

Committee: SPECPOL 2

Topic: The question of reparations for historical colonial acts

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Summary

Through history, there have been 8 countries who have been able to have at least 2 colonies in control. Many people argue that reparations should be made to historical colonies as it would be addressing inequalities, and it would help regain any economic loss that a country had been through. However, some people argue that reparations shouldn't be made as due to the rapid pace that the world is developing in, they feel modern society shouldn't repair any damages that time before them has done. Furthermore, there has been a lot of confusion sparked in this topic due to the lack of information, and laws there are, such as, people are confused if economic or financial reparations should be made to the government or to the individual families. Financial reparations that former colonial empires should be providing is a difficult topic to manage as many of the former colonial powers are permanent members of the Security Council with veto powers, which would be the only way to force former colonial powers to pay out to colonised nations. Therefore, a solution must be amicable to all, and should be the goal of debate during committee time.

Definition of Key Terms

Colonialism – “The principal, policy, and practice of acquiring full or partial political control over a country and occupying it with settlers,” (Oxford Dictionary)

Neocolonialism – “The use of economic, political, cultural or other pressures to control or influence another country” (Oxford Dictionary)

Depreciation – “The fall in the market value of an (esp. durable) asset, brought about by age, wear and tear, etc; a conventional allowance made for this in balance” (Oxford Dictionary)

OHCHR– Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, serves as the secretariat for the Human Rights Council

Background Information

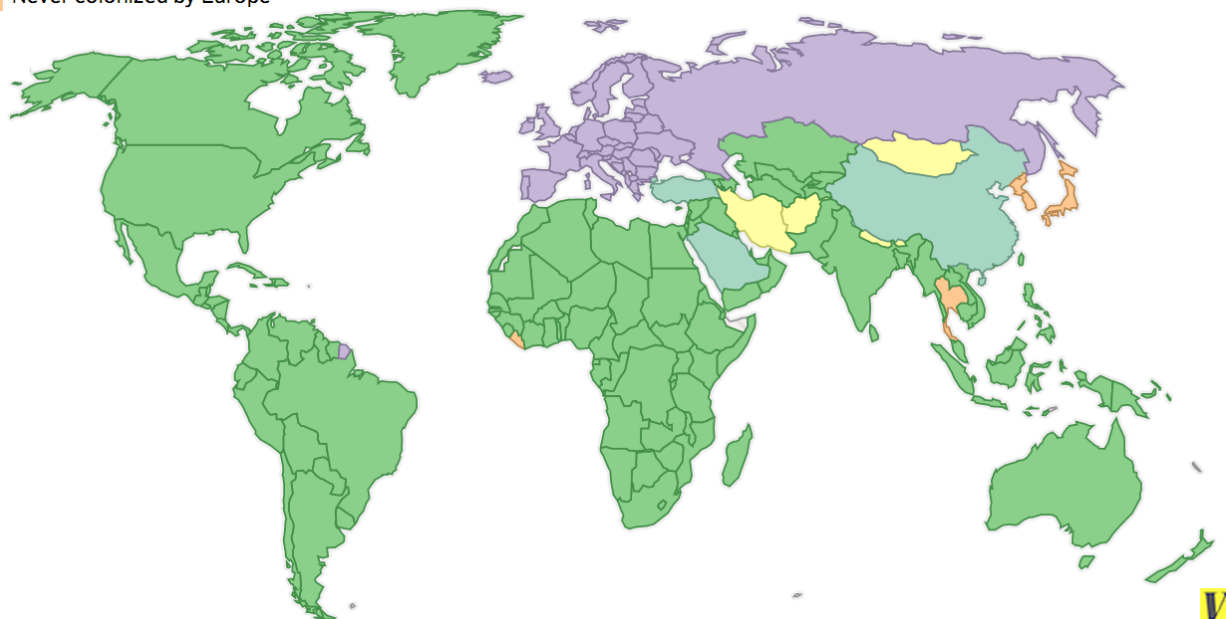
The act of colonisation has dated back many years, the earliest coloniser was Christopher Columbus in 1492 who sparked the beginning of general colonial acts and colonisation.

Generally, the main idea of colonialism was the economic benefits through the colonies' resources and political power. For example, Britain created multiple colonial acts in order to benefit from them. The 1764 Sugar Act was mainly created for revenue generation. This revenue was aimed to offset the payments of maintaining the British empire after multiple wars, especially the Seven Years War. Britain didn't only want more money, they also wanted order in their colonies, explaining why Britain created the Quartering Act of 1765 in order to house troops in their colonies.

