

Global Justice, Truth-Telling and Healing

MAY 2 - MAY 3, 2024

Symposium Proceedings

Proceedings from the Symposium on Global Justice, Truth Telling and Healing

Institutional Antiracism and Accountability (IARA) Project

Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation
Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University

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Overview of the Convening

The Institutional Antiracism and Accountability (IARA) Project conducted a three-year study from 2021-2024, surveying international examples of truth-telling, justice, and healing efforts, including truth commissions, tribunals, and community-based programs. The project aimed to better understand the mechanisms for accountability in these endeavors and to highlight lessons that practitioners in the United States and globally can apply going forward. IARA's assessment of global practices of truth-telling and healing included evaluating the pathway from inception to implementation and establishing guidelines based on effective approaches as well as the ongoing challenges in transforming social and political systems.

The Symposium on Global Justice, Truth-Telling and Healing at the Harvard Kennedy School marked the culmination of this project. The event brought together 25 leaders, advocates, and experts from nonprofit organizations, government institutions, and academia, most of whom had been interviewed during the project's fieldwork. International participants hailed from the seven countries examined in the project and represented multiple fields and sectors, spanning distinct examples of truth commissions and tribunals and their aftermath. The group also included U.S. leaders steering national and local efforts for reparations and truth commissions.

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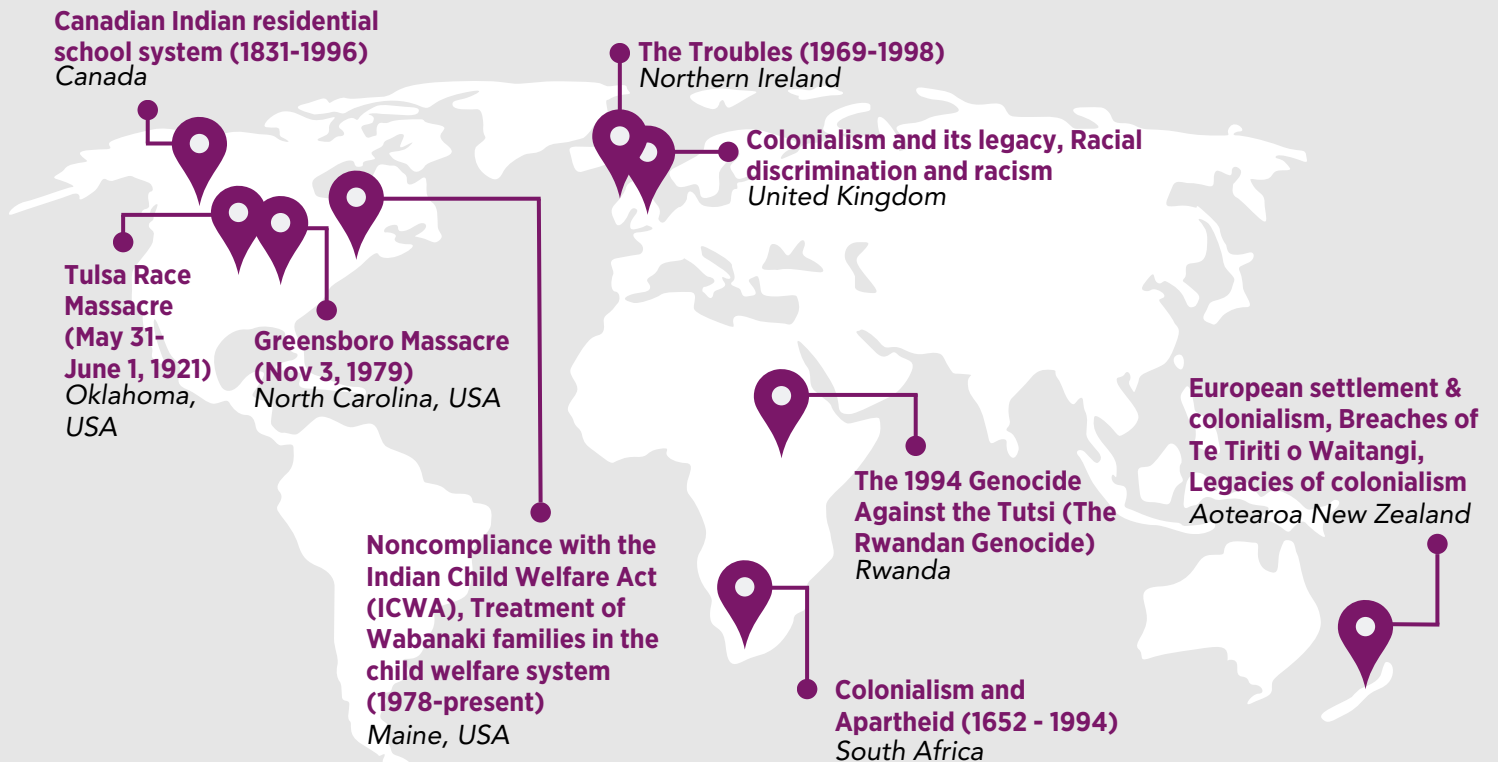
The Symposium provided an important venue for the IARA team to share its findings, receive feedback from critical stakeholders, and hear about new developments in the field. It also presented a vital opportunity to cultivate dialogue to further shared efforts for social change. Participants learned from each other's experiences and advanced collective understanding of these complex issues.

