

# **Report of the African Transitional Justice Research Coalition Meeting**

**Cape Town, South Africa | 24–25 July 2025**

**Rapporteurs: Rutendo Nyaku, Anastasia Solomons and Luvano Ntuli.**

## **Executive Summary**

Over two days, participants from across the continent and beyond considered how to sustain and/or re-strategise the pursuit of justice in an era of democratic backsliding, authoritarian consolidation, historical denialism, contested and shrinking civic space, and new forms of political violence. A shared concern was the way transitional justice has remained tethered to the past, while political violence in Africa increasingly emerges and changes form in the present around elections, protests, and economic policies. In the words of a participant: “Injustice wears new clothes”.

The meeting highlighted four major insights. First, transitional justice must evolve to address ongoing harms, not only historic ones. Second, memory work is never confined to the past, but is a dynamic force that shapes the present and future. The angered responses of youth movements to historical legacies of violence are thus a central tenet of memory-work. Third, civic space is under deliberate attack, as anti-rights actors capture institutions, laws, and digital platforms to control narratives and silence dissent. Finally, the AUTJP remains a powerful tool if civil society can mobilise its provisions to demand both accountability and economic justice.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Advance Real-Time Justice**

Justice initiatives need to be strengthened to ensure that the documentation of human rights violations is translated into action.

Recommendations:

- Establish a Rapid Response Roster of trusted African practitioners and human rights defenders.
- Support the development of country-specific Documentation Teams to be deployed at flashpoints to collect timely, verifiable evidence of abuses.

### **2. Broaden and Deepen Memory Work**

Memory initiatives should achieve both breadth and depth and make historical inquiry accessible to new generations.

Recommendations:

- Foster partnerships between national archives, museums, and community-led memory workers.
- Promote open access to public records with independent oversight to enhance trust and accountability.
- Support the development of educational materials designed to encourage young people to question and contribute to collective memory projects.

### **3. Strengthen Civil Society Infrastructure**

Civil society requires stability and support to sustain advocacy efforts. A resilient ecosystem should link local initiatives to continental goals.

Recommendations:

- Build cross-sector coalitions that connect anti-corruption, socio-economic rights, and health justice agendas.
- Invest in leadership pipelines to ensure continuity and institutional learning across leadership transitions.

#### **4. Leverage the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP)**

The AUTJP should be applied as a practical advocacy instrument, not merely a reference framework. It offers a platform to translate continental norms into measurable national action.

Recommendations:

- Translate AUTJP clauses into country-specific action plans on reparations, security-sector reform, victim inclusion, and budget allocation.
- Publish national scorecards to track progress, highlight challenges, and incentivize delivery.
- Use the AUTJP as a strategic lever for resource allocation and public accountability.

#### **5. Protection and Capacity-Building Initiatives**

Effective justice and memory work depend on safeguarding those who document and organise.

Recommendations:

- Pilot a community funding mechanism with simple, transparent reporting that shows direct links between support and outputs such as educational modules produced.

#### **6. Policy Translation**

Policy translation ensures that continental frameworks influence real fiscal and administrative choices at the national level.

Actions:

- Select two focus countries where opportunities for reform currently exist.
- Prepare AUTJP-to-budget notes identifying three fiscal decisions that could advance reparations or victim support during the current budget cycle.
- Secure time-bound commitments where immediate reform is not feasible, enabling verification and follow-up.

#### **7. Database Initiative**

It is important to create a dedicated database to consolidate documentation, memory and policy-tracking efforts on the continent.

Proposed Steps:

- Establish a small working group to develop a feasibility and sustainability plan.
- Identify resourcing options, including shared hosting arrangements and potential data management partners.
- Determine whether the database will form part of this programme's implementation phase or be advanced as a standalone domestic project in 2026.

## Introduction

Proceedings began by situating transitional justice within today's turbulent context. Participants reflected on how, despite three decades of mechanisms such as truth commissions, commissions of inquiry, and criminal prosecutions, the goals of justice, peace, and inclusion remain fragile. One contributor observed that the space for human rights and memory work is being squeezed by authoritarian governments and the rise of disinformation, making it imperative to defend the hard-won ground. Transitional Justice is a war. It demands that human rights practitioners, scholars, and networks need to fight for it.

