sudan’s government entered into contracts with foreign oil companies to extract oil in rebel-held areas, sparking a brutal war in which roughly 12,000 people lost their lives and 200,000 were forcibly displaced. Though the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement explicitly granted victims a right to compensation, neither the Sudanese government nor the oil companies, which were signatories to the contracts, took any action. Disillusioned, communities asked Pax to investigate. In response, Pax, on behalf of the European Coalition on Oil in Sudan, published “Unpaid Debt” in 2010.⁶ The report documents atrocities while reframing the legal implications under evolving international law, particularly the idea that transnational corporations can be held liable for international crimes. To the surprise of many, this led Swedish prosecutors to open a criminal investigation against Lundin. The trial, still ongoing, is a rare case in which corporate executives are being held accountable for their role in war crimes.

Affected communities in South Sudan articulated their demands clearly: collective rather than individual reparations, exclusion of Sudanese authorities from the process, and international oversight of the process. These communities were not driven by vengeance but by reconciliation. Corporate tactics, including asset-stripping ahead of indictments, have been used by Lundin to evade accountability. Reparations are estimated to cost EUR 1.5–2 billion—easily affordable by the firm—and should be considered a legal obligation under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Truth telling and apologies matter, but without reparations, the process remains hollow.

During plenary, the discussion centered on the complexities of designing and implementing reparations programs that are not only financially sustainable but also transformative and inclusive. A strong emphasis was placed on the need for reparations to go beyond monetary compensation, integrating truth telling, healing, institutional reform, and socioeconomic rehabilitation. Speakers emphasized that enabling victims, especially survivors of SGBV, to come forward requires the creation of safe, supportive conditions through multi-sectoral collaboration. The importance of involving multiple government ministries, such as health, education, and culture ministries, in the design and delivery of reparations to ensure a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach that supports long-term societal transformation and state building was underscored.

Participants also reflected on the political and philosophical dimensions of reparations, calling for a deeper interrogation of the relationship between African states, colonial histories, and ongoing structural inequalities. Some argued that the reparations discourse is often too narrowly focused and should be decolonized, as reparations should address not just past harms but the systems that continue to perpetuate injustice and dependency. There was also

⁶ European Coalition on Oil in Sudan, “Unpaid Debt: The Legacy of Lundin, Petronas and OMV in Block 5A, Sudan 1997–2003,” (June 2010).

criticism of how affirmative action programs in some countries, while well-intentioned, ended up reinforcing new layers of inequality.

Additionally, the potential role of multinational corporations and foreign governments in financing reparations was explored. While there are many examples, such as Volkswagen paying reparations in Brazil or the United States funding environmental cleanup in Vietnam, these initiatives often stop short of acknowledging full responsibility. It was stressed that for such contributions to be meaningful and reparative, they must be rooted in accountability and not simply framed as “development aid” or “corporate social responsibility.”

The session concluded with a reaffirmation that reparations are not only financially feasible but fundamentally necessary. The panelists emphasized that reparations, particularly financial ones, represent a transfer of power and recognition to victims. They are not about pity but about restoring dignity, opportunity, and agency. The problem is not the absence of funds, but the refusal to redirect existing resources from the powerful to the wronged.

**“Reparations are a right of victims and a duty of states and perpetrators. When states claim they cannot afford reparations, the real question should be: why do they continue to prioritize everything else over justice?” —
Seminar participant**

Session 5. Integrating Rehabilitation into Reparation Programs

In engaging with this topic, experts Annah Moyo (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation), Dr. Joseph Ike (Kaduna State Bureau for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment), Hugo Van der Merwe (Global Survivors Fund), and Dr. Emilie Medeiros (Manas) explored practical strategies to design and implement effective and sustainable rehabilitation programs that respond to the physical and psychological harm experienced by victims. Panelists examined ways to foster and leverage local support systems, including community-based care, as integral components of rehabilitation. The discussion also addressed the need to move beyond short-term mental health and psychosocial support during transitional justice processes and considered how to establish pathways for continued rehabilitation and recovery in the post-transitional period.

The session opened with an important reframing: rehabilitation should be understood not merely as clinical psychological treatment for individual victims, but as a broader, sustained process rooted in community structures and local support systems. One-on-one clinical models are neither scalable nor sustainable in post-conflict societies. Instead, effective rehabilitation must be interwoven into the fabric of communities, recognizing and building upon existing support systems to foster collective and societal healing as a core element of reparative justice.

