

Prince William and Kate's Tour Was Meant to Secure the Monarchy in the Caribbean. Instead, It's Raising New Questions About Its Future

The British royal family is facing embarrassment on the international stage this week as protests disrupt Prince William and Kate Middleton's tour of former British colonies in the Caribbean. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge began their week-long visit to Belize, Jamaica and the Bahamas March 19.

Officially, the trip was meant to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee, celebrating 70 years on the throne. Many observers say the trip was meant to persuade the three countries to keep the Queen as head of state, and not to follow Barbados, which transitioned to a republic last November. But growing calls to cut formal ties with the Queen and campaigns for slavery reparations have ignited a reckoning with the region's colonial past.

Prince William and Kate arrived in Jamaica, the second stop of their trip, on March 22. Only a day later, The Independent reported that the Jamaican government had begun the process of transitioning the island nation—which is the largest English speaking country in the Caribbean—to a republic.

The news arrived at a difficult moment for the royals. The day before the couple's arrival in the country, one hundred Jamaican academics, politicians, and cultural figures signed an open letter calling for the royal family and British government to apologize and pay reparations for subjecting the island to colonial rule and slavery.

"We are of the view an apology for British crimes against humanity, including but not limited to the exploitation of the indigenous people of Jamaica, the transatlantic trafficking of Africans, the enslavement of Africans, indentureship and colonialization is necessary to begin a process of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and compensation," the letter said.

The letter's signatories describe Prince William and Kate as "direct beneficiaries of the wealth accumulated by the royal family...from the trafficking and enslavement of Africans". In reference to the Queen's Jubilee, the letter reads: "We see no reason to celebrate 70 years of the ascension of your grandmother to the British throne because her leadership, and that of her predecessors, has perpetuated the greatest human rights tragedy in the history of humankind."

The group, called the Advocates Network, staged a protest March 22 outside the British High Commission in Kingston to coincide with the couple's arrival.

The following day, Prince William stopped short of an apology, instead expressing "profound sorrow" for the "appalling atrocity of slavery" during an address to Jamaica's prime minister March 23.

"Slavery was abhorrent and it never should have happened," he said. "I strongly agree with my father, the Prince of Wales, who said in Barbados last year that the appalling atrocity of slavery forever stains our history."

Events in Jamaica weren't the only controversy for the couple on their tour. They canceled their first major engagement the day before touching down in Belize, the first stop on the trip. William and Kate were due to visit a cocoa farm March 20 but locals staged a protest against the visit, objecting to the couple's plans to land their helicopter on a nearby football pitch without consultation, the Daily Mail reported.

The protests were part of a wider land dispute between indigenous communities and Flora and Fauna International (FFI), the conservation charity that William supports as patron. Locals allege that the charity controls their communal ancestral lands, lost in the colonial era, as "private property," according to the report. Demonstrators carried banners reading 'Prince William leave our land' and 'Colonial legacy of theft continues with Prince and FFI'.