Reflections on the evolving nature of political violence heightened the sense of urgency. Transitional justice has often been built to respond to the grand abuses of authoritarian regimes or civil wars, bounded by neat timelines and historic events. Yet, as several speakers noted, violence today is less spectacular but more chronic. It emerges during moments that are supposed to symbolise democratic vitality, such as elections and protests. Killings, disappearances, and harassment of activists have become recurring features of political life in countries once seen as stable. The certification of flawed elections as "free and fair" only deepens disillusionment, while new forms of lawfare—using terrorism charges or constitutional provisions to silence dissent—reveal how institutions themselves are being captured and repurposed to entrench repression.

Memory work was framed as equally urgent. Rather than being confined to history, memory lives in the present and has consequences for the future. As one participant argued, memory is "a long past, a real present, and a future," meaning it is not static but constantly shifting with the present needs of survivors and communities. This recognition calls for memorialisation that is dynamic, participatory, and resistant to state control. Case studies such as Zimbabwe's Gukurahundi, South Africa's post-apartheid commemorations, and grassroots memorial initiatives in northern Uganda showed how memory can either entrench injustice or lay the groundwork for transformation. The afterlives of violence (post-memory)—such as xenophobic attacks or intergenerational trauma—were understood as unfinished business of history, requiring creative approaches through education, film, museums, and oral traditions.

Civic space emerged as another crucial concern. Several participants described how anti-rights actors are deliberately capturing the very tools that were meant to advance democracy: the courts, the law, and digital platforms. Online spaces, once seen as offering freedom to organise, are now flooded with misinformation, disinformation campaigns, and propaganda. Civil society organisations that were previously independent are being constrained by financial dependencies and political pressures. This dynamic has left activists in a precarious position, yet also sparked conversations about new models of sustainability. Proposals such as community philanthropy, stronger coalitions, and leadership pipelines highlighted the ingenuity of African civil society in resisting authoritarian capture.

Finally, the AUTJP was presented not as an abstract policy but as a living instrument that can connect transitional justice to economic justice. Its emphasis on sustainable peace, justice, and democratic order gives civil society a framework through which to demand tangible reforms—land redistribution, reparations, and social protection—that go beyond symbolic recognition. The AUTJP's relevance lies in its ability to bridge questions of memory and accountability with the structural inequalities that continue to fuel conflict across the continent.

Taken together, these reflections situated the meeting within a much broader struggle that is part of a continental reckoning with how justice must adapt in an era of democratic fragility, contested memory, shrinking civic space, and persistent inequality.



From left to right: Dr Aaron Weah, Lino Owor Ogora, Allan Ngari and Ssetu Holomisa.

## Thematic Areas

### Political Violence in New Guises

Several participants described political violence as the most urgent and unsettling reality confronting transitional justice today. It is a testament to the fact that political violence cannot be solely relegated to the past. These legacies of violence permeate the present-day, albeit, in new forms.

Transitional Justice can be critiqued on the basis that its response to political violence is too narrow. Traditionally, transitional justice has been imagined as a tool to respond to the extraordinary violence of wars, coups, and authoritarian regimes. Its mechanisms — truth commissions, prosecutions, or reparations — were designed to address past atrocities, confined within fixed timeframes. Yet as one speaker reflected, this framing no longer holds: “Last year alone, on the African continent, we had nineteen elections, and in every one of them there was political violence.” The problem, then, is not only historical. Violence today emerges repeatedly in moments meant to symbolise democracy itself. It is spurred by a captured memory of the liberation.

The concern expressed by many was that transitional justice frameworks have not kept pace with these shifts. Where past violence could be investigated after peace agreements or regime change, the contemporary picture is far more complex. The harms take place in real time, often through state institutions that are themselves supposed to protect rights. Protesters are met with lethal

force. Activists were forcibly disappeared. Opposition figures are harassed under the guise of legality. One participant described this trend as “lawfare,” where regimes use the courts and the language of legality to criminalise dissent. In Kenya, for example, terrorism charges have been laid against activists whose work had little to do with terrorism at all. Such practices expose the paradox of institutions designed to deliver justice being repurposed to entrench repression.

Concrete illustrations were raised throughout the discussion. Kenya’s 2024–2025 tax protests were mentioned as a vivid case. Demonstrations against unpopular economic policies, led largely by young people, were met with excessive police violence. The deaths of these protestors highlighted how violence is no longer limited to marginalised or minority groups, but increasingly affects a broader spectrum of society, including the middle classes who had once been assumed to be shielded from state brutality. Elsewhere, in Uganda, the passing of discriminatory laws targeting LGBTQ+ communities was seen as another example of how identity-based exclusion is used to consolidate political power, shifting public attention away from deeper structural failures.