Ultimately, the gathering reflected the breadth and depth of longstanding commitments to advancing racial, ethnic, and Indigenous justice globally and domestically. IARA anticipates the forthcoming project report to serve as a catalyst to continue these important policy and advocacy efforts, movements, and community-based programs.



The power of truth-telling at scale rests not in our ability to outsource it to a deliberative body but to actually, through the cultural sector, educate the young people who have the ability to make change at scale.

– Professor Khalil Gibran Muhammad,
IARA Director



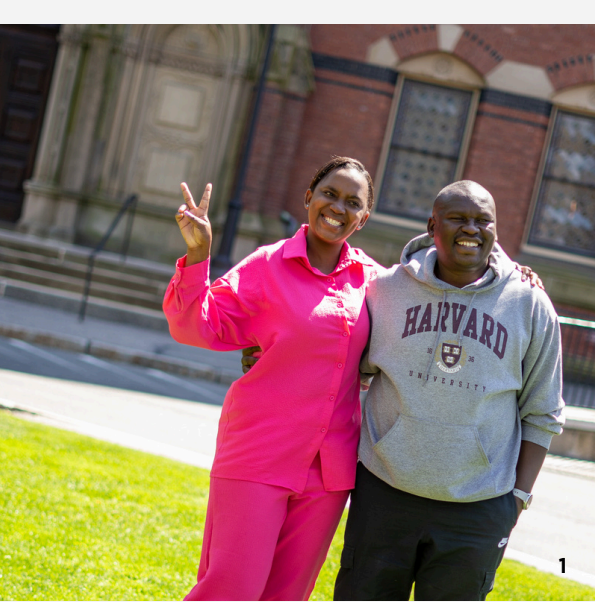


Photo captions:

1. Annah Mahlako Mpobane and Dr. Maropeng Mpya pose for a photo in Harvard Yard.
2. Faculty Director for the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation Archon Fung welcomes Symposium guests.
3. From left to right, Dr. Gloria Yayra A. Ayee, U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Lee, Erica Jacqueline Licht, and Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad pose for a photo.
4. President Natan Obed, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, speaks at a roundtable discussion.
5. Dr. Gloria Yayra A. Ayee welcomes Eduardo González with an embrace.

Plenary Remarks from U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Lee

Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA) delivered plenary remarks on strategies to interrupt a cycle of inaction when it comes to reparative justice in the United States. She shared highlights from her decades-long career fighting for racial justice, from the anti-apartheid movement to pushing for reparations for Japanese Americans.

During the session, Congresswoman Lee, a senior House member from the San Francisco Bay area and a longtime foreign policy voice on Capitol Hill, described the onerous process of seeking racial justice in the United States — while acknowledging the long road ahead. Even California, which she represents and is one of the few states to establish a task force on reparations, is struggling with how to implement its findings.

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People in America do not understand or know the impacts, the trauma, the policy, the institutional DNA that’s in this country as it relates to genocide, as it relates to the impact of slavery and all of the other human rights crimes against humanity that are institutionalized in American policy in the private sector and in the public sector.

– Congresswoman Barbara Lee



In the wake of the 2020 racial justice protests, Lee introduced federal legislation to establish a United States Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Commission. “We decided ‘transformation’ because there’s really nothing to reconcile in the United States. Transformation is reparations,” she said. “That’s how we repair the damage in America. Otherwise, 100 years from now we’ll still be going around the clock and we’ll still be dealing with setbacks.”

Congresswoman Lee also serves as senior Democrat on the House subcommittee that funds the U.S. Institute of Peace, a quasi-public foreign policy think tank based in Washington, D.C. She noted that while the institute’s mandate is to assist other countries to establish truth commissions, it has no jurisdiction over the United States. She also shared how she faced substantial pushback when it came to getting the institute to examine America in the same light as other nations.

Keynote from Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) President Obed

President Natan Obed of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) gave the midday keynote on how ITK advocates for policy change and accountability related to the livelihood and welfare of Inuit communities as well as First Nations and Métis people.

Various mechanisms have driven the work for Indigenous justice in Canada, including the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which was between multiple parties, including ITK. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which focused on residential schools, was a condition of that agreement, as was remuneration for Inuit who went to residential schools or experienced harm there. However, President Obed noted that one of the challenges of these processes is that they often reduce people and their suffering to mere numbers. He added, “I would imagine that truth commissions across the world struggle with that concept. And within Canada, it was really divisive.”

President Obed emphasized the importance of listening to his community and leading with empathy. Much of his work requires shifting perspectives and re-educating Canadian society and government at large. He shared the example of a campaign to change the name of a Canadian football team from a racist moniker, explaining how the fallout was not directed at the team but at President Obed and Inuit communities, especially in the comments of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) media content. Ultimately, because of the pressure ITK put on CBC, it changed its policy on reader comments.



