

Belgian King voices his regrets for atrocities in DRC, but doesn't apologize

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Kinshasa, June 10 (RHC)-- Belgium's King Philippe has expressed what he called his "deepest regrets" for Belgium's abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the colonial era.

King Philippe made the comments in Congo's capital Kinshasa during his first official trip to the country, where he was welcomed by Congo's president, Félix Tshisekedi.

But the king stopped short of a formal apology, saying: "The colonial regime was based on exploitation and domination. It was a regime of unequal and unjustifiable relationships marked by paternalism, discrimination and racism. It led to violent acts and humiliations. On my first trip to the Congo, here in front of the Congolese people and those who are still suffering from it, I wish to reaffirm my deepest regrets for these past wounds."

Congolese opposition Senator Francine Muyumba wrote in response: "[I]n the face of the crimes committed by Belgium, regrets are insufficient. We expect an apology and a promise of reparations from him. It is at this price that we will definitely turn the page."

Historians estimate that up to 10 million Congolese were killed during the first 23 years of Belgium's rule beginning in 1885, as King Leopold II ruled the Congo Free State as a personal fiefdom.

Communities that missed their rubber collection quotas were made to provide severed hands instead, and King Leopold had Congolese people imported back to Europe for his human zoo.

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