

It's time for the UN to formally recognise the transatlantic slave trade as a crime against Humanity

By John Dramani Mahama, *The Guardian*, Sun 22 mar 2026

This month my country, Ghana, celebrated its 69th independence day. Kwame Nkrumah reminded us that political independence without transforming the global systems that shape our economies and opportunities remains incomplete.

It is in that spirit that, this month, Ghana will table a resolution at the United Nations general assembly calling for the formal recognition of one of the greatest moral tragedies in human history: the transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of Africans as a crime against humanity, and the need for a process of repair. This initiative is not Ghana's alone. It carries the support of the African Union and a growing coalition of countries across the global south. Together we seek not to reopen old wounds but to acknowledge them honestly.

Our proposal at the UN seeks to move the international community from acknowledgment to action: from recognition of historical injustice to a structured dialogue on repair.

This is not about assigning collective guilt to present generations. Nor is it about revisiting history in a spirit of division. Rather, it is about understanding how historical injustices have shaped contemporary inequalities, and how a more honest reckoning can contribute to a fairer, more inclusive global order.

The transatlantic slave trade and the system it sustained disrupted societies, extracted human and economic value on an unprecedented scale, and left enduring legacies that continue to influence patterns of development, opportunity and vulnerability across the world. Recognising this history fully is essential, not only for Africa and its diaspora, but for humanity as a whole.

Africa brings to this conversation a perspective shaped by its own intellectual and moral traditions – one that holds that injustice does not simply fade with time, but requires deliberate effort to address and redress.

At the heart of this effort is a commitment to partnership. The process we envision is one of engagement, bringing together states, institutions, scholars and communities to explore constructive and forward-looking approaches to reparatory justice.

We must also recognise the human dimension of this history, including how systems of enslavement entrenched inequalities that affected generations, particularly women and families. A full accounting of this past requires us to acknowledge these dimensions and to ensure that any process of repair is inclusive and comprehensive.

The world today faces many interconnected challenges, from inequality and underdevelopment to the climate crisis and global instability. Addressing historical injustices is not separate from these challenges; it is part of building the trust and cooperation necessary to confront them together.

Ghana's initiative at the UN is therefore an invitation – an invitation to engage in honest reflection, constructive dialogue and collective action. It is an invitation to move beyond acknowledgment toward meaningful steps that strengthen justice, dignity and shared progress.

For centuries, the voices calling for justice have endured across continents, across generations and across institutions. Today, we have an opportunity to listen, to respond and to act.

A crime of this magnitude calls not only for remembrance but for responsibility. And in meeting that responsibility together, we take a step toward a more just and united world.