

Proposal for the WGEPAD 20th session, "Leaving no one behind, people of African descent and the Sustainable Development Goals", 3-7 April 2017

Michael McEachrane (The European Network of People of African Descent),
Ornette Clennon (Research Fellow in Race and Ethnicity at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), **Robbie Shilliam** (Professor in International Relations at Queen Mary University College of London, UK)

The UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD) have done much to raise awareness on the adverse effects of enslavement and colonialism and to put reparatory justice on the political agenda. This is in line with the *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action* (DDPA) which states that “colonialism has led to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”, Africans and people of African descent “were victims of colonialism and continue to be victims of its consequences” and “that the effects and persistence of these structures and practices [of colonialism] have been among the factors contributing to lasting social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world today.”¹ As the DDPA asserts states that have contributed to enslavement, apartheid, colonialism and genocide have a moral obligation to “take appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of those practices.”²

Like no other universal human rights instrument the DDPA also affirms that the international community has a responsibility to promote the fundamental human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination within and between communities and nations.³

We would like to suggest that the WGEPAD during the next three years, together with civil society organisations and researchers – and in line with the DDPA – focus on three main objectives.

First, to raise awareness at the UN as well as internationally on the continuing adverse effects of enslavement and colonialism – including their relevance to structural racial discrimination of people of African descent around the world, police brutality and other state violence against people of African descent, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Second, to develop general guidelines and otherwise advocate for appropriate and effective international as well as national measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of enslavement and colonialism – including measures that are relevant to the SDGs.

¹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action* (DDPA), Declaration of the World Conference, Article 14 p. 17, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Durban_text_en.pdf (accessed March 27, 2017).

² Ibid, Declaration of the World Conference, Article 102 p. 38

³ Ibid, Preamble; Declaration of World Conference, Article 77 p. 32; and, Programme of Action of World Conference, Article 58 p. 66.

Third, to increase civil society involvement in the work of the WGEPAD around these objectives – especially organisations, but also researchers with relevant expertise.⁴

These three objectives can be pursued within the framework of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024 for which the General Assembly has declared that it is, “Committed to upholding human dignity and equality for the victims of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism, in particular people of African descent in the African diaspora.”⁵

I. Redressing Legacies of Enslavement and Colonialism

Around the world, Africans and people of African descent are suffering the consequences of colonialism and enslavement. It was with European colonialism and enslavement that much of today’s structural racism, denial of equality of dignity and rights of Africans and people of African descent were established. This is recognised by the *International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)*, the *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA)* as well as the official programme for the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024.⁶ Still, it is poorly recognised by European countries, other developed countries as well as former European settler colonies throughout Latin America. It is also insufficiently recognised at the UN level.

In General Recommendation 34 on people of African descent, the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) points out that, “The Committee is aware that millions of people of African descent are living in societies in which racial discrimination places them in the lowest positions in social hierarchies.”⁷ As has consistently been shown in comparative studies, this is true across Europe and the Americas.⁸ It is evident in the police brutality that the Black Lives Matter Movement in the US has highlighted in recent years and the endemic racial profiling of people of African descent by the police in Germany,

⁴ The mandate of the WGEPAD calls for, among other things, “the preparation of specific programmes of action” for people of African descent and designing “special projects, in collaboration with people of African descent, to support their initiatives at the community level and to facilitate the exchange of information and technical know-how between these populations and experts in these areas.” See WGEPAD Mandate:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Racism/WGAfricanDescent/Pages/WGEPADIndex.aspx>

⁵ See the Preamble in General Assembly Resolution 69/16, *Programme of Activities for the Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent*, adopted by the General Assembly on 18 November 2014.

⁶ For the ICERD see §17 in CERD General Recommendation 34 which calls on Member States to, “Effectively acknowledge in their policies and actions the negative effects of the wrongs occasioned on people of African descent in the past, chief among which are colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, the effects of which continue to disadvantage people of African descent today.”

⁷ CERD General Recommendation 34,

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?TreatyID=6&DocTypeID=11

⁸ Cf e.g. EU Fundamental Rights Agency, *EU-MIDIS: European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey* (Vienna: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009); Tanya K. Hernandez, *Racial Subordination in Latin America: The Role of the State, Customary Law, and the New Civil Rights Response* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Chapter 4, pp. 73-101; Edward E. Telles, *Pigmentocracies : Ethnicity, Race and Colour in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

as was recently pointed out by WGEPAD.⁹ The consistency of such structural racism against people of African descent was established with the racial hierarchy and world order of European colonialism and enslavement of African peoples. Therefore, CERD General Recommendation 34 also calls on States to, “Effectively acknowledge in their policies and actions the negative effects of the wrongs occasioned on people of African descent in the past, chief among which are colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, the effects of which continue to disadvantage people of African descent today.”¹⁰

However, such recommendations are far from being adhered to by the UN and the international community. For example, although the SDGs seek to empower the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of race; facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people;¹¹ ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance;¹² progressively improve global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation; protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers;¹³ broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance¹⁴--still, there is no recognition of how the racial discrimination, globally unequal freedom of migration, unequal access to economic and natural resources, unequal labour rights, unequal participation in institutions of global governance and the coupling of economic growth with environmental degradation may be continuations of conditions that were established with European colonialism (or imperialism more generally).