Insights were shared from work in Nigeria, particularly in the northeast, with internally displaced women affected by conflict-related sexual violence. An initial phase focused on immediate stabilization and psychosocial support was described, followed by a second phase centered on the question, “And then what?” as women were required to leave camps for internally displaced persons. Reintegration emerged as a significant challenge, especially when survivors were resettled in unfamiliar communities. The importance of combining mental health care with skill development, follow-up support, and reintegration strategies was highlighted as essential to building a holistic rehabilitation model. This experience illustrated that healing, rehabilitation, and reintegration must occur concurrently to be effective.

The limitations of federal-level responses in Nigeria were also emphasized, noting that only 11 psychiatric hospitals serve a population of over 200 million. The urgent need to decentralize mental health services by embedding them within community-level structures was highlighted. In Kaduna State, priority has been given to training local health care providers, including staff in primary health centers and general hospitals, to deliver psychosocial support. This shift from a centralized to a community-based approach enables more consistent and long-term care, rather than relying on temporary, donor-dependent programs. These reflections underscored the importance of state-level engagement in transitional justice processes and the need to tailor interventions to the complexity and diversity of local contexts.

Case studies from across Africa, particularly from the DRC, highlighted the use of interim reparative measures designed and governed by survivors themselves. These programs, while not state-sanctioned reparations, treated survivors as rights holders and co-creators of the process. Survivors participated in decision-making committees, ensuring that interventions—whether psychological care, economic support, or educational assistance—responded directly to their needs. In some cases, memorialization initiatives, including ceremonies and storytelling projects, were also developed to support community healing.

“Rehabilitation should not be an add-on, but the foundation around which reparations are built.” — Seminar participant

A central feature of this approach is the co-creation model, in which survivors actively shape the support they receive. This model restores agency to individuals who have experienced profound loss of control and contributes to rebuilding a sense of community. Psychological healing was often facilitated through collective practices such as rituals, storytelling, singing, and art, which offered culturally resonant alternatives to conventional clinical methods. Such holistic, survivor-led processes were described as hav-

ing the potential to generate long-term transformation, even decades after the original harm. These initiatives also created space for rebuilding social bonds between survivors and their wider communities, addressing both individual trauma and collective fracture.

The importance of trauma-informed education was also underscored, particularly for girls reintegrating after abduction or conflict-related displacement. In contexts such as Nigeria, returning to school often involved stigma, isolation, or rejection. This was addressed through collaboration with educational institutions to reduce stigma and develop alternative, trauma-sensitive education systems. Teachers were trained to understand trauma and its impact on learning, ensuring that survivors received appropriate support within educational settings. It was emphasized that expert input is essential for building sustainable educational models and that the intersection between trauma recovery and education must be intentionally integrated into reparations efforts.

Another perspective emphasized how mass violence fractures not only individuals but the broader psychological, social, and symbolic fabric of communities. This reality necessitates a deeper rethinking of what rehabilitation entails within reparations programs. Violence was described as often deliberate and strategic, targeting the relationships and structures that sustain collective life, such as intergenerational bonds, social roles, and spiritual systems. Illustrative examples showed how acts of violence can carry profound symbolic weight, disrupting trust, hierarchy, and continuity within communities. In some contexts, the long-term consequences were not limited to individual trauma but extended to concerns about social reproduction and cohesion, revealing how violence can intentionally undermine the resilience and future of entire groups.

This perspective called for a methodological shift away from focusing solely on immediate psychological symptoms toward a more comprehensive understanding of how violence reshapes everyday life and relationships over time. In this sense, rehabilitation must engage with the erosion of social support systems, including the roles of elders, healers, and spiritual leaders, who are often incapacitated or overwhelmed in the aftermath of violence. Without these structures, survivors may remain isolated in their suffering. It was also emphasized that healing processes must engage with the existential and meaning-making questions that survivors grapple with, which are often deeply embedded in cultural and spiritual frameworks. In some cases, survivors interpret violence through disruptions in spiritual or cosmological orders, underscoring the importance of recognizing and incorporating non-Western forms of healing alongside biomedical approaches.

