

## Rastafari Movement UK Press Releases - 5

Further info: 0796 098 1205, 0790 327 7175

### **Rastafari Movement UK PR COMMITTEE (PR1)**

The Rastafari Movement Repatriation and Reparation Committee was formed in January 2014.

The Committee consists of community-based Rastafari activists who came together to organize a march to Parliament. We were acutely aware that the heinous crimes of the Transatlantic Slave Trade had not been acknowledged or addressed, or apologised for, by its perpetrators – the British government.

Moreover, the knock-on effects of slavery and colonialism still impact severely on the lives of African descendants today. The march to Parliament was meant to raise awareness of the cruel inequalities that still persist in today's society as a result of that 400-year-long genocide of Africans, and to demand legal Reparations for the enduring damage, injury and hurt this legacy has imposed upon us.

Emancipation Day August 1<sup>st</sup> was chosen as the appropriate day for the march. This is a day when Africans in the Diaspora commemorate our ancestors' sufferings - as well as their triumphs. It is a day dedicated to the memory of those who came before us, who bore the anguish and pains of inhuman oppression, and whose blood, sweat and tears were the building blocks of British and European prosperity.

It is untrue to state that what was done at that time was 'legal'. At no time has international law sanctioned chattel slavery, the reduction of human beings to goods (a status lower than animals) and judged African people as worthy of torture and servile oppression in perpetuity. Chattel slavery is the ultimate violation of all human rights and can be described as the most detestable and immoral crime possible against humanity. As such there is no statute of limitation that can be set for repairing and redressing the grievances committed during centuries of gross maltreatment.

It is equally erroneous to suggest that this history is long gone and we should move on and forget the past as free citizens of a modern world. Africans today are genetically traumatised by the horror of their past. Africans (at home and abroad) still bear the collective scars and stigma of racism enshrined in the writ of white domination and white supremacy.

Europe owes its wealth and pre-eminence in today's world to the criminal gains of kidnap, unpaid labour and genocide; Africa and Africans owe their lowly status and impoverishment

to the devastating circumstances of rape and disembowelment of a continent. Human justice demands that we return to a level playing-field.

This is the general context which motivated the march. We will continue to raise awareness, campaign and protest so long as the refusal to admit, apologise and repair this enormous wrong continues. The proposed Emancipation Day Rally for 2015 is dedicated to this task.

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### **Rastafari Movement UK (PR2)**

The RMUK will provide a series of educational workshops for people of all ages at the Kennington Park rally on 1st August 2015. The workshops will be designed to give basic information to the wider public on the hidden curricula of reparation and repatriation, largely omitted from Eurocentric studies. Britain's role as a slave-trading nation is the subtext to the industrial revolution and the huge profits that placed European nations at the helm of world power today. The connection is conveniently overlooked, along with the depreciation of the Black input in Europe's success, and the consequent racism and discrimination that now characterizes black-white relations.

Truth is the major casualty of misguided history. The need for repair is no less necessary for the victim than for the oppressor. Public awareness involves a much broader field than merely education. It involves not only schools, colleges and universities, though these are certainly the frontline targets for revision of history. Every major institution of the state, from government and the judiciary to the police, health, media, arts, culture and community, are affected by a historical reality that has never been addressed. The cumulative oversight has resulted in engrained inequalities that negatively impact on Black lives today.

The monumental task of reorienting the minds of a generation may take years to accomplish. The UN has at least provided a window of opportunity in the Decade for People of African Descent, beginning this year. RMUK has nailed its colours to the mast of this global initiative. The long journey began with a first step in the historic march of 2014. Then, it was the spectacle of chanting, marching thousands with banners that informed public opinion, setting a platform for this year's more formal intervention in the process of conscientizing the masses.

Activities on the day will consist of motivational speakers, drumming, cultural performances, stalls and cuisine, co-ordinated to create a feast of public awareness on Emancipation Day August 1st 2015.

Miss this at your peril!