Furthermore, colonialism also was aimed to not only change land, but also to change people's psychology, ideology of their society and their social norms. A significant colonial impact is cultural changes. Countries colonising areas would generally force settlers to change their religion, language, education (systems), and traditions. This was important as it had a long-lasting effect and it gave them control over the inhabitants, ensuring that secrecy within their society and inhabitants wasn't viable. Currently, multiple African countries that were previously colonised by France or Belgium still speak French. There are currently 21 countries that speak French as one of their main languages. Some of these countries are, Gabon, Niger, Cameroon, Senegal, Togo, Benin, and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Countries that have been under European control

■ Europe
 ■ Colonized or controlled by Europe
 ■ Partial European control or influence
 ■ European sphere of influence
■ Never colonized by Europe



There is no hesitation that European countries had leading colonisation power. Significant countries with strong colonial powers were France, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, and Belgium. Between 1492 and 1914, European countries had colonised 84% of the world, some European countries still have overseas colonies.

The question of reparations for historical colonial acts haven't been widely debated and covered yet. However, there are multiple reasons why people don't believe that reparations are necessary. Some arguments are that we should be facing current problems and not historical problems. Additionally, countries might not be able to fully help all past colonies' economic problems. Reparations of all kinds might be seen as overcomplicated, and finally, people argue that colonisation has affected some countries positively, with measures such as improvement of infrastructure and proper education, especially in areas in Africa.

While many people argue that reparations shouldn't be made, others argue otherwise. They argue that these reparations would help decrease racial injustice and a racial hierarchy that was implemented in colonial times. These would also help repair any human exploitations that were made. People also believe that, if necessary, important artefacts stolen should be returned to

the rightful owners. These artefacts may represent or symbolise important pieces of their tradition, culture or history. Finally, reparations for historical colonial acts gives opportunities to create or strengthen more laws regarding human rights, migration, borders, tax and many more.

In many instances, countries must pay for their independence, leading to further economic depletion. Countries that have multiple overseas colonies struggle economically due to the huge burden they carry, therefore, a colony paying for their independence, gives the country that used to have power over that land, an economic benefit. Some countries must also pay for independence as “compensation” from former protests. For example, Haiti had to pay 150 million francs (reduced to 90 million francs later on) for their independence due to the economic damage they caused after the uprising in 1791. Some countries can have their independence, however the old ruling country could still be able to have some of the finances from economically valuable areas. For example, when Egypt gained the independence from Britain in 1922, the British government still had some financial control over the Suez Canal, due to the money helping the British Empire from collapsing because of having not enough money to support all the colonies the British Empire were ruling.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United States of America – Even though America wasn’t a major colonial power, the United States were able to acquire colonies after the Spanish-American War, the United States had control in places such as Cuba, Philippines, Puerto Rico, and in the Panama Canal Zone. America supported decolonization on a global level too, while Puerto Rico was under control by America, they gave some economic assistance, and some self-governance before they granted Puerto Rico their own independence.

United Kingdom – In total, the UK had 120 colonies, changing major parts of world history. Furthermore, in 2013 United Kingdom promised to compensate the over 100 million Kenyans who were put into detention camps, and were tortured, during to the Mau Mau uprising.

Japan– Japan gained strong colonial power in the 19th century. Japan’s first colony was Taiwan, then was later able to beat Russia in 1905, and gained colonial power in Korea 1910. Japan was later on able to colonise more than half of Asia. However, Japan had multiple standardising policies, for example, the replacement of local traditions with Japanese cultures, and Japan wanted to standardise the Japanese language in governments and schools. Japan

later on decided to exploit their countries, especially Korea. Japan started to enforce the “Comfort Woman”, segregation in communities and schools, and Koreans didn’t have many political rights. Additionally, Japan hasn’t spoken the truth about their actions, causing further geo-political instability.

China – The Han, and Qing dynasties were very important to the history of China’s expansion. China was able to colonise Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia, and modern territories of Xinjiang and Tibet. Multiple countries such as France, Germany, Russia, United States of America, Italy and more were able to get colonies in China. Currently, there is evidence of China engaging in Neo-colonialism due to China’s economic activities in Africa.

France– Throughout history, France had control over 80 colonies. However, France has denied multiple appeals for reparations from colonial damage. These appeals are mainly coming from Africa. The continuous rejections of appeals for reparations, have sparked West African organisations, NGOs, former colonies, and individuals to file multiple lawsuits regarding economic aid, and recognition of historical colonial crimes (slave trade).

