



Carlos Quesada
Director Latin America Program

1. I would like to thank Ms. Gay McDougall, UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues for organizing this Forum. Due to today's time constraints, I would like to highlight the following:
2. Racism and racial discrimination have profoundly and lastingly marked and structured every single country in the Americas. This structural racism has affected the lives of more than 190 million Afro descendants and more than 40 million indigenous people in the hemisphere in all areas of life. It has led to their underrepresentation in government; limited access to education, housing; employment; wealth; healthcare and other basic services; among others.
3. Even though there have been some advances, thanks to the perseverance and resistance of communities of victims; such as the powerful struggle of the civil rights movement and the growing political confrontation of racism in the United States; or the quiet struggle of the Afro-Latino movement once democracy was reestablished in the region in the mid-1980s; little has been changed in general to improve the conditions of these minorities in our continent.
4. Socio-economic indicators show that poverty and race or ethnicity plus violence continue to overlap in the Hemisphere; from the streets of South Central Chicago; or S.E. in Washington D.C., or the Pacific basin in Colombia to the favelas in Rio de Janeiro or the Yungas region in Bolivia.
5. The overlap between poverty, race and violence creates structural problems and it is the biggest threat for democracies in the region. Poverty, being uneducated, unemployment or having a low paying job; inadequate or no housing and being regularly subjected to violence create a cycle of marginalization and exclusion of minorities throughout the Hemisphere and particularly affects Afro-descendant youth.

6. These trends also contribute to reinforce prejudices and stereotypes; such as an association of minorities to criminality or to poor educational performance or not being worthy of a home loan or micro-credit loans.
7. The situation of Afro-descendant women is particularly worrisome; not only because they represent half of the Afro-descendant population, but because they are a vulnerable sector of society on the grounds of their sex, race and poverty.
8. Women are also the most economically affected by racism and racial discrimination. Usually they have to drop out of school (if they have the luxury of going in the first place) in order to take care of parents, brothers or sisters. They are victims of all kind of violence, verbal, physical and sexual; and usually they have to engage in informal economic activities in order to survive; in most cases with little to no help from state institutions.

Based on that I would like to make the following recommendations:

1. There has to be a public acknowledgment by governments to recognize how structural racism is the biggest obstacle to their democracies and development. Based on that recognition, governments will be able to begin overcoming and redressing the consequences of it.
2. Governments should invest in education as it is the main tool to combat racial discrimination; not only to offer education for all, but to re-educate their societies so as to acknowledge the contributions of minorities in the development of national identities.
3. Governments should implement or keep special measures and Affirmative Action Programs to ensure that minorities will have full access to economic opportunities; including loans.
4. Finally, we encourage the governments to fully implement the Durban Program of Action of 2001 (III World Conference against Racism that took place in South Africa).