



By: TA | AP Brief

African leaders push for recognition of colonial crimes and reparations



African leaders pushed to have colonial-era crimes recognized, criminalized and addressed through reparations.

At a conference in Algiers, diplomats and leaders convened to advance an **African Union** resolution passed at a meeting earlier this year calling for justice and reparations for victims of colonialism.

In his opening speech, Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf said Algeria's experience under French rule underscored the need to seek compensation and reclaim stolen property.

A legal framework, he added, would ensure restitution is seen as "neither a gift nor a favor."

"Africa is entitled to demand the official and explicit recognition of the crimes committed against its peoples during the colonial period, an indispensable first step toward addressing the consequences of that era, for which African countries and peoples continue to pay a heavy price in terms of exclusion, marginalization and backwardness," Attaf said.

International conventions and statutes accepted by a majority of countries have outlawed practices including slavery, torture and apartheid.

The **United Nations Charter** prohibits the seizure of territory by force but does not explicitly reference colonialism.

That absence was central to the African Union's February summit, where leaders discussed a proposal to develop a unified position on reparations and formally define colonization as a crime against humanity.

The economic cost of colonialism

The economic cost of colonialism in Africa is believed to be staggering, with some estimates putting the cost of plunder in the trillions.

European powers extracted natural resources often through brutal methods, amassing vast profits from gold, rubber, diamonds and other minerals, while leaving local populations impoverished.

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Attaf said it was no mistake that the conference was held in Algeria, a country that suffered some of the most brutal forms of French colonial rule and fought a bloody war to win its independence.

Its impact was far-reaching: Nearly a million European settlers held greater political, economic and social privileges, even though Algeria was legally part of France and its men were conscripted in World War II.

Hundreds of thousands died in the country's revolution, during which French forces tortured detainees, disappeared suspects and devastated villages as part of a counterinsurgency strategy to maintain their grip on power.

"Our continent retains the example of Algeria's bitter ordeal as a rare model, almost without equivalent in history, in its nature, its logic and its practices," Attaf said.

Algeria's experience has long informed its position on the disputed **Western Sahara**, a former Spanish colony claimed by neighboring Morocco and the pro-independence Polisario Front.

Attaf on Sunday framed it as a case of unfinished decolonization, echoing the African Union's formal stance even as a growing number of member states have moved to support Morocco's claim to the territory.

He called it “Africa's last colony” and lauded the indigenous Sahrawis' fight “to assert their legitimate and legal right to self-determination, as confirmed — and continuously reaffirmed — by international legality and UN doctrine on decolonization.”

Algeria has for decades pressed for colonialism to be tackled through international law, even as its leaders tread carefully to avoid inflaming tensions with France, where the war's legacy remains politically sensitive.

French President Emmanuel Macron in 2017 described elements of the history as a crime against humanity but stopped short of issuing an official apology and implored Algerians not to dwell on past injustices.

Mohamed Arezki Ferrad, a member of Algeria's parliament, told The Associated Press that compensation had to be more than symbolic, noting Algerian artifacts looted by France have yet to be returned. That includes Baba Merzoug, a 16th century cannon that remains in Brest.