Timeline of Events

Date	Description
1791	– An organised slave rebellion against the French colonial rules broke out in northern Haiti.
1795	– The French Convention terminates slavery in all colonies driven by the French.
1796	– In China, the White Lotus Rebellion took place against the Manchu Dynasty.
1803	– The US doubles in land size due to the Louisiana Purchase (828,000 square miles of land for \$15 million).
1804	– Haiti became the first independent black republic in the world after the 1791 rebellion.
1839	– China was forced to open their markets to foreign trade due to the Opium Wars.
1848	– US gains large portions of land in the South-West after the ending of the Mexican American war.
1867	– US territory expands after the purchase of Alaska from Russia.

- 1898 – After the end of the Spanish-American War, the Philippines were bought for \$20 million by the US, from Spain.
- 1903 – The US gains control of the Panama canal zone.
- 1904 – Start of the Herero-Nama genocide towards Namibia, triggered by Germany.
- 1922 – Egypt gains independence from Britain.
- 1945 – After the establishment of the UN, decolonization gets promoted.
- 1946 – The governments of the US gave the Philippines their independence through the treaty of Manila.
- 1947 – British rule gives India their independence.
- 1980 – Former Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) gains independence from Britain.
- 1990 – Namibia gains independence from South Africa
- 1997 – After 156 years of British colonial power over Taiwan and Hong Kong, Chinese rule takes over Taiwan and Hong Kong.
- 2002 – After UN administration, East Timor gained full independence.
- 2011 – South Sudan becomes independent from Sudan.
- 2021 – The British Monarch gets removed as head of state in Barbados, making Barbados a republic.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent

This UN document is one of the few that has mention of including reparations for colonialism through the many years of colonialism. It mentions the amount of different crimes and unjust actions that were taken against natives under colonial rule. It specifically mentions colonies in Africa for violent crimes being committed.

GA 62/122

This document was focused on the historical aspects of slavery and slave trade, meanwhile it included the historical injustice when colonialism usually connects to slavery. This resolution

also emphasised the need to improve education on this topic, providing unbiased information and clearness. Finally, the resolution enforced that colonialism was against international law, and that resolution would enhance the significance of the promotions in justice, equality and the decrease of racism that has been influenced from past colonialism.

GA 56/74

This resolution that all UN members have agreed to is an agreement to eradicate colonialism within their own government and the governments of others. This agreement while binding does seem to ignore some colonised land such as Greenland which has survived to modern day and seems focused on attempting to eradicate colonialism for the colonial period. This resolution however does not mention anything about UN members with former colonial empires paying reparations.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Italy and Libya Genocide and Torture (1911-1913)

After multiple political tensions between Italy and Libya, Italy decided to invade Libya, in order to do a military operation against the Ottoman Empire, the main aim was to occupy Cyrenaica-Tripolitania. The attempt of colonisation of Libya caused concentration camps, aerial bombardments and chemical weapons to be used towards the civilians of North Africa. However, in 2008 Italy and Libya had a reparations agreement. Italy confessed to all crimes committed during the colonial era and promised to give 5 billion dollars over 25 years. Additionally, Libya decided to improve immigration control.

United Kingdom and Kenya: Mau Mau Uprising (1950s)

The Mau Mau was caused after tensions between the United Kingdom colonising the Kenyans. The tension was caused after the UK soldiers continuously used oppression, structured racism, forced labour, and more. This caused the Kikuyu Tribe to revolt, and the war between them and the UK army started. Victims or anyone that was allegedly part of the Mau Mau were led into torture, death and concentration camps. For compensation, the UK government issued a public formal apology, and paid 19.9 million pounds to over 5,000 Kenyan victims.

Germany and Namibia: Herero-Nama Genocide (1904-1908)

During the Herero-Nama Genocide German forces were responsible for the deaths of 80% of the Herero, and 50% of the Nama. Not only did the Genocide trigger the loss of multiple people, however, the event caused a depletion of economic and exacerbated socio-economic aspects of the 2 tribes. The survivors had no money, no land and were jobless, resulting in the death of more people. In May 2021, Germany decided to repay them with aid, and a funding of 1.1 billion euros.

Possible Solutions

Legal measures – The changing of laws, policies and institutions would be beneficial as it would ensure that countries won't be able to get away from punishments of severe actions they may have committed before. It would also ensure prominent justice and equality that was missing before. A policy could be a Trade Policy, this would provide economical supremacies for former colonies. Additionally, policies must be created for historical revisionism, to ensure countries pay the correct compensation for the past colonial acts they have done.

Returning of Artefacts – Artefacts may not only hold economic worth, however, they could carry cultural, and traditional worth. Giving back important Artefacts to the original owner, may also show respect to each other's countries, and it's a crucial factor of peacekeeping.

Educational support – Improve any misunderstandings that are taught by school by increasing the discussions of this matter. This will ensure clarity, for students and parents. Furthermore, educational support will be provided to families who have lower income due to colonialism.

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