Thank you, Madam Chair, your excellencies, fellow panellists and those attending this panel in person and online.

I was asked to speak to you about the role of parliamentarians and the legislation they pass in reversing the barriers that generate debt, as well as the provision of social protection measures.

In post-colonial states, the legacy of colonialism has created enormous challenges for reversing barriers to poverty and colonial debt and providing social protection measures. To begin tackling the barriers that generate debt, parliamentarians must pass laws that acknowledge and address the historical and structural factors perpetuating poverty and indebtedness. Recently during her talk at the “Zurich and colonialism” exhibition in Zurich the CERD chair Professor Shepherd mentioned a Jamaican saying- “one hand cannot clap”. A saying I took to heart because as a Black Swiss parliamentarian, I know how first hand frustrating and dangerous it is to address these barriers in a predominately white society. It took the combined efforts of the United Nations mechanisms like the CERD where I personally presented the first racial

profiling report on Switzerland in 2017 opening the pandoras box to the situation of people of African descent in Swtzerland, and the Working Group of Experts on people of African descent report on their country visit to Switzerland in 2022, civil societies, activists and parliamentarians of African descent, managed to exert just the right amount of pressure to change a tradition of complete denial of racism in Switzerland to one of not only acknowledgement of their role in the transatlantic slave trade, acknowledgement of the existence of racism but also the willingness to speak openly about structural racism. This feat would have been impossible to achieve with my one hand as a parliamentarian.

We see the same pattern of white superiority and blantant refusal when Global south parliamentarians call for the return of cultural heritage - art artefacts and precious stones stolen during the colonial times as a form of reversing the generational debt of their countries. In the case of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria who spearheaded a movement by African governments and other stakeholders to repatriate and restitute between 3,000 and 5,000 Benin Bronze

artefacts looted from the royal palace when the British launched an assault on Benin City, the capital of Benin Kingdom in 1867. Although these artefacts are of immeasurable financial and cultural value; therefore, if returned today to Nigeria, they would aid the reversal of Nigeria's general debt, countries who acquired part of these artefacts have been exercising their have been flexing their neocolonial muscle. For example, in 2018, the British Museum in London agreed to loan some of its Benin bronzes to a planned new museum in Benin City, Nigeria. The German Culture Ministry has also expressed willingness to discuss the repatriation of the country's Benin bronzes in 2019. This scenerio suddenly changed on 2nd February 2023 when the Swiss Benin Initiative, which comprises eight Swiss museums, the Nigerian government and some Swiss parliamentarians, agreed on the return of all the hundred pieces of Benin Bronze artefacts held in Swiss museums to Benin, Nigeria. Yet another example of the results of Swiss parliamentarians and United nations mechanism - like CERD and the WGEPAD clapping together.

The last examples of collaborative success can be seen in the Caribbean islands. In Barbados for

example the discourse on debt reduction is unified action of the reparation channel is the government of Barbados through the National Task Force on Reparations. As a CARICOM member, Barbados is part of the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) and is a signatory party of the CARICOM 10-Point Reparations Plan. We see that Barbados' goal of having a Global Reparatory Agenda and a viable healing process is carefully strategised into steps taken by the individual (parliamentarian-driven) and collective (CARICOM-driven) initiatives transformed into action and the achievement of reparatory justice.

It is important to note that because of the complexity and continuity of reparations issues, many African countries and African diaspora communities continue to struggle with the legacy of historical injustices such as slavery and colonialism and therefore rely on the accountability This will be discussed in a later panel during this session.

Parliamentarians can also work internally within their States to enact social and economic development programs or laws such as land tenure, eliminate debt inherited from colonialism, and

establish redistributive policies that address the vicious debt circle to ensure equitable access to resources.

South Africa is an excellent example of a country that has looked into its internal structure as part of its efforts to address the legacy of apartheid and provide redress to those harmed by it.

One of the ways it has done this is through the Land Restitution Program, which aims to restore land taken from communities during apartheid. Under this program, people can apply to have their land restored or receive compensation for land that cannot be restored. The Land Restitution Program was implemented in South Africa in 1994, shortly after the country's first democratic elections. The program was established under the Restitution of Land Rights Act, which allows individuals and communities forcibly removed from their land due to discriminatory laws between 1913 and 1994 to claim restitution or compensation for their land. The ongoing program has resulted in the restoration of millions of hectares of land to previously disadvantaged communities.

Another program is the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policy, which seeks to address

the economic inequalities caused by apartheid by promoting the participation of black South Africans in the economy. This includes measures such as preferential procurement policies, training and support for black-owned businesses, and promoting black ownership of assets. The BEE policy was started in South Africa in 2003 under the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act. The South African government introduced the act to empower and promote the economic participation of previously disadvantaged black South Africans who were excluded from participating in the country's economy during apartheid. The BBBEE policy aims to advance black ownership and control of the economy and promotes the advancement of people of colour to leadership positions in the private and public sectors. The policy also incentivises companies to contribute to socio-economic development initiatives such as skills development, enterprise development, and job creation in disadvantaged communities. The BBBEE policy has undergone several revisions since its implementation in 2003, with the latest version coming into effect in 2019.

Now after the realisation of the power of our united strength, parliamentarians of African descent in western Europe have cime together and formed a European Minority Paliamentary Caucus (EMPC) that

will play a crucial role in contribute to reversing these barriers by:

1. Addressing structural racism: the EMPC will advocate for measures to address the structural racism that leads to discrimination and exclusion of people of African descent in the workforce, education, and social services. For example, the Switzerland and colonial historic exhibition set to begin during the second half of the year after the end of in Switzerland, the current called Zürich and Colonialism that also depicts racial stereotypes and their repercussion.

2. Supporting entrepreneurship: EMPC will support entrepreneurship programs for people of African descent, creating opportunities for them to establish businesses and build economic stability.

3. Investing in education and training: EMPC will push for increased investment in education and training for people of African descent to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to access higher-paying jobs and become self-sufficient. Affirmative

action, teaching our histories in schools.

4. Protecting workers' rights: EMPC will advocate for workers' rights and push against unfair labour practices such as wage theft and lack of access to benefits.

5. Ensuring social protection measures: EMPC will work to ensure that social protection measures are in place for people of African descent, such as access to healthcare, affordable housing, and other forms of assistance.

In summary, the EMPC aims to work closely with after the United Nations mechanisms like the WGEPAD, CERD, the Group of Independent Eminent Experts and the newly launched Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, on significantly impact reversing the barriers that generate generational debt and increasing access to social protection measures for people of African descent.