In South Africa, contributors traced a pattern where public-order policing and post-crisis commissions move in tandem, yet rarely settle the underlying questions of accountability. One participant recalled how major episodes of unrest have historically been followed by panels and inquiries that establish important truths, but seldom deliver justice at scale. The unfortunate reality is that the politics of the day determines the prioritised truth. South Africa has “become very good at producing commissions,” another observed, listing inquiries from farm abuses to the July 2021 unrest, only to note that these mechanisms “fall far short of delivering justice,” especially where structural violence sits at the centre of the problem. It was further mentioned that commissions of inquiry are created by politicians to find themselves guilt-free. Apolitical truth commissions are a myth. However, the lesson drawn was not to abandon inquiries, but to recognise their limits and pair them with present-tense oversight: independent monitoring of protests, early documentation of force, and citizen complaint pathways that bite before the next crisis. Participants noted the need for commissions to remain rooted in grassroots communities and not become tools for ruling elites. In short, the task is to prevent the cycle in which violence occurs, a commission is formed, findings are tabled, and the same system of violence resets with little material change.

Turning to Mozambique, the discussion emphasised how labels can obscure local dynamics. A contributor cautioned against reducing all militant activity to a single storyline. Armed groups that operate inland behave differently from those along the coast, and blanket narratives miss the local grievances that allow violence to take root. What looks like a monolith from a distance is, up close, a web of economic marginalisation, community protection rackets, fear, and opportunism. The point was not to excuse violence, but to diagnose it correctly: “there are underlying factors that allow these violent groups to emerge,” and community responses have been “building up since 2017,” including mob justice and protest violence when formal remedies fail. The implication is practical. Responses that rely only on securitised tactics will struggle; they must be coupled with measures that address livelihoods, inclusion, and credible grievance channels so that communities do not see violence as their only lever.

Across both cases, speakers tied the examples back to the core concern of the session: the use of law to criminalise dissent. In South Africa, protest policing sits within a broader trend of “legalising” political disputes; in Mozambique, the absence of trusted legal and administrative

remedies gives rise to extra-legal forms of order. Either way, the law is not a neutral backdrop. It is part of the conflict ecosystem. That is why the group's mitigation proposals returned to similar anchors: early-response documentation, independent protest monitoring, safeguards for journalists, and fast, public remedies when force is misused; parallel investments in community-led security dialogues, youth employment pathways, and local mediation so that the first resort is not the street or the gun. Where possible, participants suggested using the AUTJP as leverage to tie these actions to state obligations, so advocacy is not framed as a moral plea but as implementation of existing commitments.

The implications of these developments are profound. First, they erode trust in electoral processes and political institutions. When elections certified as "free and fair" are simultaneously remembered as episodes of bloodshed, the legitimacy of democracy itself comes into question. Second, the chronic and recurring nature of the violence exposes the inadequacy of transitional justice models built for exceptional episodes of atrocity. Finally, they reveal a dangerous entanglement of law and politics, in which courts and constitutions can be manipulated as instruments of repression rather than protection.

Mitigating these concerns requires both conceptual and practical shifts. Several participants suggested that transitional justice must expand its lens beyond backward-looking mechanisms. It must develop tools to monitor, document, and respond to violence as it unfolds in contemporary democratic life. Early-response documentation units were suggested as one way to track killings, disappearances, and harassment during elections or protests, creating records that can be used to demand accountability. Civil society also has a role in reframing the language of transitional justice, pressing for recognition that structural violence, economic inequality, and identity-based exclusion are not side issues but central drivers of conflict.

At the same time, there were calls to resist the over-legalisation of justice. One speaker argued that focusing exclusively on criminal prosecutions or commissions of inquiry narrows the field, leaving little space to address systemic or everyday violence. Broader approaches, including community-based monitoring, citizen oversight mechanisms, and the use of continental frameworks such as the AUTJP, were proposed as ways of holding governments accountable in the present rather than waiting for historical reckonings.

The conversation on political violence highlighted that transitional justice in Africa must now contend with the paradox of democracies that produce violence while claiming legitimacy. It is not only about how societies recover from past conflicts, but also about how they prevent and confront ongoing harm. The challenge moving forward is to build justice frameworks that are as agile and persistent as the forms of violence they are meant to confront.