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### **Rastafari Movement UK (PR3)**

The RMUK, a Rastafari-based collective, have revived a traditional banking system to fund a mission to Africa planned for later this year. This small group of activists co-ordinated last year's historic Reparation march to Parliament on Emancipation Day. A raft of Pan-African and Black community organisations supported the march. This year the RMUK will convene a major rally in Lambeth's Kennington Park on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> August. The event is the second stage of a layered strategy to raise public awareness of the inhumanity of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (TAST) and its aftershocks that still reverberate throughout the Black community. Reparation remains high on the agenda. Repatriation will add a cutting edge to this year's programme.

Now registered as a Community Interest Company (CIC), RMUK members have clubbed together in a 'pardner' to fund travel to Ethiopia. The 'pardner' or 'sou-sou' is an ancient method of community banking with its roots in Africa. Early Caribbean immigrants to Britain used the weekly pooling of 'hands' to finance homes and business ventures in the 1950s and 60s. Each 'hand' represents one partner's equal contribution to the scheme of weekly savings, which is kept by a banker. Monthly lump-sum pay-outs are rotated in turn to each member of the partnership for use as the individual sees fit. The RMUK have tailored their 'pardner' as a fit-for-purpose venture to self-fund the mission to Ethiopia. The aim is a research-based project which will focus on the iconic repatriate community in Shashemane. This Rastafari outpost in southern Ethiopia is in dire need of recognition, justice and development - the 3-point agenda of the United Nations decade for People of African Descent, which commences this year.

In the meantime the group is relentlessly pursuing its strategy for this year's rally in Kennington Park. Consultation with police and local authorities, public meetings and a robust media drive are on-going. Kennington Park fits the bill. Nearby St Agnes Place was the original HQ of Rastafari in Britain. The Park is also a historic point for the green shoots of democracy and people's power in Britain.

Lying between Kennington Park Road and St Agnes Place the Park was opened in 1854 on the site of what had been Kennington Common, where the Chartists gathered for their biggest "monster rally" on 10 April 1848. Soon after this demonstration the common was enclosed and, sponsored by the royals, made into a public park. Activities on the day will include a variety of cultural presentations, including drumming, debates, stalls, African-Caribbean cuisine, guest performers, speakers and educational workshops.

Rastafarian elder and Chair of the RMUK is Ras Gabre Wold. Legal representative is Sister Sheba Levi-Stewart, who presented 65,000 signed petitions for Reparation to Parliament in 2014.

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### **Rastafari Movement UK (PR4)**

The Ambience

Grounation is nothing new. It is an aspect of African village culture from time immemorial. The community gathers in an open space in the village. Some sit under trees at the edge of the circular

clearing. The headman, village elder or griot addresses the audience. There is an atmosphere of expectation and of impending performance. The event begins with a ritual libation by the priest, followed by drumming. Then comes the main event – perhaps a celebration, public announcement or open reasoning. Individuals may interject from time to time, making sounds of agreement with each other, nodding heads, sometimes boldly interrupting to make a mocking jest or an unofficial point of order. There is a sense of true democracy, which the community determines instinctively without the need for autocratic procedure. At points there is unbridled applause, with the women ululating in high-pitched cries of approval. The whole environment trembles palpably and vibrates as one with the people. At the close of the gathering everyone has been uplifted. The community is refreshed. New life has been breathed into the collective. No wonder. We gave the world civilization.

We cannot reinvent the wheel, but we can return to fundamental values, collective grounding, spiritual awakening and the spine of unity that holds the African nation together. This gives us a unique place in the family of nations. Our singular humanity has been damaged by our recent past, but it is not lost. The Rastafari movement has revived the original heartbeat of the people. InI have reclaimed a sense of identity that is peculiar to our tradition, history and culture. In this way we have re-energized the African diasporic community. Our message has also taken root with communities throughout Africa and worldwide.