Addressing the topic of accountability, he focused on the “unfinished work of institutions,” including their failure to commit to and follow through with relinquishing their holding of human remains and engaging in repatriation. This is a reality pertinent to Harvard University, where the convening took place and where thousands of Indigenous peoples’ remains are held by the university, as well as to many museums and institutions across the United States and Canada.

“

Democracy and governments are evolving and imperfect. We are not a monolith; we govern through democracy and have varied opinions and outlooks. Often, we as Indigenous people are not given that credibility and space to be seen as democratic institutions that represent our people.

– President Natan Obed



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Roundtable Presentations from International Participants

Each participant from countries and Indigenous nations around the globe, and featured in the project, shared a presentation responding to the question: “How does your work serve as a key intervention for achieving justice?” Their remarks were delivered during two roundtable sessions that covered multiple sectors, including education, museums, the arts, archives, community organizing, and women-led movements. The accompanying discussions facilitated the cross-pollination of critical ideas and questions about justice and healing efforts.

Participants identified commonalities across their experiences, including the notion that truth commissions alone cannot achieve societal peace and reconciliation; they are only one step and one option. In establishing the goals of truth commissions and evaluating their efforts, an often-critical flaw is the assumption that they can achieve justice, accountability, and, potentially, healing and reconciliation on their own.

Please [watch this video](#) to hear some of what was learned from interview participants.



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Speakers in photos: 1. Kamara Scott, 2. Prue Kapua, 3. Mark Thompson



Concluding Remarks

The Symposium on Global Justice, Truth-Telling and Healing was an important gathering in the final stage of IARA's three-year project focused on related efforts around the world. It was also a monumental occasion in which participants gathered in Cambridge, MA from seven countries, three U.S. states, and multiple Indigenous nations and communities to engage in strategy, praxis and learning from national and community-led efforts. The event also marked the end of the research stage of the work, and a critical time for gathering insights from project participants who had been previously interviewed.

In February 2025, the IARA team will release the final report of findings from the project, incorporating the learning and feedback from this gathering. The IARA team hopes that the report, and its dissemination, will further the field's development of learning and implementation of truth-telling efforts, particularly in the United States. As U.S. leaders seek to cultivate reparative initiatives, they can learn from international examples in order to face and reconcile with the U.S.'s own histories of harm and systemic racism.

Speakers in photos: 1. Stephanie Scott, 2. Professor Eilish Rooney, 3. Annah Mahlako Mpobane

Symposium Participants

Dr. Gloria Y.A Ayee

Senior Research Fellow, Institutional Antiracism and Accountability Project

Helen Clapp

Research Coordinator, Transitional Justice Evaluation Team, Carr Center & Faculty Assistant, Dr. Kathryn Sikkink

Eduardo González

Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Mali, United Nations

Marc Gwamaka

Engagement and Outreach Coordinator, Kigali Genocide Memorial

Dreisen Heath

National Reparations Strategist | Founder, Why We Can't Wait National Reparations Coalition

Dr. Marcus Anthony Hunter

Scott Waugh Endowed Chair in the Social Sciences Division, Professor of Sociology & African American Studies, UCLA

Emily Kassie

Investigative Journalist and Filmmaker

Dr. Samantha Lakin

Lecturer in Conflict Resolution, UMass Boston John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies

Dr. Lisa J. Laplante

Professor of Law and Director of the Center for International Law and Policy, New England Law School

Congresswoman Barbara Lee

U.S. Congresswoman for the 12th District of California

Erica Jacqueline Licht

Research Projects Director, Institutional Antiracism and Accountability Project

Annah Mahlako Mpobane

Educator, Elite College

Dr. Maropeng Mpya

Senior Lecturer, North-West University, South Africa

Dr. Khalil Gibran Muhammad

Faculty Director, Institutional Antiracism and Accountability Project (IARA)

Dr. Eric Ns. Ndushabandi

Professor at University of Rwanda and Associate Researcher, UCLouvain Saint-louis Bruxelles

Julian Brave NoiseCat

Writer and Filmmaker

President Natan Obed

President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

Betsy Richards

Executive Director & Senior Partner with Wabanaki Nations, Abbe Museum

Eilish Rooney

Scholar Emeritus, Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University

Ms. Mandy Sanger

Head of Education, District Six Museum

Kamara Scott

Cultural Producer and Co-Founder, Tottenham Rights

Stephanie Scott

Executive Director, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

Prue Tamatekapua

Immediate Past President, Maori Women's Welfare League | Tribal affiliation: Ngati Whakaue and Ngati Kahungunu

Fernando Travesí

Executive Director, International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)

Mark Thompson

Chief Executive Officer, Relatives for Justice

Jill Williams

Acting Executive Director, Calfee Community & Cultural Center

Kristi Williams

Founder, Black History Saturdays | Community Activist and Chair, The Greater Tulsa African American Affairs Commission



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