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Slavery: St. Gallen historian delivers expert opinion on criminal complaint



Fässler has been researching Switzerland's connections to colonialism and slavery for years (symbolic image) Image: stgallen24/KI

Zurich, Bern, and Solothurn should face criminal investigations for their historical ties to slavery. This is the demand of Caribbean activist Shelley Moorhead, according to Hans Fässler, a historian from St. Gallen. The St. Gallen historian is contributing an expert report. Among other things, fines of five million Swiss francs per canton are being demanded.

The accusations date back a long way: Between 1719 and 1839, the three cantons or their legal predecessors, the so-called old cantons, are said to have been involved in and profited from transatlantic slavery.

As Hans Fässler announced on September 7th, Shelley Moorhead therefore filed a criminal complaint with the Federal Prosecutor's Office in Bern on September 1st, 2026. Moorhead is represented by the Widnau-based lawyer Catherine Reiter.



Hans Fässler lives and works in St. Gallen. Image: centrogiacometti.ch

Moorhead lives in the U.S. Virgin Islands and is involved with the African-Caribbean Reparations & Resettlement Alliance (ACRRA). According to Fässler, he is demanding an investigation and fines of five million Swiss francs each from the three cantons. He is also seeking damages and compensation.

The initiative includes Fässler's historical report "Zurich, Bern, Solothurn and Slavery (1719-1839)." dated March 18, 2026. The St. Gallen historian and activist has been studying Swiss connections to colonialism and slavery for many years.



Shelley Moorhead Image: Courtesy

Since 2024, he has been working with Moorhead to investigate the historical connections of UBS's predecessor institutions. Fässler documents this on his [website](#).

The fact that Swiss communities were financially linked to the slave economy has been researched independently of the current initiative.

For example, a [study published in 2020 by the University of Zurich](#) on behalf of the city of Zurich showed that the city held shares in the British slave trading company South Sea Company in the 18th century.

Through the semi-public Leu interest commission, it also invested in Danish government bonds, which financed the slave trade in what was then the Danish Antilles. ([University of Zurich](#))

Historical analysis and legal assessment are distinct issues. Whether the Federal Prosecutor's Office will open proceedings based on the now-reported complaint has not been officially confirmed for this article. A judicial review of the current allegations is also (still) pending.

Source: <https://stgallen24.ch/articles/404292-sklaerveri-st-galler-historiker-liefert-gutachten-zu-straftanzeige>