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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by Asocio Esperanto Radikala, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Remembrance Day also for the Black Holocaust

There is a black, African, Holocaust, which claimed about twice the number of victims of the Jewish, white, genocide and which precedes it of a few decades: between the end of the 19th and early 20th century Leopold II king of Belgium killed millions of Congolese exclusively for commercial reasons: rubber collection.

This black holocaust has always been hidden,¹ nobody ever talks about it because, in our opinion, it does not have ideological, nor racial, nor religious motives but exclusively economic ones.

Instead, precisely for this reason, despite preceding the Jewish holocaust, it is the closest to our contemporary world, a world that seems to have lost the dignity of every human person. Thus, there should be full awareness of it in all countries of the world and, to date, there being only economic reasons for it, it should be historically remembered everywhere, especially for this.

We talk of numbers ranging from 10 to 25 million deaths; millions of hand-mutilated people because they were unable to collect the amount of rubber assigned daily; of intensive slave farms where women were raped at their first menstruation and forced to give birth to children who were to replace the slaves killed by working in rubber fields or as servants in private residences as soon as they had the physical ability, children aged 5 or 6 at most.

Many documents, collected in the book “King Leopold’s Ghost” by Adam Hochschild² offer a detailed account of the way in which Leopold operated, speaking of this huge tragedy. “Hochschild’s book is particularly well-written and accessible making it an excellent history book to start off with. ... includes a more general analysis of systems of terror and offers a parallel between the actions of Belgian officials in the Congo and those of Nazi officers during the Holocaust”, according to Oxford University College’s Library review. A video documentary based on this book³ is a good synthesis of it.

Leopold II king of the Belgians personally owned 260 million hectares of central Africa and was the ruler of 20 million Africans. Between 1880 and 1890, car and bicycle manufacturers in the world needed large quantities of rubber and the Congo Free State of Leopold II had the largest natural rubber reserves.

Leopold II decided to supply the world with all the possible rubber in the shortest possible time. In 20 years, Congo, about ten times larger than Belgium, becomes the largest forced labour camp in the world and, thanks to this, Leopold II becomes one of the richest men on Earth but the increase of his profits will go hand in hand with the loss of human lives. Congo was a prison state where Africans had no rights whatsoever, where there was no justice nor freedom. Their lives served only to satisfy the ambitions of the Belgian king, thousands of kilometres away, who will never go to Congo.

The Congolese had to collect rubber in impossible quantities and, to force them to do so, they were subjected to incredible tortures. Those who could not make it were tortured or killed:

- natives whipped with the “chicote” - a whip made with sun-dried rhinoceros hide - until their skins were reduced to strips;
- men killed by pouring boiling resin over their heads.

All this to the soldiers' amusement at the tortured men's contortions. The Belgian army in Congo counted 16,000 men armed with modern automatic rifles.

Yet they had to save even on the cartridges used to kill those who could not manage to collect the required quantities of rubber daily. Therefore, each soldier was given a certain number of cartridges and for each one there must be a dead person. Therefore, to prove to the Belgian officers that they had not been wasted, the soldiers had to take with them a cut off hand, usually the right hand, for each cartridge fired. Such practice was so consolidated that, for

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/1999/may/13/features11.g22>.

² <https://www.univ.ox.ac.uk/book/king-leopolds-ghost/>.

³ https://youtu.be/w_cP6oZVE8U.

each unit of the army, there were soldiers in charge of smoking those hands to keep them well, not rotten, thus being able, even after some time, to take them to the officers, to prove that all the ammunitions had been used properly.

All attempts to report those crimes to any Institution or International Tribunal, including The Hague's International Court of Justice (ICJ), have failed. In addition, Leopold II ordered to destroy all the documentation concerning his activity in Congo.

In 1908, Congo became a colony of Belgium and the country offered the sovereign 50 million francs as a sign of gratitude. Leopold II died the following year but was contested during his funeral procession.

