

UWI establishes Centre for Reparations Research

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The University of the West Indies (The UWI) has established a Centre for Reparations Research. Approved by the University's Finance and General Purpose Committee earlier this year, it will be formally launched on October 10, at The UWI Regional Headquarters in Jamaica and will hold its first major event, a one-day Reparations symposium, on October 11.

The Centre, which will be led by Professor Verene Shepherd, former Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, coChair of the National Council on Reparation (Jamaica) and one of the three Vice Chairs of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, is based on a mandate of the 34th meeting of the CARICOM Heads of Government in 2013. At that meeting, the Heads of Government also agreed to create a CARICOM Reparations Commission along with national committees for reparations in each CARICOM member country. To date, there are 12 national reparations committees all of which have been engaged in a range of activities designed to build public awareness on the issue of reparatory justice. The UWI Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles is Chair of the Commission.

The Centre for Reparations Research at The UWI will lead the implementation of CARICOM's Reparatory Justice Programme, which broadly seeks to foster public awareness around the lasting and adverse consequences of European invasion of indigenous peoples' lands, African enslavement and colonialism in the Caribbean; and offer practical solutions towards halting and reversing the legacies of such acts. These objectives stem from an understanding that many of the injustices and adverse effects of native genocide, African enslavement and colonialism in the region did not end with formal emancipation and independence and still need to be addressed and repaired.

More specifically, the Centre will focus on promoting research on the legacies of enslavement, colonialism and native genocide in the Caribbean and on how to bring justice and positive transformation to these legacies with a particular focus on CARICOM's Reparatory Justice programme. It will also work with national and regional reparation commissions and committees to promote education at The UWI and across Caribbean school systems on these legacies and the need for justice and repair.

And it will promote advocacy for reparatory and social justice by building a capacity to provide consultancies to CARICOM and other relevant institutions, raise public awareness and support activism around the Reparatory Justice programme.

In accepting The UWI's request to lead the new Centre, Professor Shepherd praised the pioneers of the reparation movement, especially the Rastafari community, and expressed the hope that all who believe in social justice will unite around a cause that has the potential to achieve peace, reconciliation, socioeconomic development and a sustainable future for the Caribbean.