Allan Ngari and Dzikamai Bere in conversation about emerging forms of political violence - “Injustice wears new clothes”.

## **Memory Across Past, Present, and Future**

The meeting turned to the contested terrain of memory. Participants challenged the tendency to treat memory as static or time-bound. As one contributor put it, “memory has a long past, a real present, and a future.” This observation resonated strongly when the film *Matabeleland* was screened, showing how unacknowledged atrocities from the 1980s still haunt families today. The film followed one man’s decades-long search for a dignified burial for his father, killed during the massacres, and captured how grief, silence, and trauma endure across generations. It was a stark reminder that when states leave histories unresolved, the burden does not fade — it becomes heavier with time.

Speakers stressed that transitional justice has too often confined memory to a closed chapter of the past — as if history could be documented, published in a report, and set aside. Yet, communities live with the consequences of violence long after commissions and courts have

completed their work. They inherit trauma, reinterpret events, and pass them on. Memory, therefore, is not simply historical fact; it is a dynamic and contested process through which people make sense of their place in the present and their hopes for the future.

The first concern raised was the state's tendency to dominate narratives. Museums, monuments, and archives can serve as tools of education, but they can also be instruments of selective remembering, narrowing public understanding to what is politically expedient. The second concern was access: archives are often closed or heavily restricted, which denies survivors and scholars the ability to interrogate official accounts. A third concern was intergenerational transmission. Without deliberate efforts to connect youth to the legacies of past violence, younger generations risk inheriting only fragments — or worse, silence. As one participant noted, memory work “is in the future” as much as it is about the past.

South Africa was discussed as both a success and a warning. Post-apartheid museums and memorials have helped to educate the public and dignify victims, yet their impact is limited when unaccompanied by material justice. Commissions of inquiry, too, have surfaced truths about episodes such as the Marikana massacre or the July 2021 unrest, but have not been matched with meaningful redress, leaving wounds open. The implication is that memory without accountability risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

By contrast, northern Uganda offered an example of memory led from below. Communities there created their own memorialisation centres, reclaiming agency over how their histories were told. Instead of waiting for the state to legislate or approve, they gathered stories, built spaces, and marked sites of violence themselves. Civil society organisations later came alongside these projects, supporting them without co-opting them. This community-driven approach ensured that plural memories were preserved, not just those sanctioned by the government.

Other interventions reminded the group that memory is not always visible. In places such as Liberia and Mozambique, communal dreams, spiritual practices, and unmarked sites continue to carry meaning. These invisible or intangible forms of remembrance may not appear in formal reports but are deeply embedded in local life, shaping how communities interpret justice and belonging.

The implications of these examples are far-reaching. When memory is monopolised by the state, it risks silencing survivors and producing distorted histories. When it is left unresolved, trauma festers and resurfaces as grievance or renewed violence. When archives are closed or bureaucratised, societies lose their ability to learn and self-correct. And when younger generations are not engaged, entire histories risk being forgotten or trivialised.

Speakers proposed several strategies. First, democratise memory work by privileging community-led initiatives and ensuring plural voices are heard. Second, design for transmission, not just preservation: embed memory in school curricula, youth programmes, and creative projects like film, theatre, and digital storytelling. Third, expand access to archives and protect independent repositories that safeguard testimonies. Fourth, link memorialisation to material justice, recognising that true remembrance requires tangible change — reparations, scholarships, land reform, and services that honour survivors. Finally, guard against the capture of memory by monitoring official commemorations and producing counter-archives when necessary.

The session on memory across past, present and future re-framed memory as a living civic infrastructure. It is simultaneously about recording the past whilst shaping how societies understand themselves now and chart their futures. When memory is open, plural, and linked to justice, it can heal and build trust. When it is narrow or captured, it becomes another tool of power.



Dr. Thapelo Teele, Sesetu Holomisa and Prof. Nicki Rousseau facilitating a panel discussion on memory-work.

### **Civil Society and Shrinking Civic Space**

Across the continent, civic space is being squeezed—sometimes slowly, through bureaucratic controls, and sometimes abruptly, through raids, arrests, and sudden bans. Participants described this not as an abstract trend but as a lived reality, shaping the daily work of civil society organisations (CSOs), activists, and community-based initiatives.