In concluding reflections, the limitations of dominant trauma-informed frameworks were critically examined. While approaches centered on “do no harm” were acknowledged as important, a more expansive model of “healing-centered engagement” was proposed. This approach situates trauma within broader structural and systemic conditions rather than isolating it at the individual level. Healing was framed as a collective responsibility that extends beyond mental health professionals to include all actors involved in post-conflict processes. This approach calls for a shift in perspective, recognizing that emotional, social, and spiritual repair are not secondary to justice and reparations, but essential to their realization.

During plenary, participants underscored that the core objective of reparations must be healing not only individuals but entire communities and societies. Without a foundation of healing, even well-intentioned reparative actions, such as job creation or financial compensation, often collapse. This has been seen, for example, in South Africa concerning the employment scheme provided for ex-Robben Island detainees and in the monetary compensation packages awarded to war veterans in Zimbabwe. These examples revealed how unresolved trauma can sabotage reintegration or empowerment efforts. There was a strong consensus that healing must be deeply integrated into reparations, not as a superficial or generic toolkit but as a victim-led, context-sensitive process. This includes working closely with survivors to determine what healing means to them. Additionally, the discussion emphasized the danger of traumatization when interventions are not holistic or when they fail to consider the everyday conditions of victims.

The plenary also brought attention to often overlooked but critical themes. The rehabilitation of perpetrators, particularly those who were once victims themselves, was highlighted as essential in contexts of prolonged violence where victim–perpetrator lines become blurred. Cultural expressions such as storytelling, traditional clothing, singing, and gathering were described as powerful tools of resistance and healing. The importance of media, arts, and cultural education in shaping public consciousness and promoting peace was also raised, although participants noted the media’s currently limited role in transitional justice.

The session concluded with a strong consensus that integrating rehabilitation into reparations programs requires more than medicalized or externally imposed solutions. The panelists and audience advocated for approaches that prioritize community, survivor participation, and long-term sustainability. The discussion made clear that proper rehabilitation is not simply about treating psychological wounds; it is about restoring dignity, fostering agency, and enabling survivors and communities to rebuild their lives on their own terms. The co-creation of services, decentralization of support, and integration of cultural and contextual understanding emerged as guiding principles for designing reparations that are both effective and just.

Session 6. Gender and Reparations

In addressing this theme, experts Juliet Ugwu (Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa, Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund), Professor Fionnuala Ní Aoláin (Queen’s University Belfast; former UN Special Rapporteur on counterterrorism and human rights), and Christine Alai (Utu Wetu Trust, Kenya) explored how to design and implement reparations programs that are truly gender responsive. The panelists and participants examined concrete strategies for ensuring women’s meaningful participation in reparations processes and preventing their marginalization. The discussion also delved into how reparations can tackle the structural and systemic causes of gender-based human rights violations and contribute to transformative gender equality. The following captures the principal points raised.

The session opened with panelists drawing from prior discussions and reiterating that reparations are not merely about compensation; they are about restoring dignity, acknowledging harm, and addressing the deep-seated cultural and structural inequalities that underpin gender-based violence. It was stressed that in many conflicts and oppressive regimes, gender plays a defining role in how harm is experienced, with women often bearing the brunt of violence. Reparations, therefore, must go beyond symbolic gestures and ensure meaningful, impactful participation of women at all stages, from design to implementation.

Experts further asserted that reparations remain one of the most underfunded and overlooked pillars of transitional justice, despite the existence of clear international legal obligations guaranteeing victims the right to an effective remedy and reparation. This marginalization runs counter to the demonstrated potential of reparations to restore dignity and address deeply embedded structural inequalities. Emphasis was placed on the ways in which harms experienced by women and girls—ranging from conflict-related sexual violence to economic exclusion and displacement—are often rendered invisible or unacknowledged, with significant consequences for the scope and effectiveness of reparative justice.

Drawing on comparative experiences in Ireland and Northern Ireland, the discussion underlined the need for both symbolic and material reparations grounded in the lived realities of women and girls. Traditional models based on restitution to the status quo ante were described as fundamentally inadequate for victims of layered and cumulative trauma, as returning individuals to their pre-harm condition is often neither possible nor meaningful. Instead, reparations should acknowledge this limitation and focus on transformative justice, incorporating rehabilitation, guarantees of non-recurrence, and long-term social reintegration.

