Regrets, apologies and repair for Belgium’s colonial harms

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Former colonial countries appear increasingly willing to engage in processes akin to transitional justice in order to confront the legacies of their colonial past. In this blog post, Valerie Arnould discusses recent initiatives in Belgium meant to address and repair its colonial harms in Central Africa. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s independence from Belgian colonial rule, King Philippe expressed his “deepest regrets for the wounds from the past” in a letter addressed to Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi. A few days earlier, the Belgian parliament the Belgian parliament agreed to the principle of setting up a ‘truth commission’ that will investigate Belgium’s colonial past. While these initiatives could signal a genuine willingness to transform Belgium’s relations with its colonial past, this will only happen if they are not treated as expedient measures to close the door on the past but instead are mobilised as a means to commit to a profound societal transformation.

This commentary was published on the Leuven Transitional Justice Blog.

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