Overall, there is little recognition at the UN level and large parts of the international community of how colonialism has shaped and continue to shape the world in ways that undermine developing countries and the equality of dignity and rights of people of colour in general and Africans and people of African descent in particular – both in developing and developed countries. Given that the compounded inequities facing Africans and people of African descent largely are shaped by colonialism and enslavement, that this is a common denominator of Africans and people of African descent around the world and that recognition of this is lacking at the UN level and in the international community – not least amongst the developed countries – we find it appropriate for the WGEPAD to focus the next three years on advocacy, awareness raising and the empowerment of civil society around addressing and redressing the adverse effects of colonialism and enslavement.

⁹ Statement to the media by the UN WGEPAD, on the conclusion of its official visit to Germany, 20-27 February 2017, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21233&LangID=E#sthash.jZgeLPKG.dpuf>

¹⁰ CERD General Recommendation 34, http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?TreatyID=6&DocTypeID=11

¹¹ SDG 10, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg10>

¹² SDG 1, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg1>

¹³ SDG 8, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg8>

¹⁴ SDG 16, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

II. Recommendations

There are many ways in which this can be done and ultimately the implementation of these objectives need to be worked out in collaboration with civil society. However, here are some preliminary and cursory recommendations:

1. **Develop special projects and programmes of action to increase collaboration between WGEPAD and civil society (including “grassroots” organisations) around the stated objectives.** For example:
 - a. **A new interactive website to increase communications between the WGEPAD and civil society, enable an international network of grassroots advocates and scholars as well as various civil society projects with the objective of addressing and redressing legacies of colonialism and enslavement.** The website could also host competitions for grassroots organisations' suggestions for small S.M.A.R.T. UN funded initiatives designed to showcase change and bottom up governance in their communities.
2. **Develop written materials and general guidelines for addressing adverse effects of colonialism and enslavement – in collaboration with civil society and perhaps other relevant UN institutions such as UNESCO and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).**
 - a. **A UN report – or a shorter “handbook”, “manual” or “pamphlet” – commissioned by the WGEPAD with guidelines for how the UN, the international community, civil society and grassroots organisations can help recognise, halt and reverse the legacies of colonialism and enslavement (including in the implementation of the SDGs).** The guidelines should also include suggestions for measurable objectives that will be designed to have maximum impact on the ground in grassroots communities.
 - b. **A UN report that focuses specifically on reparatory justice.** As reparatory justice is a concept that has been referred to by the WGEPAD in recent years and is gaining increasing significance across the world including the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC) and the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) in the US and the 15 States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) – it would be useful to develop a report on how reparatory justice is relevant to the UN, the international community and civil society.
 - c. **A UN report (or even better a series of multimedia projects) with guidelines for public education on the histories and legacies of colonialism and enslavement.** This is part of the official UN programme for the International Decade for People of African Descent. For instance, paragraph 12(g) of the Programme calls on all Member States to:

Ensure that textbooks and other educational materials reflect historical facts accurately as they relate to past tragedies and atrocities, in particular slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, so as to avoid stereotypes and the distortion or falsification of these historical facts, which may lead to racism, racial

*discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including the role of respective countries therein,*¹⁵

3. **Develop partnerships with other relevant UN agencies – e.g. UNCTAD and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) – around raising awareness about and redressing the legacies of colonialism and enslavement.**
4. **Address and seek redress for how climate change and environmental degradation especially affect Africans and people of African descent and indeed are continuations of colonial injustices.** The need for climate justice has become an established idea at the UN level and is reflected in the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities.¹⁶ For instance, this sort of awareness raising could be done by:
 - a. **Engaging with the yearly United Nations climate change Conferences of the Parties (COPs).** Next conference (COP 23) will be held in Bonn, Germany, 6-17 November 2017. WGEPAD could e.g. issue public statements for the COPs and organise events at the COPs together with climate justice advocates such as the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance and others.¹⁷
 - b. **Organise side events at the High-Level Forums on SDGs.**¹⁸

This proposal is supported by,

1. **ADEFRA Roots e.v., Germany**
2. **African Empowerment Center, Denmark**
3. **Toyin Agbetu, Ligali Organisation, UK**
4. **Martin Odei Ajei, Professor of Philosophy, University of Ghana**
5. **Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, President of the Congress of Santa Barbara (KOSANBA) and Professor Emeritus of Africology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, US**
6. **Linda Bellos, OBE, Equality Law Specialist, UK**
7. **Black Study Group, UK**
8. **Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA)**
9. **Caribbean Rastafari Organization (CRO)**
10. **Augustus Casely-Hayford, Historian, Curator and Broadcaster, United Kingdom**

¹⁵ Paragraph 12(g) in General Assembly Resolution 69/16, *Programme of Activities for the Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent*, adopted by the General Assembly on 18 November 2014.