Expanding on the concept of transformative reparations, it was emphasized that addressing gendered harms must extend beyond recognition to include procedural and structural changes in how reparations are accessed and delivered. Barriers such as mobility restrictions, unpaid caregiving responsibilities, and a lack of information continue to exclude many women from reparative justice mechanisms. Meaningful reparations require more than acknowledgment;

they must also be adequate, prompt, and tailored to the real conditions of survivors. International law already provides a strong normative foundation, and the challenge is not legal scarcity, but the failure to implement those norms through gender-sensitive frameworks.

Finally, the discussion addressed the systemic obstacles to effective gender-responsive reparations, including limited political will, insufficient funding, and persistent social stigma, particularly for survivors of sexual violence. Attention was also drawn to the invisibility of

“slow harms,” such as hunger, lack of access to water, and disruptions in education and health care, which are no less significant than more visible forms of violence. There was a clear warning against “one-and-done” models of reparation, alongside a call for lifelong and intergenerational approaches capable of responding to evolving needs over time.

Another intervention provided a comprehensive overview of the gendered dynamics involved in the pursuit of justice and reparations for victims of SGBV in the aftermath of Kenya’s 2007–2008 post-election violence. It was emphasized that preexisting gender norms and beliefs play a critical role in shaping transitional justice processes, influencing who is recognized as a victim and how violations are

acknowledged and addressed. The importance of adopting a gendered lens that also accounts for intersecting identities—such as ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation—was highlighted, alongside the need to identify not only the differentiated impacts of conflict, but also new forms of violence that emerge in wartime, such as acts designed to humiliate and emasculate specific ethnic groups.

The discussion also examined efforts to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into Kenya’s Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission. For instance, the commission made concerted efforts to ensure gender inclusivity in its design. This included having 40 percent of commissioners be women, the creation of special hearings, the inclusion of gender specialists, and involving victim and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the selection process.

Panelists underscored that the commission’s gender unit was tasked with mainstreaming gender across every phase of the truth-seeking process, from statement taking to public hearings. The importance of providing enabling conditions for women’s participation was also highlighted, including access to transport, childcare, counseling, and protection services during hearings. It was noted that approximately 38 percent of the 42,000 statements submitted to the commission came from women, reflecting a significant effort to ensure their voices were included in the process. Emphasis was placed on the inclusion of dedicated chapters in the final report addressing sexual violence and other gendered violations, alongside comprehensive reparations recommendations. These measures were designed not only to respond to immediate harms but also to tackle long-term structural issues, including reforms to the security sector and constitutional reforms.

However, significant gaps and challenges in the implementation of these recommendations were also highlighted. Despite the existence of a comprehensive framework and efforts to design inclusive mechanisms, many of the reparative measures outlined by the commission have yet to be realized. This implementation gap is illustrated by the ongoing suffering of victims of sexual violence, including enduring health consequences such as fistula and the continued lack of recognition and support for children born of rape. The delayed approach to reparations was critically examined, raising the question of whether reparations should be treated as a standalone right rather than contingent upon truth-seeking processes. It was argued

“We need not just a gender-sensitive reparations model—one capable of addressing structural inequalities and enabling long-term healing and social reintegration for women and girls affected by conflict.” — Seminar participant

that reparations should not be deferred as a distant objective but instead delivered urgently to victims, as evidenced by more immediate approaches in other contexts. The discussion ultimately called for a more integrated and long-term approach to reparations—one that avoids isolating gender-based violence from other violations and ensures sustained support for victims from the inception of a transitional justice process until long-term societal transformation is achieved.

The plenary session involved numerous submissions highlighting that a holistic approach to reparations is necessary to ensure that victims are not re-traumatized and that reparative measures adequately address the wide-ranging impacts of SGBV. Truth-seeking initiatives, while valuable, should not be used as a substitute for justice or healing. A participant alluded to the fact that survivors have voiced that sharing their truth without seeing any form of accountability often deepens their trauma. Therefore, reparations must go beyond truth telling and integrate measures that address both individual and systemic harm, such as accountability, non-recurrence, and long-term support. In contexts where national reparations frameworks are absent or weak, the role of community actors, civil society, and survivor groups becomes crucial in documenting abuses, advocating for justice, and ensuring that reparations are not just a symbolic gesture but a meaningful process. Institutional and legal reforms are also necessary to address the impunity that often surrounds these crimes. The design of reparations must be gender-sensitive from the beginning, ensuring that all forms of harm, whether sexual violence or displacement, are acknowledged and addressed in a way that reflects the lived experiences of survivors.

