King Charles Faces Caribbean Calls for Slavery Reparations

On a nine-day tour, Britain's king is being pressed to go beyond regret for the monarchy's ties to slavery.

A quiet Caribbean waterfront shows empty meeting chairs facing a harbor with a formal ship in the distance.

King Charles III is touring the Bahamas, Guyana, and Antigua and Barbuda this week while facing renewed demands that Britain apologize and pay reparations for **slavery**, according to reporting by the Associated Press published by PBS NewsHour. Palace officials say Charles will repeat earlier language calling slavery an "atrocity that forever stains our history," but they do not expect him to make a formal **apology**.

That difference matters. Reparations are actions meant to repair harm from an **injustice**; they can include an official apology, money, public programs, or other forms of compensation. Critics of the **monarchy** say words of sorrow are not enough when the British crown and empire profited for centuries from the forced labor of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and North America. British officials, however, have long said reparations are not payable, and the king is not free to make government policy on his own.

The conflict is partly about history and partly about who has **authority** today. Charles is a constitutional monarch, meaning he is king but normally acts on behalf of the elected government rather than setting policy himself. Craig Prescott, a constitutional law expert quoted in the report, said an apology or promise of reparations is not simply a personal choice for the king. In that view, Charles may express regret, but he cannot commit the United Kingdom to a major political and financial decision without the government.

For many Caribbean leaders and scholars, that answer sounds like avoidance. Brooke Newman, a historian at Virginia Commonwealth University and author of a book on the monarchy and slavery, argues that the crown's links to slavery were not symbolic or distant. The report describes Queen Elizabeth I supporting John Hawkins in the 1500s as he captured Africans and transported them to Spanish **colonies** in the Caribbean, receiving a share of the profits after lending him a Royal Navy warship. About a century later, King Charles II granted a company exclusive trading rights along the West African coast. That company, later known as the Royal African Company, expanded into the trade in enslaved Africans, and both Charles II and his brother invested in it.

The transatlantic slave trade was the forced movement of millions of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean, where they were sold and made to labor, often on plantations growing sugar, tobacco, and cotton. Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807

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and slavery in its empire 26 years later. But advocates for reparations argue that **abolition** did not erase the wealth created by slavery or the long-term damage done to Black communities in the Caribbean and the Americas.

That argument has gained international support. In March, the United Nations General Assembly approved a **resolution** calling for reparatory justice for the slave trade and slavery. Reparatory justice means trying to address both the original wrong and its lasting effects, such as reduced economic opportunity, lower income levels, and shorter life expectancy. The United Kingdom abstained, meaning it did not vote for or against the measure.

The financial stakes help explain why the issue remains so difficult. Reparations could potentially cost the U.K. hundreds of billions of pounds, the report notes. British leaders are already under pressure over the cost of living and the expense of popular social programs. Supporters of reparations say cost cannot be the main excuse for refusing to repair a historic injustice. Opponents or skeptics may ask how responsibility should be assigned across centuries, who should receive compensation, and whether today's taxpayers should pay for crimes committed by institutions and people long gone.

The setting of the tour makes the debate harder for Charles to sidestep. The Commonwealth is an association of 56 independent nations, many of them former parts of the British Empire in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Charles is head of the Commonwealth, and the British monarch is still head of state in 14 Commonwealth countries outside the United Kingdom. The final days of this Caribbean trip are scheduled for Antigua and Barbuda, which is hosting a meeting of Commonwealth leaders.

Hilary Beckles, who chairs the Caribbean Community's reparations commission, has urged Charles to respond not only as a monarch but as a person whose family inherited wealth and status from empire. That appeal points to the central tension of the visit: Is Charles mainly a public official bound by the elected government's position, or is he also a human being with a special moral responsibility because of the institution he represents?

The tour is not just a ceremonial trip, then. It is a test of what public regret is supposed to do. For Buckingham Palace and the British government, acknowledging slavery as a grave wrong may be seen as the furthest responsible step without opening a huge legal and financial question. For critics in the Caribbean, acknowledgment without apology or repair can sound like asking descendants of the enslaved to accept the language of sorrow while the benefits of the old system remain untouched.

Written from reporting by PBS NewsHour.

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THINK IT THROUGH

1. Should a present-day government or monarchy be financially responsible for injustices committed centuries ago if the effects are still visible today? Defend your position.

2. If King Charles cannot make policy without the elected government, should he still make a personal apology? Why or why not?

3. What would count as a meaningful response to slavery's legacy besides direct cash payments, and what would be the weaknesses of that approach?

