

CONCEPT NOTE

THE 2025 CONFERENCE ON LAND POLICY IN AFRICA

THEME: LAND GOVERNANCE, JUSTICE AND REPARATIONS FOR AFRICANS AND DESCENDANTS OF PEOPLE OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

BACKGROUND

The quest for justice, reparations and restitution for crimes against humanity and the horrendous atrocities committed on Africa and the People of African Descent through slavery and colonialism has been part of the liberation agenda of the African Union (AU), and its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). African land, African natural resources and the African people have for centuries been targeted by other nations for the provision of raw materials and labour toward the development of Western nations. During the transatlantic slave trade, African men and women were kidnapped and sold off to work without pay and under inhuman and extremely harsh conditions in plantations, construction, and industries in the United States, the Caribbean Islands and Britain. They created wealth for the slave owners and the countries in which they were enslaved, working under inhuman and intolerable conditions. Enslaved Africans were denied the right to own property and did not benefit from the land on which they worked. Whenever they revolted, the authorities responded through beatings, torture, deportations, and executions. The human rights violations and brutal killings of those who opposed slavery are well captured in historical accounts. In many cases, African women were sexually abused and raped to give birth to more slave labourers for slave owners who had the support of their governments. The policy of racial exclusion and discrimination from owning and accessing land through post-slavery systems, such as share cropping and segregationist land laws, has contributed to sharp social and economic inequalities and poverty among People of African Descent. The trauma experienced during slavery and the post-slavery period continues to this day.

The violations experienced by Africans and the People of African Descent during slavery were replicated during colonialism. A major motivation for colonialism was empire building: the acquisition of territories by European powers to extract Africa's natural resources, including

land, timber and minerals. African nations were invaded, especially after the Berlin Conference of 1884. Driven by a racist ideology and the hunger for resources, colonial systems often led to the forceful seizure and redistribution of land, displacing indigenous communities and turning them into squatters. The land acquired by the colonizers became the foundation for the accumulation of wealth. The introduction of colonial land governance systems on the continent undermined practices that had for centuries ensured unfettered community access to land and its resources.

The colonial system facilitated the subjugation and brutalization of the African people. At every turn, their fertile and productive land was alienated, Natural resources were pillaged, and African heritage resources were looted by explorers and private collectors. Other cultural resources were shipped away to stock Western museums or for scientific purposes. Additionally, African cultures were demonized and decimated because they were viewed as a challenge to Western worldviews. Those who resisted colonial conquest were killed or subjected to genocide, as happened in Namibia in 1904, in which approximately 80% of the Herero people and 50% of the Nama were killed. Their ancestral land was taken away, and most of it remains in the hands of Germans to this day. It is estimated that about 70% of agricultural land in Namibia is controlled by Germans who acquired it through colonialism. The resistance against colonialism was met with torture, detentions, concentration camps, and mass killings. In certain cases, body parts of fighters and community leaders were severed and shipped off to Europe.

In addition to the extraction of natural resources, cultural heritage and artefacts were looted and currently form part of the displays in Western museums. Many symbols of power and spirituality, including royal stools, drums, spears, markers of rites of passage, and family treasures, were stolen and taken away. At present, African heritage resources are a major source of income from tourism in the host countries. Without doubt, the separation of the heritage resources from Africa denies the youth of Africa sites of cultural and artistic identity, symbols of community history and of becoming, and markers of creativity that could spur innovation, confidence and pride.

Colonialism also introduced agricultural and livelihood values that undermine indigenous knowledge systems, and threaten food security and livelihoods. Through the education system and in practice, colonial languages were presented as superior to African languages and offered

the pathways to power, status and opportunities. With that came cash crops and agricultural and food systems that favoured Europe and undermined smallholder farmers who fed their families with indigenous foods. African languages, through which intergenerational knowledge about indigenous foods, values and livelihoods could be communicated, were undervalued and presented as inferior to European languages.

There is no doubt that the dislocation and trauma of slavery, the colonial legacy of land dispossession leading to concentration of land in the hands of colonial agents and their descendants, the plunder of cultural resources, the atrocities committed during the struggles for land and freedom and the neo-colonial practices perpetuated by former colonial powers in Africa ought to be subjected to deeper reflection at a conference that brings together policy makers, academics, traditional leaders, development partners and civil society.

Land is a critical economic, social, cultural and spiritual asset. Through slavery and colonialism, Africans and People of African Descent were denied the right to enjoy this heritage and to create wealth from it. Reparations that should include land redistribution or access to land can contribute to addressing the structural inequalities and land dispossession that were set in motion through slavery and colonialism. Lessons from land redistribution programs in post-apartheid South Africa and New Zealand for the Māori people suggest that with commitment, land reparations are possible.

In undertaking land-related reparations, it will be important to address land ownership and disparities in access. This is because in most post-colonial societies, the descendants of colonizers still control large swathes of land and its resources, while the historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities struggle to access land and its resources. This is especially the case due to the statutory frameworks, which often mirror colonial-era policies, creating barriers to equitable land access. Furthermore, in urban development, descendants of enslaved or colonized people often face gentrification, eviction, or lack decent housing as a result of non-inclusive land governance policies emanating from the colonial encounter.

In line with the 2025 AU Theme of the Year, the 2025 Conference on Land Policy in Africa is as follows: ***Land Governance, Justice and Reparations for Africans and Descendants of People of The African Diaspora.***

Core themes:

1. Emerging best practices in developing responsive land policies
2. Effective and transparent land governance and administration institutions
3. Data monitoring and evaluation of land governance

Cross cutting: Youth, gender, climate change, agriculture, and reparations

Proposed Conference Subthemes:

- Land tenure, equity and reparative justice
- Colonialism, displacement, livelihoods and conflicts
- Global justice, climate resilience, and reparations
- Restitution of Africa's cultural property, heritage and ancestral land
- Colonial legacies, pastoralism and tourism
- Enhancing land governance for equitable land access and distribution
- Land governance, international law and reparations
- Colonialism, agriculture, and food security
- Colonial boundaries, economic justice and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Stakeholders and Partnerships

The AUC, ECA, and AfDB with support of the African Land Policy Centre leads in the organization of the Conference on Land Policy in Africa in close collaboration with its key partners, including intergovernmental organizations, government agencies, academia, regional economic communities, African Centres of Excellence, Civil Society Organizations, African private sector associations and development partners.

Dates and Venue

The Conference on Land Policy in Africa is usually held in November every two years. **The 2025 edition will be held from the 10th to 14th November at the Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa Ethiopia**

Conference Format

The Conference theme and sub-themes will be the focus of discussions in key plenary and parallel sessions. To ensure alignment with the Conference theme, A Call for Abstracts will be sent out as the basis for selecting paper contributions as well as Master Classes, side events, policy dialogues, exhibitions and other related events. The scientific content generated from the Call will be guided by members of the CLPA Scientific Committee.