Session 7. The Role of Civil Society in Reparation Processes

In exploring this theme, panelists Nomarussia Bonase (Khulumani Support Group, South Africa), Julie Bardeche (Senior Legal Advisor, REDRESS), and Dr. Valérie Arnould (Legal and Policy Advisor on Transitional Justice, Avocats sans Frontières, Belgium) reflected on the critical role of CSOs in shaping and implementing reparations programs. The discussion examined how civic space can be protected and expanded to enable meaningful engagement, while also addressing persistent challenges around representation—particularly how CSOs can authentically reflect victims’ voices and priorities. It further considered how the opening of civic space can be embedded within broader reform processes to advance inclusive, victim-centered reparations. The following section outlines the key insights that emerged from this discussion.

Crucial insights were shared into the role of civil society in shaping reparations, alongside the challenges faced by victims within these processes. It was emphasized that victims and survivors of human rights violations must organize themselves to demand justice, redress, and reparations and that they need to understand the mechanisms in place, even when such processes have often been designed without their full participation. The experience of many victims has been one of exclusion, with reparations programs either failing to reach the most marginalized or, in some cases, re-victimizing those already harmed. Reflections on South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) highlighted how its limitations left many victims—particularly women and rural populations—without access to justice and how its failure to adequately address issues such as sexual violence and marginalization has contributed to ongoing struggles for reparations.

Further insights were drawn from the foundational work of the Khulumani Support Group, which emerged as a direct response to the shortcomings of the TRC. Initially established to support individuals submitting statements, it evolved into a broader movement addressing the failures of both the TRC and subsequent reparations processes. Attention was given to the commission’s restrictive approach, including its failure to recognize certain violations—especially gender-based violations—as political crimes, thereby significantly limiting access to reparations. Illustrative examples, such as cases dismissed for not meeting narrow definitions of political motivation, underscored how exclusionary interpretations of harm reinforced the marginalization of victims. These shortcomings highlighted the need for a more inclusive, victim-centered approach that better reflects the lived realities of survivors.

Despite limited government recognition, it was noted that over 100,000 individuals have been identified as eligible for reparations under the TRC Act, though official records recognize only around 17,000. This disparity was contrasted with the financial support provided to perpetrators who remained in government positions and received ongoing pensions, while

victims were granted one-off payments far below what they were owed. Ongoing mobilization for justice and reparations was framed not merely as a struggle for financial compensation, but as an effort to restore victims' dignity and ensure their voices are meaningfully included in processes that address historical injustices.

It was further highlighted that CSOs have played an instrumental role in shaping the global landscape of reparations. Drawing from experiences across multiple contexts, five core functions were identified: documenting and investigating violations, supporting victims' participation, advocating for inclusive reparations processes, providing direct assistance, and engaging in monitoring and litigation. In many cases, CSOs have stepped in where governments have failed to act, effectively becoming *de facto* implementers of reparations. However, it was emphasized that this should not serve as a substitute for state responsibility, as reparations remain a legal obligation rather than a discretionary act. The importance of maintaining a victim-centered—rather than merely victim-informed—approach was underscored, ensuring that survivors actively shape the form and substance of reparations.

The discussion also stressed that reparations processes should not be reduced to technical exercises or constrained by financial or political considerations; they should instead be grounded in a broader understanding of justice. Examples from different contexts illustrated both the potential and limitations of such efforts. In one instance, although survivors secured an international court ruling in their favor, implementation stalled, prompting civil society actors to establish a survivor-led fund to administer reparations directly. This was presented as a rare but promising model in which survivors themselves defined and implemented a reparations program.

It was cautioned that substituting reparations with development or humanitarian interventions risks diluting their core purpose. While such measures may provide short-term relief, they do not fulfill the legal and moral obligations associated with reparations, which are entitlements arising from violations suffered. Persistent resistance by states—often justified on the grounds of cost or political feasibility—was identified as a major obstacle. In response, the need for continued advocacy and stronger collaboration among civil society actors, regional mechanisms, and funders was emphasized to ensure that states are held accountable and that reparations remain firmly grounded in principles of justice.

