

Language as Reparative Practice

Paper 6 — Britain Yearly Meeting Reparation Working Group — Summary

Four animating principles

Name what was done, not what people became.	Enslavement is something imposed; “slave” erases the act and fixes an identity. Process words restore humanity.
Name the crime, not the commerce.	“The trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic” centres the criminal act; “transatlantic chattel slavery” frames it as trade.
Name the living present, not the historical past.	People are not “descendants of slaves” — they are living with a legacy: inherited trauma, systemic racism, and the ongoing absence of generational wealth.
Name the frame, not just the fact.	Who sets the agenda, which language is used, whose place-names are spoken — none of this is neutral. Naming the frame opens the possibility of redistribution.

Key terms in current use

Use	Instead of	Because
Enslavement	Slavery / being a slave	Foregrounds an act done to a person, not a fixed identity
Enslaved person	Slave	Restores humanity; the condition was imposed, not intrinsic
The trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic	Transatlantic chattel slavery / the slave trade	Names the crime and its perpetrators; ‘trade’ frames atrocity as commerce
People living with a legacy of enslavement	Descendants of slaves	Captures present-tense, all-encompassing reality: trauma, racism, inequity, absence of generational wealth
Turtle Island	North America / USA, Canada, and Greenland	Translated into English and used by some Indigenous peoples of the North of the Western Hemisphere ; avoids imposing a colonial frame on the land and its peoples
Abya Yala	Latin / South America	Guna/Chibchan Indigenous name for the Southern and Central Western Hemisphere
Joint endeavour / joint enterprise	Partnership (in religious or cross-cultural contexts)	‘Partnership’ implies equality that may not yet exist; joint endeavour invites honest renegotiation
Colonial languages	English, French, Spanish, Portuguese used without comment	Acknowledges that languages of dialogue carry embedded power; names them so we can question them

Terms proposed for adoption

Proposed term	Replaces	Why
Reparative dialogue	Reconciliation / reparations conversation	Centres active repair; signals dialogue itself is part of the reparative work
Agenda-holding	Leadership / chairing	Makes visible who controls what is discussed, opening space to redistribute that power
Language-of-welcome	Common / working language	Shifts the question from efficiency to hospitality: whose language welcomes, and whose excludes?
Ministry in translation	Translated ministry / interpretation	Reframes translation as ministry: care, not administrative inconvenience
Colonial frame / colonial lens	Western / Eurocentric perspective	Explicitly names the political origin of the perspective rather than softening it to geography
Cultural assimilation and land displacement centre	Boarding school	Names the institution’s purpose: eradicate indigenous culture and free the land for colonial exploitation

This is a living document. Language will grow as we continue to listen — to people living with the legacy, to Friends across Africa, the Caribbean, Turtle Island and Abya Yala, and to the Spirit that guides us.

Key – terms agreed by RWG, terms currently under review