At the heart of these pressures is a growing tendency of African states—often under the banner of national security or sovereignty—to impose restrictions on CSOs. These restrictions range from new laws regulating foreign funding, to surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and limitations on freedom of assembly. Speakers were quick to note that this is not unique to Africa, but part of a global wave of authoritarian consolidation, where governments increasingly treat independent civil society as a threat rather than a partner.

Opening the session, one speaker raised the questions necessary to evaluate the state of CSOs in Africa today as a way to frame the discussion and the paths forward. The questions raised were:

- How can CSOs maintain credibility in contexts where governments delegitimise them as “foreign agents”?
- What strategies ensure accountability to local communities, rather than just to donors?
- How can movements avoid fragmentation and find common ground when pressure intensifies?
- Should civil society rethink the balance between advocacy and service delivery in order to survive in hostile environments?

Upon raising these questions, speakers turned to discuss the current concerns emerging in the CSO space. First was the erosion of trust between governments and CSOs, creating adversarial rather than cooperative relationships. Second, the financial fragility of many organisations makes them vulnerable to state co-option or donor dependency, raising questions about sustainability and accountability. Third, the targeting of individual activists—including harassment, imprisonment, or even enforced disappearances—was highlighted as not only silencing dissent but also intimidating communities at large.

As one participant noted, *“civil society is asked to fill the governance gaps that the state leaves behind, but the very act of stepping into that space is then criminalised.”* This paradox showed the structural challenge CSOs face in trying to hold governments accountable while remaining legal and legitimate in the eyes of the state.

Speakers cited examples across the continent to show how these dynamics play out. In Tanzania, restrictive NGO laws have been used to curtail advocacy around sensitive issues such as gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights, and electoral monitoring. In Uganda, the suspension of NGOs in 2021—including prominent human rights organisations—demonstrated how state power can swiftly dismantle hard-won civil society infrastructure. In Zimbabwe, the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Bill has been widely criticised as a tool to stifle dissent, by requiring onerous registration and reporting requirements that could criminalise unregistered activity.

At the same time, speakers pointed to more subtle forms of repression: in Kenya, the overregulation of foreign funding has created a climate of fear that discourages bold advocacy, while in Ethiopia, local CSOs often find themselves caught between government suspicion and donor agendas that may not always align with community priorities.

These pressures reflect a deeper political economy. Many states fear that civil society activism—particularly around elections, corruption, and human rights—could destabilise fragile ruling coalitions or expose governance failures. For governments dependent on foreign aid, CSOs are sometimes portrayed as conduits for external interference. The result is a narrowing of legitimate civic space, leaving communities without trusted intermediaries to voice concerns.

The implications are far-reaching: when civic space closes, accountability weakens, trust in institutions erodes, and communities become more vulnerable to violence or exploitation.

Moreover, the silencing of local organisations undermines the very international commitments African states have signed on to—whether in the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights or the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite these challenges, speakers identified strategies to navigate and resist repression. Some organisations are experimenting with hybrid models that combine service delivery with advocacy, thereby building legitimacy while continuing to push for accountability. Others are investing in digital tools and diaspora networks to maintain visibility even when physically constrained. Community-based initiatives—especially those led by women and youth—were highlighted as more resilient, precisely because they are rooted in local trust rather than external funding.

Importantly, several participants argued that international partners need to rethink their support: moving away from short-term project cycles towards long-term capacity-building, and recognising the importance of funding informal or grassroots actors who may not fit traditional donor templates. As one contributor stressed, *“our survival depends not only on resisting the state, but on re-imagining partnerships that are responsive to African realities.”*

The discussion closed with a recognition that civil society remains indispensable for Africa’s democratic and developmental futures. But unless both states and international partners shift their approach—towards enabling rather than constraining—CSOs will continue to operate in survival mode, limiting their transformative potential.

## **The AUTJP as Leverage for Economic Justice**

### **The African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP)**

The conversation on the AUTJP unfolded as both hopeful and sobering. Participants recognised that, on paper, the Policy offers an ambitious and uniquely African framework for addressing legacies of conflict, authoritarianism, and exclusion. Its significance lies in shifting transitional justice from ad hoc, donor-driven initiatives to a continental agenda that recognises the diverse realities of African states. Yet, as one speaker warned, *“a policy is only as alive as the will to use it.”*

The context for this discussion was the paradox of Africa’s policy landscape. While the AU has developed a suite of progressive instruments—from the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance to the AUTJP—implementation lags behind. Many participants expressed concern that states have been quick to adopt the language of transitional justice but slow to domesticate it, often preferring selective application to shield ruling elites from accountability. This “gap between norms and practice” was a recurrent theme, with some suggesting that the AUTJP risks becoming another symbolic instrument unless it is translated into concrete national processes.