It was reaffirmed that civil society plays a central role in catalyzing and sustaining reparations processes, particularly in contexts marked by structural violence and prolonged denial. CSOs were described as key actors in bridging the gap between victims and institutions, especially where the legitimacy of state authorities is weakened. Reparations processes were characterized as inherently political, often unfolding in fragile, post-conflict environments where trust is limited, thereby increasing the importance of sustained civil society engagement.

The discussion further elaborated on the challenges CSOs face in reparations work, including managing victims' expectations, navigating state resistance, and balancing formal legal processes with broader justice objectives. It was noted that many victims perceive reparations not merely as financial compensation, but as public recognition of their suffering and a restoration of dignity. Experiences from different contexts demonstrated that when reparations become overly technocratic or detached from the lived realities of survivors, they risk being perceived as hollow or insufficient. In response, participatory approaches that reflect the diverse and intersectional needs of victims were strongly advocated.

Discussants also emphasized that CSOs should not be confined to advocacy roles alone, but should actively contribute to the co-design, monitoring, and, where necessary, implementation of reparations programs—particularly in situations where states fail to act. The importance of sustained, long-term support for civil society actors was highlighted as essen-

tial to ensuring that reparations processes remain meaningful, timely, and grounded in local contexts.

During the plenary, participants raised several key challenges and reflections regarding civil society’s role in reparations processes. A primary concern was the shrinking civic space in conflict-affected regions, where insecurity, government restrictions, and political sensitivities make it difficult for CSOs to operate safely and effectively. Participants called for greater support from regional bodies such as the AU and EU in protecting civic actors and facilitating their work. There was also a discussion on the inadequacy of reparations awards in many contexts, particularly when compared across different countries. Participants questioned whether civil litigation might offer a more effective path for securing meaningful reparations when truth commissions and political processes fall short.

Bureaucratic and regulatory constraints imposed by governments were also raised as issues. These often require CSOs to obtain approval for activities and funding, thereby limiting their independence and delaying critical interventions. Participants were keen to learn how other organizations have navigated these restrictions while continuing their advocacy work. Managing survivors’ expectations also emerged as a significant challenge. Many victims believe CSOs are responsible for delivering reparations, leading to frustration when such support is not forthcoming. This confusion often stems from a lack of clarity on who bears the responsibility for reparations: CSOs or the state. Participants emphasized the need for transparent communication with victims from the outset, including realistic timelines and limitations.

Sustainability was another pressing concern discussed during the plenary. It was noted that once formal transitional justice mechanisms conclude, donor interest often wanes, leaving CSOs and survivors to carry the work forward without adequate resources. Participants called for long-term support mechanisms and questioned what concrete steps the AU and EU are taking to ensure victims and CSOs continue to receive support after state-led processes end.

Session 8. Environmental Justice and Reparations

In addressing this theme, panelists Munini Mutuku (Environmental Peacebuilding Association), Dr. Martin Szoke (Independent Researcher), and Dr. Jasmina Brankovic (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation) reflected on the growing importance of integrating environmental justice into reparations frameworks in post-conflict settings. The discussion focused on the ecological consequences of conflict and exploitation of natural resources, while unpacking the nature of environmental harm, identifying responsible actors, and considering mechanisms for accountability. It also explored practical and policy-oriented strategies for ecological repair, environmental rehabilitation, and sustainable recovery. The following captures the main points raised.

The panel underscored the urgent and growing attention to the environmental impacts of armed conflict. It highlighted recent developments such as the ICC’s draft policy on environmental crimes and the AU’s transitional justice agenda, now integrating climate and environmental concerns. It illustrated how conflict interacts differently with diverse ecosystems, including forests, rivers, and coastlines, showing how mining, damming, and chemical pollution degrade environments, harm civilians, and complicate efforts for reparations. Drawing from examples in Darfur and the Kagera River, it emphasized the challenges of cross-border environmental harm and ecological stigma, where communities suffer not only physical contamination but also deep psychosocial trauma. It stressed that reparations must go beyond technical cleanup to include rituals, memorials, renaming spaces, and restoring infrastructure.

It further called for reparations frameworks to expand their definitions of both victims and perpetrators. It pointed to cases like Colombia, where rivers were legally recognized as victims and ex-combatants were tasked with environmental restoration as part of reparations. Emphasizing the interlinkages between environmental harm, climate change, and ongoing conflict, the discussion raised questions around how to quantify ecological damage and who should be held accountable, whether armed groups, corporations, or states. Drawing on examples from South Sudan, Sudan, and Ukraine, experts demonstrated how weakened environmental infrastructures and extreme weather have led to ecological disasters with lethal consequences. The session urged a rethinking of reparations models to include non-human victims, indigenous knowledge systems, and participatory ecological recovery initiatives, emphasizing the potential of post-conflict assessments and peace agreements to anchor environmental justice.