The proposed Rally on August 1<sup>st</sup> will mirror a re-enactment of African village society. The day will be structured to embrace performances, motivational speakers, workshops and drumming. Emancipation will be the overarching theme, with reparation and repatriation as key points on the day's agenda. With several thousands expected to attend the event this will signal a significant development on last year's historic march to Parliament.

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## **Rastafari Movement UK (PR5)**

### **UNITY**

Africans write and speak of the need for unity in enthusiastic and eloquent terms and voices. The quest for an enduring oneness has echoed down the centuries ever since the fragmentation and division generated by the transatlantic slave trade began 5 centuries ago.

In the Diaspora that cumulative yearning came to a head in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the works of the great Pan Africanists of the Caribbean, Africa and in the Americas, who championed the cause of global unification of the African race. The long-list is well known. Their names and deeds have been recovered from the detritus of history and are now celebrated wherever Africans gather to honour the works of our ancestors.

Marcus Garvey's place stands out in that litany of greats. His unfaltering gaze towards Africa ignited the sleeping energies of a generation in exile. His pointing finger exhorted us to look to Africa and to the crowning of a great King. This was the 'cosmic trigger' that would signal the time of redemption.

The Rastafari movement arose in the 1930's as if in answer to the call of time. The movement took on the mantle of total rehabilitation. Rastafari replaced the stripping of African identity and

consciousness with a renaissance of pride, purpose and self-knowledge that has straddled the last 85 years, outlasting other social reparation movements, impacting on the international Black and global community with poignant, living messages of equal rights and justice. From being persecuted and threatened with outright genocide, the movement rose like a phoenix whose wings now cover the globe, giving bright hope to all who seek a new world order of peace, love and harmony among mankind.

Strange to imagine that unlettered men and women at the base of an oppressed colonial society – one foot out of slavery – could find gems of wisdom in the dust of their everyday lives; could retrace and retrieve a tradition of independence, sovereignty and divinity out of the bottomless pit of oppression and serfdom in a land of the 'Carry-beyond'. Strange that the redemptive gospel should come from the lowest and the least – ones who were positioned beneath the heels of those who were already oppressed, ones who were considered unfit for polite society, unfit for life's purpose, an accursed excrescence to be scorned and spat upon, rejected out of hand by their own communities.

The stone that the builders refused has become the head cornerstone. Now Jamaica basks in the wealth of Marley's legacy, of Howell's legacy. The sacred herb, once outlawed and disparaged, the butt of malediction, is now decriminalized and set to become the cash cow of the Caribbean economy. The colours red, gold and green trump the Jamaican flag, fluttering across the planet in victory over the fall of Babylon. Jah kingdom come.

Scientists have postulated that even a child playing with a dog over a period of time, their hearts would beat in synchronicity. The cry of one heart, one aim and one destiny, a mantra which Garvey took up from his mentor Dr Love, became the central theme of the Rastafari movement. The Nyahbinghi warriors were inspired by a heartbeat rhythm, the war of hand on drums, accompanied by hymns and chants to the Almighty in what became known as the Binghi ceremony. Often the Binghi went on for days at a time. In 1958 Charles Edwards, aka Prince Emmanuel, head of the Ethio-African Black International Congress (the Bo-bo Shanti), organized an all-island Binghi convention that lasted for a month. On such occasions birds and other animals were known to walk freely and without fear among the gathering, whose hearts also beat in one unified rhythm. Strange that untutored grassroots Africans could come up with a scientific sound therapy that could unify the hearts of all living things - physically, spiritually and psychologically.

The Rally organized by the Rastafari Movement UK in Kennington Park on August 1st will seek to recreate the Binghi vibration in a modern-day environment. The day will orchestrate the forces of Pan-Africanism with drumming, traditional culture, word-sound, cuisine, music and reasoning, a veritable festival of remembrance, celebrating ancestral memories, bringing our forebears into the present in a glorious effort towards one heart, one aim, one destiny.

Let us repair the breach. Let us relocate the continuity that comes from Ethiopia, Khemet, Luxor, flowing from the head-waters of the Nile to bestow civilization and humanity unto the world. One perfect love.

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