

Press Release

#ZacTAX Campaign launched in New York

#ZacTAX campaign launched by ecumenical organisations at United Nations, New York

(July 11, 2019, New York) Over 50 people participated in the launch of the #ZacTAX campaign, including the permanent observer of the CARICOM to the United Nations (UN), members of the Nigerian delegation and many from civil society movements and church groups. The Zacchaeus Tax Campaign is a further piece of work by the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and Council for World Mission's joint project on creating a New International Financial and Economic Architecture.

Held under the auspices of the UN High-level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals and co-organised by the aforementioned organisations together with Lutheran World Federation and the United Methodist Church, the launch was preceded by a panel of commentators, moderated by Athena Peralta of the WCC. "Tax justice is an important and practical means of tackling inequality – which are at levels not seen since the 19th century – and making reparation for the legacies of slavery and ecological devastation, especially climate change-related loss and damage," she said. The 2019 HLPF is reviewing several SDGs including SDG 10 (reduce inequality) and SDG 13 (take urgent action on climate change).

Dr Manuel Montes, permanent observer of the South Centre to the UN and a member of the Ecumenical Panel on a NIFEA, gave a historical critique of economic inequalities and ecological crisis of the world today, noting that the current tax system is in many ways serving to re-colonise many countries in the global South.

Rev Dr Suzanne Matala of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation addressed the launch from the Zambian context, stating that tax justice is a matter of life and death. Despite being resource-rich, many Zambians are deeply impoverished, as many MNCs avoid and evade paying taxes on their mining operations in the country. The lost revenues could have been used to fund hospitals and schools.

James Henry of the Tax Justice Network USA, reminded the audience that churches have been instrumental in the past for bringing a more just economy, confronting invested economic power and its exploitation of others. He called on Churches to organize events, especially against off shore tax havens.

Prof Verene Shepherd, of the University of the West Indies Center for Reparations Research, traced the racist exploitation of the Caribbean in the colonial and post emancipation period. She shared the CARICOM Ten-point Plan for Reparatory Justice which culminates in a call for debt cancellation.

Dr Iva Carruthers of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference charged the Churches to embroil themselves in the struggle for justice, and called for churches especially to make reparation for their complicity in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, for racism and persistent economic exploitation of people of African descent.

Rev Philip Peacock of the WCRC and Rev Dr Peter Cruchley of CWM set the calls of the campaign in the context of the Zacchaeus story in the bible, with its vision of a tax system which brings reparation and restoration, and invited those hearing the calls to believe that being as big as someone small can be the beginnings of deep and wide spread change.

Specific Calls of the Zacchaeus Tax Campaign

Calls for Tax Justice

- **We call for the enactment of progressive wealth taxes at global and national levels to curb the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of an increasingly powerful few, hand-in-hand with increased public spending to stamp out poverty.**
- **We demand for a stop to tax evasion and avoidance by multinational corporations (MNCs) and affluent individuals.**
- **We urgently call for progressive carbon and pollution taxes at different levels to protect our only planetary home.**
- **We call for the immediate implementation of a financial transaction tax on trade in equities, bonds, currencies and derivatives to curb harmful speculative activities.**

Calls for Reparation

- **Midway through the International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015–2024, we call for the establishment from taxation of an Enslavement Reparation Fund overseen by a Global Commission for Reparatory Justice.**
- **We demand for debt cancellation as a further measure to bring reparation and restoration to nations impoverished by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and struggling with the impacts of runaway climate change.**

Calls to the Churches

- **We call on churches to discern and study the issues around just taxation and reparation for slavery and ecological debt through the lens of the covenantal relationships that God calls us into with each other and the earth.**
- **We urge for creative and prophetic readings of the Zacchaeus story in Luke 19: 1-10.**
- **We encourage churches to join the Zacchaeus campaign and lobby and advocate with national governments and global financial and economic institutions for tax and reparative justice.**

- **Finally, we call on churches to organise their finances in line with Zacchaeus principles for just taxation, sharing of resources and reparation for historical injustice.**