

'Jamaica owed £2.2 trillion in slavery reparations'

The commission is now asking the government to consider seeking a debt write-off from countries that benefited from the trans-atlantic slave trade.

In its report, which was tabled in the House of Representatives last Wednesday (Sept 17), the commission called on the Government to "provide a list of the national debt so that negotiations can be initiated under the umbrella of reparations to write off the present debt owed by our country as debt-for-equity swap by the nations identified".

The report of the commission, which was chaired by Professor Verene Shepherd, further said the debt write-off is an important development strategy and one that is geared towards achieving sustainable development. Jamaica's stock of public debt is expected to increase to \$2.09 trillion this fiscal year. The debt stock is estimated to be 132 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). **REPARATION STRATEGY** As part of the reparation strategy, which is being proposed, the commission suggested that the Government negotiate with Spain and the United Kingdom for compensation for historic injustices and discuss with them the strategies needed for, among other things, the return of the money, which was paid to the owners of enslaved Africans in return for emancipation. Using the calculations of economic historian David Richardson, it is estimated that the total monetary reparations owed by Britain to its former colonies is £7.5 trillion. "Jamaica, being the largest and most profitable of its colonies, accounted for 30.64 per cent, or an estimated £2.2 trillion," the report said. The commission noted that more than 10 million Africans were taken from their homes and forcefully transported to the Caribbean as the enslaved chattel and property of Europeans. "The transatlantic slave trade is the largest forced migration in human history and has no parallel in terms of man's inhumanity to man," the report said. It added: "This trade in enchained bodies was a highly successful commercial business for the nations of Europe. The lives of millions of men, women and children were destroyed in search for profits." The commission, in pushing the need for debt cancellation, said Caribbean governments that emerged from slavery and colonialism have inherited the massive crisis of community poverty and institutional unpreparedness for development. "These governments still daily engage in the business of cleaning up the colonial mess in order to prepare for development. The pressure of development has driven governments to carry the burden of public employment and social privileges designed to confront colonial legacies. This process has resulted in states accumulating unsustainable levels of public debt that now constitute their fiscal entrapment," the report said. Written by Jamaica Gleaner 26/09/2014