¹⁶ Cf. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/background/application/pdf/convention_text_with_annexes_english_for_posting.pdf

¹⁷ <http://www.pacja.org>

¹⁸ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

11. **Conseil des Communautés Africaines en Europe et en Belgique (CCAEB), Belgium**
12. **Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires (CRAN), France**
13. **Decades of Heroes for the Elimination of Racism and Oppression (D'HERO), Netherlands**
14. **Fassil Demissie, Associate Professor of Public Policy, DePaul University, USA**
15. **Marcelo Dias, Spokesperson for Negro Movimento Unificado (MNU), Brazil**
16. **European Network of People of African Descent (ENPAD)**
17. **Fight Racism Now (FRN), Sweden**
18. **Frantz Fanon Foundation, France**
19. **Quinsy Gario, Artist, activist and creator of the project Zwarte Piet is Racisme, Netherlands**
20. **Donald Peter Herbert, OBE, Barrister, UK**
21. **Tanya K. Hernandez, Professor of Law, Associate Director and Head of Global & Comparative Law Programs and Initiatives, Fordham University School of Law, Center on Race, Law & Justice, USA**
22. **Sandew Hira, Director International Institute for Scientific Research, Netherlands**
23. **Zita Holbourne, Co-Founder of Black Activists Against Cuts UK (BARAC UK) and Vice President of Public & Commercial Services Union, UK**
24. **Ichiroganaim Council for the Advancement of Rastafari (ICAR), Barbados**
25. **Professor Augustine John, Co-Founder and Patron, Communities Empowerment Network, UK**
26. **Gaye Theresa Johnson, Associate Professor in Chicana/o Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, US**
27. **Marai Larasi, MBE, Chair of the End Violence Against Women Coalition and Director of IMKAAN, UK**
28. **Alanna Lockward, Professor in Audiovisual Theory, Pontificia Univesidad Católica Madre y Maestra, Dominican Republic**
29. **Making Education a Priority (MEaP), UK**
30. **Firoze Manji, Daraja Press, Kenya, Québec -Canada**
31. **Narrative Eye, United Kingdom**

32. National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), USA
33. Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Professor of Development Studies and Head of Archie Mafeje Research Institute (AMRI), University of South Africa
34. Courttia Newland, Author, UK
35. New Urban Collective (NUC), Netherlands
36. Oluwafemi Nylander, Rhodes Must Fall Oxford, UK
37. Uchenna Okeja, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Rhodes University, South Africa
38. Ade Olaiya, Activist and Postgraduate Researcher, University of West England, UK
39. Larry Olomoofe, Advisor for Combating Racism and Xenophobia/Training Coordinator, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR), Poland
40. Nana Osei-Kofi, Associate Professor and Director of the Difference, Power, and Discrimination Program, Oregon State University, US
41. Pan Africanism Working Group, Germany
42. Raad van Afrikaanse gemeenschappen in Europa afdeling Vlaanderen, Belgium
43. Anthony Reddie, Professor in Philosophy and Theology, University of South Africa
44. TheRules.org
45. Olivia U. Rutazibwa, Senior Lecturer in International Development and European Studies, University of Portsmouth, UK
46. Kitimbwa Sabuni, Secretary General, the Afro-Swedish National Association, Sweden
47. Minna Salami, writer and founder of MsAfropolitan.com, UK and Nigeria
48. Claudia Sampaio, Professor of Public Health, Universidade Federal do Amazonas, Brazil
49. Gimena Sanchez, Senior Associate for the Andes of the Washington Office of Latin America (WOLA), US
50. Humberto Adami Santos Jr, President of the National Truth Commission of Black Slavery in Brazil, Brazil
51. Denise Ferreira da Silva, Professor of Law and Director of the Social Justice Institute, University of British Columbia, Canada

- 52. Stephen A. Small, Associate Professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies, University of California Berkeley, USA**
- 53. Social, Cultural and Educational Empowerment for Development (SCEED), Belgium**
- 54. Soul Rebel Movement, Netherlands**
- 55. Christopher Jones Thompson, Co-chair of the International Decade for People of African Descent Coalition UK (IDPAD Coalition UK), UK**
- 56. Antumi Toasijé, Centro Panafricano and Centro de Estudios Panafricanos, Spain**
- 57. Ubele Initiative, UK**
- 58. Françoise Vergès, Professor in Political Science, Collège d'études mondiales, France**
- 59. Patrick Vernon OBE, Trustee of the Bernie Grant Trust, UK**
- 60. Hanétha Vété-Congolo, Professor and Chair of the Romance Languages and Literature Department at Bowdoin College, USA**
- 61. Yusef Waghid, Professor of Philosophy of Education, Stellenbosch University, South Africa**
- 62. Simon Woolley, Director of Operation Black Vote (OBV), UK**