Examples from across the continent brought these concerns into sharper relief. In The Gambia, for instance, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) drew heavily on AU principles in its mandate to investigate Yahya Jammeh’s 22-year rule. The TRRC became a national and international reference point for truth-seeking, especially in its public hearings and its broad inclusion of victims’ voices. Yet its work exposed the limitations of the AUTJP as a

continental framework when political will waned. While the Commission produced a far-reaching set of recommendations, the Gambian government resisted key proposals—particularly those touching on prosecutions and security sector reform. The result was a process that generated momentum but stalled at the point of hardest decisions. Participants saw this as an emblematic case of how the AUTJP can inspire ambitious frameworks but cannot compel states to act against entrenched interests.

A different trajectory emerged in Côte d’Ivoire, where the AUTJP became a tool of leverage for civil society rather than a shield for government. After the 2010–2011 post-election crisis, the state created a Commission for Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation. Its early years were marred by accusations of exclusion and political bias, with victims’ groups lamenting their marginalisation. Civic actors subsequently invoked the AUTJP to demand stronger recognition of victims’ rights and broader accountability mechanisms, arguing that the Policy’s principles obliged the Ivorian government to go further. This advocacy gradually reshaped the national conversation and forced a more inclusive approach to reparations. Although implementation remains uneven, the case illustrated how communities and civic organisations can appropriate the AUTJP from below, using it as a normative anchor to pressure governments and international actors alike.

The conversation also explored the dangers of instrumentalising transitional justice. Some participants worried that governments invoke the AUTJP in donor conferences and international forums as evidence of reform, while domestically undermining the very principles it enshrines. This dynamic, they noted, risks eroding public trust in both continental and national institutions. As one contributor remarked, “if transitional justice is spoken of only in Addis or Geneva, but not in Banjul, Juba, or Abidjan, then it is justice in name only.”

Still, the debate was not purely critical. Speakers pointed to areas of innovation and resilience. Community-based justice initiatives in northern Uganda, for example, have begun to draw legitimacy from linking their work to continental policy frameworks, showing how local ownership can anchor the AUTJP in lived realities. The Gambian and Ivorian experiences, though very different, demonstrated this point: where governments resist, civil society can creatively deploy the AUTJP to demand accountability and shape national processes.

Looking ahead, participants stressed that the future of the AUTJP depends on three interlocking elements: political commitment at the highest levels, institutional capacity at the AU and RECs to follow through, and grassroots ownership to keep the Policy grounded in real communities. Without this triangulation, the Policy risks fading into the background of Africa’s crowded policy landscape. But with it, the AUTJP could become, as one participant phrased it, “a living bridge between Africa’s painful pasts and its unfinished futures.”



From left to right: Rutendo Nyaku, Associate Professor Helen Scanlon, Lino Owor Ogora and Annah Moyo.

## **Conclusions and Ways Forward**

Across the two days, participants acknowledged that harm unfolds around elections and policy disputes, not only in the aftermath of wars. Memory is a civic resource that lives in classrooms, archives, and kitchens, not only in museums. Civil society is asked to carry more of the load at the very moment its room to act is being narrowed. The African Union Transitional Justice Policy offers a credible frame for action, yet it will matter only to the extent that people and institutions use it to shape budgets, laws, and daily practice.

The cross-cutting findings trace the same arc. First, there is a time lag between the design of many justice tools and the speed at which repression and disinformation now move. Violence appears as crowd control today, court summons tomorrow, and a rewritten narrative by the weekend. Second, narrative control has become a field of struggle. States invest in official memory and procedural language, while communities defend plural accounts through film, oral history, and local memorials. Third, the rules of the game are being adjusted while we play. Law and administrative processes are repurposed to manage dissent, which creates the appearance of order while draining institutions of public trust. Finally, every conversation returned to material life. Without remedies that touch land, livelihoods, education, and social protection, reconciliation risks sounding like a ceremony rather than a settlement.

