

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 55th SESSION

Commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

27 March 2024

In her introductory remarks, **Ms Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**, paid tribute to the victims of the Sharpeville massacre who protested against apartheid and tragically lost their lives. Their activism brings hope that racial justice can indeed be achieved for all people who suffer racial discrimination.

The recent report of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights reveals that almost half of the people of African descent in the European Union still experience racial discrimination, with an increase from 39% in 2016 to 45% in 2022. A joint project by OHCHR and the Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean identified 33 indicators to measure inequalities between people of African descent and non-African descent within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the program of activities for the international decade for people of African descent as well as the Montevideo consensus.

Despite the legal and policy frameworks to combat racism and racial discrimination, many states still lack effective and comprehensive national legislation to prevent discrimination and promote inequality. She urged states to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination laws that address discrimination based on race or ethnicity, national origin, descent, age, gender, religion, disability, and sexual orientation among others as compounded and aggravated by intersectionality. Education and awareness raising also play a pivotal role in contributing to an increased understanding of the historical context and the continuing impact of racial discrimination on people of African descent.

In conclusion, the Deputy HC called for a redouble of collective efforts to advance the elaboration of the draft declaration on the promotion and the full respect of the human rights of people of African descent. Strong leadership is essential in pursuing reparatory justice.

Ms Isabelle Mamadou, Regional Coordinator for the Movement for Peace, Valencia, highlighted the fight against racism in the EU, including the **resolution (2019)** adopted by the European Parliament on the fundamental rights of people of African descent, and the **first parliamentary initiative** [in Valencia, Spain] that seeks to combat the multiple forms of discrimination suffered by women of African descent. Despite this progress, there has been little progress in redressing the damage suffered due to enslavement, the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, and colonialism. While some countries have taken small steps towards moral and economic reparations, there is no comprehensive strategy in any of the EU states that seeks to repair the economic, psychological, social, political, and cultural consequences of genocide against Black peoples. Many EU countries have Historical Memory measures that recognize victims of crimes perpetrated by totalitarian regimes and grant rights to their descendants. But they have never considered reparation measures for the descendants of the victims of enslavement.

She concluded by reporting data and figures on current human rights violations experienced by people of African descent. These serious human rights violations highlight the urgent need to address the structural causes of anti-Black racism. In this sense, the adoption of a **second International Decade for People of African Descent**, starting in 2025, represents an opportunity for UN Member States to assume the political will and moral obligation to put the experiences and demands of Afro-descendant populations at the centre of their political agendas.

Ms June Soomer, Chair-designate of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, stressed the

importance of the **International Decade for People of African Descent**, a crucial initiative in the fight against systemic racism, discrimination, xenophobia, related intolerances, and the inequality and invisibility faced by people of African descent. Effectively addressing these profound inequalities requires concerted efforts to dismantle discriminatory systems and structures, promote diversity and inclusion, and ensure equitable access to opportunities for all individuals, regardless of race or ethnicity. The International Decade also emphasizes the importance of amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and empowering them to effectively participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives, and in that way, build a more equitable and just society for all where no one is left behind.

She mentioned that the Permanent Forum attaches great importance to the drafting of a UN Declaration on the promotion, protection, and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent. It also recognizes the critical necessity of centering the International Decade on reparatory justice, recognition, and equity and the address of systemic and structural racial discrimination at the local, national, regional, and global levels. States must adopt a proactive stance, aligning their efforts with the pressing demands and aspirations of people of African descent.

Ms Mame-Fatou Niang, Associate Professor of French and Francophone Studies, and Director-Founder of the Center for Black European Studies and the Atlantic at Carnegie Mellon University, considered the **Decade International of the People of African Ancestry** [proclaimed in the UN General Assembly Resolution in 2014], a wonderful tool for awakening and raising awareness in countries around the world about these collusions between past and present. By leading countries to reopen pages of their colonial past, the Decade encouraged them to find the roots of racism, discrimination, and systemic inequalities that plague the daily lives and possibilities of Africans and people of African descent. These inequalities affect all sectors of life and link with institutions: police, justice, economy, employment, health, housing, education, but also dignity and the right to life. It promoted threads of cooperation between public authorities, civil societies, the African diaspora, and international organizations, to establish a road map towards the elimination of racial inequalities and equal rights for all.