The role of truth commissions in addressing environmental harm was also examined. Drawing from a study of over 50 commissions, it was argued that truth commissions are well-placed to reveal how environmental degradation intersects with armed conflict and recommend reparative and preventative measures. It was noted that while traditional transitional justice frameworks have historically overlooked ecological dimensions, truth commissions are

beginning to fill this normative and analytical gap. Drawing from a review of different truth commissions globally, it was highlighted how environmental damage, though often sidelined, intersects deeply with patterns of violence, displacement, and historical marginalization.

Examples included the Sierra Leonean truth commission, which examined how natural resources, although not the cause of the war, played a critical role in funding and sustaining it, and the Timor-Leste commission, which documented the environmental devastation caused by conflict. These helped to demonstrate how commissions can uncover long-silenced truths about ecological harm and frame them as legitimate violations warranting redress. Speakers explained how in the Colombian context, rivers and forests were recognized not just as collateral damage, but as victims themselves, inviting a paradigmatic shift away from purely anthropocentric understandings of harm.

It was further emphasized that truth commissions should serve not only as mechanisms of documentation but also as platforms for legal, ethical, and political transformation. Environmental harm, particularly when linked to extractive industries, deforestation, or pollution, was described as often implicating corporate actors, state institutions, and broader structural inequalities. By identifying these actors and systematically documenting environmental violations, truth commissions can play a reparative role, both materially and symbolically. An expanded definition of victimhood was advanced, one that includes ecosystems, non-human beings, and communities experiencing intergenerational ecological degradation. The forward-looking potential of truth commissions was highlighted, particularly their ability to propose policy reforms, reshape societal narratives around nature and justice, and foster ecological resilience through locally informed, participatory, and intergenerational strategies.

The intersection of transformative transitional justice and climate justice was also explored, with emphasis on the untapped potential of transitional justice frameworks—especially when community-led and future-oriented—to address climate-related harms. It was noted that, despite clear scientific warnings, global responses to the climate crisis remain characterized by stagnation and incrementalism, disproportionately affecting already marginalized communities. The compounding and intersectional nature of these harms was underscored, including loss of life and housing, threats to livelihoods and security, and impacts on cultural practices and health. Within this context, transitional justice, with its long-standing engagement addressing past abuses and enabling structural transformation, was presented as a valuable framework for responding to these layered harms.

“The human-environment divide is, in many cultural and conflict contexts, seen as artificial. Omitting environmental harm from victim narratives may silence entire communities’ experiences.” — Seminar participant

These ideas were illustrated through a pioneering initiative in Newcastle, South Africa, that explicitly frames climate redress as a transitional justice project. Working with 80–100 local community members, primarily women and youth, the initiative co-developed three key measures: a memorial for climate harms to honor lives lost and symbolize collective memory; a public commemoration and educational process integrating truth telling, trauma healing, and awareness building around structural drivers of harm; and an advocacy campaign addressing corporate and state accountability for water contamination linked to a local coal mine and exacerbated by climate-induced flooding. These interventions were

presented as combining backward- and forward-looking approaches, integrating memorialization, symbolic and material reparations, and non-adversarial forms of accountability. The initiative has already generated significant support from local leaders and institutions, demonstrating the immediate viability of community-led approaches to climate justice and their potential to contribute to transformative, climate-just futures.

During the plenary, concerns were raised regarding whether expanding the definition of “victim” to include the environment might dilute the attention paid to human suffering. In response, it was emphasized that environmental degradation and human rights violations are deeply interconnected, with damage to ecosystems often producing long-term social and economic harms for communities, particularly indigenous and marginalized groups whose identities and livelihoods are closely tied to the environment. In certain contexts, such as Colombia, the distinction between human and environmental harm is understood as artificial and excluding environmental damage from victim narratives risks erasing entire dimensions of lived experience. While truth commissions have traditionally centered on human harms, it was suggested that incorporating environmental dimensions can strengthen their role in post-conflict truth telling and reconciliation.