Despite Leopold II's actions that amount to black holocaust, Belgium continues to erect statues of him, representing him as a great civilizer and benefactor.

Antwerp was the arrival point of the Congolese rubber. According to legend, the name of the city derives from the fight between a Roman soldier and a giant who cut off hands. Well, in Antwerp there is never any reference to the connection between the symbol of the city and the habit of cutting off hands in Congo. It is as if all the crimes committed in Congo have been forgotten or, worse, never happened.

This is even more unbearable nowadays because the British, in addition to apologizing for the slave trade with the United States of America, both through their Government (Tony Blair) and the Anglican Church⁴ in 2007, in that same year created the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool.⁵

In 2008, on 9 September, in Brussels the equestrian statue of Leopold II, responsible for the death of millions of Africans at the time of the colonization of Congo, was completely covered in red paint by the Belgian writer Théophile de Giraud.⁶ "Leopold II cannot be raised to the rank of the nation's great men," he explained. "...we believe it is unworthy of a nation to perpetuate his memory in any form that enhances him. Germany and Russia at least had the good taste of taking down the statues of Hitler and Stalin. We demand that Belgium shows self-criticism."

In 2018 Belgium reopened a Museum of Colonialism. The new Royal Museum of Africa, set up in Tervuren, near Brussels, houses over 180 thousand finds mainly from the territory corresponding to the current Democratic Republic of the Congo: mining samples, elephant skeletons, statues and jewellery made by local tribes. Absolute silence on the crimes perpetrated.

The anti-racist association Bamko-Cran requested the creation of an independent commission⁷ to establish the origin of the museum's works: "I will not set foot in that large cemetery of our ancestors who froze to death in human's zoos," observed Mireille-Tseuhi Robert, president of the association.

The Intal-Congo association argued that "no information" is provided to visitors of the museum on the exploitation of African resources and labour in the past by Brussels officials. According to the organization, moreover, the natives are described as "inferior" compared to the European colonizers. Paula Polanco, an NGO's exponent, said that "It is unacceptable for a cultural institution to provide people with a distorted view of history. This museum clearly aims to conceal the atrocities committed by Belgian sovereigns against the indigenous people. Brussels's authorities continue to relegate to oblivion the victims of the country's colonial past. The latter have not yet had justice, while those responsible for atrocities and slavery are celebrated as national heroes."

The opening of the museum was attended by Belgian Vice-Prime Minister Alexander DeCroo, who presented the event as a "manifestation of great patriotic pride".

We therefore believe that, on the initiative of the Human Rights Council, the recognition of the Black Holocaust carried out during Leopold II times should start. It is a Holocaust that

⁴ <https://youtu.be/rHztAPemqNk>.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Slavery_Museum.

⁶ <https://www.thebulletin.be/brussels-cancels-homage-leopold-ii-amid-protest>.

⁷ <https://www.modernghana.com/news/898611/will-belgium-hear-the-call-for-restitution-of-loot.html>.

even the institutions of the European Union and the European Parliament present in Belgium, and precisely in Brussels, cannot ignore in the name and on behalf of the European citizens of which they are representatives.

Even if an ad hoc international day for its commemoration could be found or created, we would like to suggest that the current international anniversary of the Memorial Day on January 27 could be the ideal date, especially for the further anti-racial teaching that would ensue: it would be a Day in which the Jewish White and the African Black Holocausts are both commemorated, at the same time.

Certainly, to some African exponents it may seem strange that an Italian organization brings the issue of the black holocaust vigorously to the international attention but it must be said that our NGO for many years has had among its members the greatest nonviolent man of the European history, the European Gandhi Marco Pannella. Our NGO was also a constituent of the PRNTT - Transnational Non-violent Radical Party and Transparty - an NGO with general consultative status at the United Nations' ECOSOC, which had as its Secretary, from 2011 to 2016, a Malian lawyer: Demba Traore.