However, since 2015 these threads have remained fragile. She further reported some of the current challenges, including weak commitment and bad will of certain states which continue to ignore, or treat them as foreign; difficulty in committing public authorities financially and on concrete actions aimed at raising awareness and proposing solutions to the historical injustices faced by people of African descent; slow or non-existent legal and political responses to multiple reports of systemic racial inequalities; and unequal power relations between the different actors.

Ms Barbara G. Reynolds, Chair of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, affirmed that despite considerable progress has been made in several areas, people of African descent continue to face structural and systemic racialized barriers in the pursuit of their human rights in virtually every country. Despite achievements in education, people of African descent are disproportionately behind in health and nutrition, housing, employment and income, access to credit, and wealth creation. Although national legislation generally recognizes the human rights of all citizens, we continue to witness the denial of justice, with men of African descent disproportionately subjected to police brutality, arrest, compromised legal proceedings, and incarceration.

She concluded that Member States should review and assess their national progress made during the Decade, taking note of the constraints and enablers; declare a new Decade for people of African descent to promulgate and support politically, financially, and technically the rights of activists and advocates for people of African descent; accelerate the completion and adoption of the Declaration on People of African descent, recognizing therein the collective nature of measures needed given the legacy of enslavement, colonialism, segregation, apartheid, and other egregious violations of rights, and including therein the right to development and the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable

environment; and take all necessary measures to secure reparatory justice for people of African descent.

Interactive dialogue

27 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries** affirmed their firm positions against all forms of racial discrimination, which is considered one of the most dangerous violations of the rights of individuals, affecting their effective participation in the societies. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance represent a denial of the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the UDHR, and that equality and non-discrimination are fundamental principles of international human rights law, despite the efforts taken by states to eliminate the phenomenon of racism. Racial discrimination not only perpetuates systemic inequalities and social divisions where they exist but also undermines the principle of human dignity, added **Iceland, GCC countries, Portugal and Bolivia** reported the adoption of many national laws and legislation against racial discrimination.

Qatar and Egypt paid attention to the tragedy of the Palestinian people and their subjection to the policy of apartheid by the Israeli occupation forces, which is based on domination, imposing restrictions, deprivation, and discrimination, and called on the international community to put an urgent end to these serious violations. The **Russian Federation** highlighted the *Russophobia* of the Baltic countries, including the persecution and imprisonment of journalists and activists expressing the interests of the Russian-speaking community.

UNICEF focused on the impact of racial discrimination and inequality experienced by children and youth of African descent on the exercise of their rights in all areas of life, including the administration of justice, law enforcement, education, development, and family life. Women and girls who are discriminated against based on gender and ethnicity are frequently subjected to violence, including conflict-related sexual violence.

Among the NGOs who took the floor, the **Legal Analysis and Research Public Union** focused on the pressing issue of the preservation of the cultural heritage of indigenous people, a cornerstone of diverse societies across the globe. Drawing on its experiences in the fight against racism, **RADDHO** believed that it is possible to isolate racism and racial discrimination in the world with the real reaffirmation of political will. **The majority of NGOs** pledged to fight against all forms of discrimination that persist across the world. They called on a new declaration that will include the effective and inclusive participation of Afro-descendant organizations and defenders; the right to reparations for enslavement; the right to development with an ethnic perspective; and communal political agency, the collective rights to cultural identity, language, religiosity, ancestral knowledge.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (27 country delegations):

Iceland, Jamaica, EU, Gambia, Qatar, Egypt, Armenia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Indonesia, Costa Rica, Malawi, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Russian Federation, Azerbaijan, Cuba, State of Palestine, US, Portugal, Türkiye, Lesotho, Belgium, Botswana, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Brazil, Sierra Leone.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (12):

International Youth and Student Movement For The United Nations, International Service for Human Rights, World Jewish Congress, Geneva pour les Droits de l'Homme formation Internationale, international federation for the protection of the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic and other minorities, Centre Zagros pour les Droits de l'Homme, African Council for the Defense of Law, Al-Ayn Social Care Foundation,

China Ethnic Minorities Association for External Exchanges, Promotion du Development, Economique et Social, GELEDES, Legal Analysis and Research Public Union.

International Organizations: UNICEF.

To watch the full meeting refer to [UN Web TV](#).