Session 9. High-Level Trialogue/Dialogue Between the AU and EU: Bridging International Reparations Standards and Regional Realities

This high-level dialogue brought together Anna Myriam Roccatello (ICTJ), Helena Boguslawska (European External Action Service), and Dr. John Ikubaje (AU Commission) for a reflective and strategic exchange at the close of the seminar focused on aligning AU and EU approaches to transitional justice. The discussion underscored the importance of strengthened cooperation among multilateral actors for advancing shared policies, frameworks, and strategies in the field.

The EU’s strategy on transitional justice, while rooted in its 2015 framework, was described as continuously evolving in response to lessons drawn from diverse conflict contexts. Emphasis was placed on the importance of local ownership and victim-centered approaches, with four key priorities identified: co-designing solutions with affected communities, leveraging existing regional frameworks, ensuring long-term accompaniment of national institutions, and fostering knowledge-sharing platforms for practical learning.

AU–EU cooperation was further highlighted as having enabled a shift toward implementation-focused support within the former’s transitional justice efforts. Through EU support, the AU has provided hands-on assistance to transitional justice processes in countries such as CAR, DRC, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Lesotho, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe, with growing demand from other states like Libya and Somalia. Furthermore, civil society engagement, enabled through initiatives like the sub-granting facility under the Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa, run by the Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund, has strengthened regional capacity and increased the visibility of transitional justice. However, expectations have risen significantly, creating an urgent need for more resources to maintain momentum and deepen support to both state and non-state actors.

The discussion also emphasized the importance of coordination among multilateral actors, including the AU, EU, and UN, to avoiding duplication and promoting sustainability. Joint frameworks and regional partnerships were cited as key mechanisms supporting this coordination. However, concerns were raised about the challenges of meeting increasing demands while sustaining trust among both state and non-state actors. Expanding forms of engagement, such as embedding expertise within national institutions and supporting civil society-led initiatives, demonstrate growing willingness but also create resource constraints.

Looking forward, priorities include expanding knowledge production, strengthening inclusive platforms—particularly those involving women and youth—and enhancing state ownership through improved implementation and reporting practices. It was emphasized that transi-

tional justice cannot rest solely with governments but must be supported through sustained partnerships with civil society and multilateral actors. Overall, effective transitional justice was framed as requiring inclusivity, contextual responsiveness, adequate resourcing, and strong cooperation, while needing to remain grounded in local needs and agency.

Closing Remarks

In its closing remarks, ICTJ opened with a poignant reflection on the value of the diverse perspectives shared throughout the seminar. It noted that even after decades in the field, the evolving nature of transitional justice, whether through unified or sequenced approaches, continues to challenge practitioners. ICTJ emphasized that each context is unique and justice processes must be driven by those who have been harmed. It called for long-term investment, not only financial but also moral and intellectual, to ensure inclusive, sustainable change. It warned that backsliding is always a threat, even in seemingly stable societies. In its view, transformation is a never-ending project, requiring collective action and continuous vigilance.

The EU reaffirmed its strategic commitment to transitional justice as a central element of its partnership with the AU and African states. It underscored its role as a leading global contributor to transitional justice, supporting truth-seeking efforts, institutional reform, reparations programs, and civil society initiatives. Importantly, it highlighted that political will remains a decisive factor in moving from continental frameworks to national implementation. Encouraged by increased requests for technical assistance by AU member states and regional bodies such as IGAD and SADC, it stressed the need for effective coordination between continental and bilateral initiatives to optimize limited resources. It linked transitional justice to broader development goals, emphasizing its role in fostering peace, stability, and economic growth, while aligning with the aspirations of the AU’s Agenda 2063.

The AU closed the seminar on behalf of its leadership, extending deep gratitude to all participants and partners. Reflecting on the robust discussions about reparations, mental health, and victim-centered processes, it affirmed that its collaboration with the EU is grounded in a shared goal of making practical impacts in the lives of victims. It outlined key priorities: technical assistance to member states, support to civil society, and knowledge generation. It also alluded to several initiatives under the AU–EU partnership, including the development of a roster of African transitional justice experts and the two vital platforms, AW4TJ and AY4TJ. It concluded by reminding participants that reparations go beyond monetary compensation; they require technical and moral support. It reiterated that neither the AU nor the EU can meet these challenges alone and called on all partners to remain steadfast in their support to advance justice, dignity, and healing across the continent.

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