OpenEdge Transforming Conflict
www.openedge.org.uk

Charitable Incorporated Organisation 1176903
registered in England and Wales
c/o UHY Hacker Young
168 Church Lane
UK BN3 2DL

Feedback on the Draft General Recommendation on Reparations for the Transatlantic Trade in Africans for Chattel Slavery and Colonialism

This feedback draws on perspectives from peacebuilding, trauma-responsive practice, and systems thinking. It appreciates the draft's depth and clarity, and offers suggestions for strengthening it -particularly in how it frames repair, responsibility, and relationship. The document already powerfully sets out the legal and moral case for reparations. The suggestions below focus on deepening its human and systemic dimensions, so that reparations are understood not only as redress but as a process of re-establishing right relationship among peoples, institutions, and the planet.

1. Keep the Human and Relational Dimension Alive

What works well:

- The document names the violence of slavery and colonialism clearly, without softening its historical or moral weight.
- It traces the connection between those histories and ongoing forms of inequality.

What could be strengthened:

- The tone is necessarily legal and formal, but that can make it sound distant from lived human experience. Adding short reflective passages that recognise the emotional and embodied continuity of harm could help readers feel the human story behind the legal argument.

Example: "The legacies of enslavement persist not only in policy and economy but in the memories and daily realities of communities, shaping how belonging and safety are felt across generations."

Why it matters: Language shapes whether people read reparations as an abstract duty or as a living moral task. When a text allows emotional and historical resonance, it invites deeper engagement from States, institutions, and citizens alike. This could also strengthen the educational and memorialisation dimensions of the Recommendation — showing that repair begins when societies can feel the truth they already know.

In practice:
- Include short narrative boxes, quotes, or testimonies from descendant communities.

- Use accessible examples of everyday impact (e.g., housing, education, or cultural survival).
- Acknowledge that reparations are as much about rebuilding trust and belonging as about financial or policy reform.

2. Frame Reparations as an Ongoing Relationship, Not a Transaction

What works well:

- The draft already includes strong provisions for dialogue and consultation with descendant communities.
- It recognises the importance of gender and intergenerational perspectives.

What could be strengthened:

- The current framing often positions States as responding to claims rather than entering a sustained relationship with the communities most affected. Reparations could be described not only as response or redress but as restoration of relationship -an ongoing process of dialogue, humility, and shared design.

Example: “Consultation is not merely procedural but an act of shared meaning-making — where the purpose and form of reparations are shaped together with descendant communities.”

Why it matters:

Reparations that end at financial payment or symbolic apology risk re-inscribing distance between the parties. When repair is understood as relationship, States are asked to remain present and responsive over time — building trust through consistent practice rather than one-off gestures.

In practice:

- Include commitments to multi-year participatory forums, co-led by descendant representatives.
- Create feedback loops so that actions taken by States are periodically reviewed by affected communities.
- Recognise relational repair as an evolving process, not a completed task.

3. Link Racial and Ecological Repair

What works well:

- The text powerfully connects past racial injustice with present-day inequities in wealth, education, and health.
- It names institutional responsibility — including churches, universities, and corporations.

What could be strengthened:

- The same extractive logic that enslaved and exploited human beings also commodified land, water, and ecosystems. These are not separate histories.

Example: the same ports that once shipped enslaved Africans later became hubs for fossil-fuel and mineral extraction. The infrastructures of racial capitalism evolved rather than disappeared, linking racial violence to ecological devastation and climate injustice.

Recognising this continuity would expand reparations beyond financial or institutional reform, toward restoring balance with the planet as well as between peoples.

Why it matters:

Slavery and colonialism were not only social systems but ecological ones: they reordered how humans relate to land and to one another. Repair that ignores the planetary dimension risks reproducing extractive behaviour in new forms -for instance, funding reparations through environmentally destructive industries.

In practice:

- Encourage States to link racial-justice commitments with ecological restoration e.g., support for community-led rewilding, land return, or sustainable energy projects led by descendant communities.
- Highlight how climate finance, debt relief, and reparations are connected parts of the same global justice framework.
-

4. Describe Responsibility as an Act of Integrity, Not Only Obligation

What works well:

- The document strongly articulates shared responsibility among States and institutions.
- It recognises that accountability extends beyond governments to include corporations, financial systems, and faith institutions.

What could be strengthened:

- Legal language often frames responsibility in punitive or compliance-based terms ("States must…"). You could balance this by describing responsibility as a pathway to restored integrity — something that strengthens, rather than burdens, those who take it.

Example: "Acknowledging harm is not a loss of sovereignty but a recovery of integrity -the act through which nations re-enter ethical relationship with humanity."

Why it matters:

People and institutions are more likely to act accountably when they can experience responsibility as honourable and freeing -an act of moral maturity rather than punishment. Such framing also clarifies that reparations are not charity, but part of the ethical evolution of democracy and human rights.

In practice:

- Encourage States to make public, self-initiated acknowledgements of historical harm rather than waiting for external pressure.
- Emphasise transparency, humility, and moral leadership as measures of progress.
- Include language showing that genuine accountability rebuilds legitimacy and trust in international systems.

5. Deepen How Listening and Testimony Are Described

What works well:

- The emphasis on memorialisation, education, and truth-telling is strong.
- The recognition that descendants must lead these processes is essential.

What could be strengthened:

- The section on participation could say more about how listening happens. Effective listening in repair processes requires time, safety, ritual, and continuity -not just public consultation.

Example: “Processes of hearing must be spacious enough to receive emotional, ancestral, and cultural dimensions of testimony -so that stories become part of shared transformation, not just official record.”

Why it matters:

When testimony is hurried or procedural, it risks repeating patterns of extraction -taking stories without honouring their depth. Slower, safer, more embodied forms of listening allow pain to be integrated, not just archived. They turn consultation into genuine encounter.

In practice:

- Encourage States to resource culturally grounded listening methods — for example, circles, artistic practices, or intergenerational storytelling.
- Ensure processes are ongoing, not one-off hearings.
- Recognise listening itself as a form of reparation, building public empathy and social memory.

Overall Observations

Theme	What’s Working	What Could Deepen the Work
Justice & Repair	Legal and institutional	Add relational and systemic dimensions — repair

Theme	What's Working	What Could Deepen the Work
	accountability are well established.	as restoration of coherence, not only restitution.
Embodiment & Memory	Harm is well-documented in facts and figures.	Include language acknowledging lived, intergenerational, and psychosocial impacts.
Interdependence	The global scope is clear.	Bring forward the idea that repair is a shared human task, not a one-way obligation.
Power Redistribution	Clear on responsibility of States and institutions.	Add tone of humility, learning, and mutual restoration.
Transformation	Focused on reform and compliance.	Add language of renewal — repair as transformation of relationship, not just systems.

In Summary

The draft already grounds reparations in justice and accountability. These suggestions aim to make it more human, relational, and forward-looking -to hold history not only as record but as a living relationship; to link racial, social, and ecological repair; and to frame responsibility as a shared act of renewal rather than obligation alone. Reparations, understood this way, become more than restitution: they become a model of how humanity learns from its past and re-enters right relationship with itself. Such framing would allow this Recommendation to speak not only in the language of law, but in the language of life -the ground from which lasting repair becomes possible.