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T M L E O I Y O T T A P D O Z E H T
Y K S S N T P O C L O L L S R M L D
A E L L E T S A O Y N A P O L O G Y
Z S A E S U I O L F C A L H I N L O
O U V T T I O O O O T R O T E A P G
M R E E U I L T S O T S U T N R R A
N A R A L H N L I N J U S T I C E G
N I Y I F T T C M E N U Y S E H P O
O A I I R O N P E L E R O R O Y A N
H T E O N A T J C U I S A E I T R I
E L E Y E F Y T V L V L I S R Y A T
U I A C C L I S U A U T H O R I T Y
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O R P E O F E P L A N T A T I O N O
L V E D L P I Q O C I E R I E T Y A
N O Y A A O A B O L I T I O N N O T
N O L I T N T H N C O L O N I E S T

ABOLITION APOLOGY AUTHORITY COLONIES INJUSTICE
MONARCHY PLANTATION REPARATION RESOLUTION
SLAVERY

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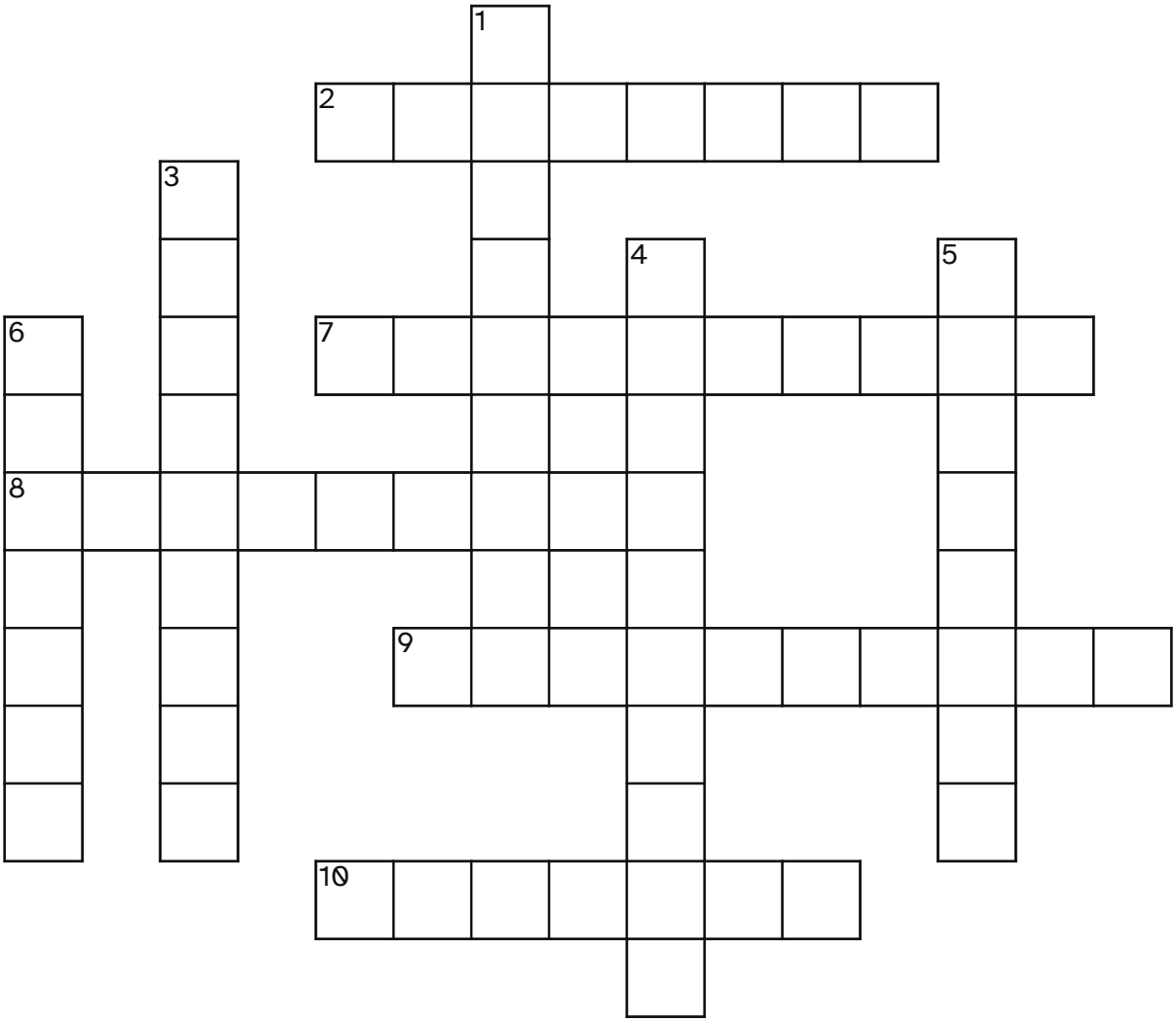

ACROSS

2 Government ruled by an inherited king or queen

7 Official decision adopted by a group or governing body

8 Official ending of a law, practice, or institution

9 Payment, statement, or program meant to address an earlier harm

10 Formal statement of regret after causing harm

DOWN

1 Unfair treatment that violates what is right

3 Official power to make decisions or command others

4 Large crop farm, often dependent on forced labor

5 Lands controlled by a stronger foreign nation

6 System that treats people as property and denies their freedom

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Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

PBS NewsHour

"King Charles III can't escape Britain's role in slavery as he tours Caribbean nations"

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https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/king-charles-iii-cant-escape-britains-role-in-slavery-as-he-tours-caribbean-nations

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