Several thorny concerns were raised. The first is legitimacy. Elections that are celebrated by observers can be remembered by citizens as days of fear. That gap erodes confidence and feeds a sense that rules exist for the powerful. The second is capture. From police oversight to archival

access, the tools that should support accountability are being bent toward control. The third is transmission. Younger people inherit stories at a distance; if we do not help them make sense of those stories, silence fills the gap and cynicism grows. The fourth is sustainability. Organisations that stand between citizens and the state depend on funding cycles that are short, brittle, and easily politicised. The final concern is scale. Isolated projects can heal, but they struggle to change incentives without coordination at national and regional levels.

Even so, the meeting did not dwell on diagnosis alone. Participants spoke about practice that works, and the ways in which it can be enlarged. Documentation that begins the moment a protest is called can become evidence that shapes prosecutions, parliamentary inquiries, and policy fixes. Memorialisation that starts in the community and then meets the museum protects plural voices while opening space for national learning. Legal strategy that anticipates repression can move faster than case-by-case defence, especially when allied to regional norms in the AUTJP. Funding that combines small local contributions with flexible grants reduces exposure to political headwinds. Education that invites students to co-create history through podcasts, theatre, and neighbourhood archives makes memory usable rather than static.

There are also questions we should carry forward, not as rhetorical flourishes but as a working brief. What does legitimacy look like when institutions are formally compliant yet substantively feared, and how will we measure it between elections rather than only on polling day? How do we protect archives for public use while safeguarding those who speak into them, and when must civil repositories lead while state archives catch up? Where is the line between using law to defend rights and becoming trapped in a legal theatre that delays repair, and who decides when to change forums? What mix of services and advocacy sustains organisations in hostile climates, and how will communities themselves judge whether those organisations still deserve their trust? When we say reparations, what precise fiscal choices will translate principle into food, school fees, land titles, and clinics?

The ways forward flow from these questions. In the near term, justice work must move in real time. That means early-response documentation teams around civic flashpoints, a rapid legal roster that can challenge abusive provisions before they settle into precedent, and a public reporting rhythm that makes misuse of force costly in the moment. Memory work needs breadth and depth at once. That means a partnership between national institutions and community-led centres, open access to public records with independent oversight, and school-ready materials that invite young people to test, question, and contribute. Civil society needs ballast. That means piloting community philanthropy with transparent micro-ledgers, building coalitions that link anti-corruption, socio-economic rights, and health justice, and investing in leadership pipelines so that transitions do not erase gains. The AUTJP should be treated as leverage, not literature. That means translating its clauses into country-specific asks on reparations, security-sector reform, victim inclusion, and budget choices, then publishing scorecards that track delivery.

For the Memory and Democracy Hubs, three streams of work can be advanced at once without sacrificing quality. The first is evidence and narrative. Convene a small, mixed team to produce a rolling country brief that pairs incident monitoring with memory mapping. Publish short, carefully sourced notes every two weeks that document protest-related harm, narrative manipulation, and the status of key archives and memorial spaces. Pair each note with a human

story gathered through ethical, consent-driven interviews, and with a classroom-ready sidebar that teachers can use the same month.

The second stream is protection and practice. It was suggested that two weekend clinics be created, bringing together organisers, lawyers, archivists, and teachers. The first clinic should focus on digital and physical security for documentation, rapid legal response, and protocols for protecting witnesses. The second should focus on participatory archiving, school partnerships, and community-led memorial design. Record the sessions, distil them into checklists, and circulate them to partners who could not attend in person. At the same time, pilot a modest community funding mechanism with simple reporting so contributors can see the direct link between their support and specific outputs, whether that is a legal brief filed, a memorial site refurbished, or a school module rolled out.

The third stream is policy translation. It was suggested two countries be selected where windows for reform are open. In each, a short AUTJP-to-budget note should be prepared that identifies three precise decisions within the current fiscal cycle that would move reparations or victim services from aspiration to allocation. Local partners should present these notes to parliamentary committees, budget offices, and relevant ministries. It is important to ask for a dated commitment and a published milestone so that progress can be verified.

This approach can deliver measurable outcomes that matter to funders and to the people who trusted us with their stories: a public evidence base that shifts costly narratives, a stronger safety net for those who document and organise, and one or two concrete policy moves that convert continental principles into national decisions. The larger aim is simple. A society that remembers honestly and protects those who speak up is a society that is harder to frighten or divide.