

**2nd Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on
People of African Descent
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**Pan-Africanism and to Live as African – An Era of
Resurgence
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Excellencies, Madam Chair of the Permanent Forum, distinguished members of the forum, the secretariat, other UN mechanisms and the members of civil society gathered here today, it is with gratitude that I share brief remarks on the topic of Pan-Africanism.

WE ARE HERE IN NEW YORK CITY – The seat of Black Internationalism. The place where in 1927, a group of twenty-one women of African descent served as the main organizers of the Fourth Pan African Congress. Women like Addie Whiteman Dickerson, Addie Hunton and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Others of them were members of a women's organization called "The Circle of Peace and Foreign Relations." – They understood the assignment.

The place where El Hajj Malik El Shabazz - Malcolm X gave speeches and roused audiences with a crystal-clear clarity about the imperative for Black Americans to internationalize their struggle and for African people around the world to unite first before we could unite with anyone else.

Those of who attended the international civil society working group for the permanent forum on people of African descent hosted by the working group and our partners at the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and the Movement for Black Lives had an opportunity to fellowship and reflect in the space that Malcolm stood and the space in which he became an ancestor 58 years ago at The Shabazz Center right here in New York City.

Where WEB Du Bois who, early on, recognized that "the problem of the color line" was not confined merely to the United States. He made this assertion with the clear knowledge that many Africans living on the African continent suffered under the yoke of European colonial rule. That Africans living elsewhere around the world suffered under similar conditions. In other words, he recognized that our issues were not just domestic issues – they were global issues. And that our response could not simply be limited to our immediate locale, it required us to connect with each other across languages and geographies and to restructure these global systems.

We know the challenges we face are global challenges – after all it was on the backs of the Transatlantic Slave trade that the current system of racial capitalism was born. The need to strip Africans of their humanity became essential to construct a system based on greed, exploitation, and extraction.

In short, the whole world is paying the price for what has been done to African people. But what does Pan-Africanism require of us today?

Pan-Africanism is in a period of resurgence – and what it requires is that we shape the institutions and structures that will allow us to actualize our vision of the world we want and the world we deserve.

Pan-Africanism today requires an expansive vision – not a reductive or exclusionary vision where we separate ourselves into camps as though our destinies are not interconnected. It requires “operational unity”. It must encompass Africans and people of African descent wherever they are around the world.

It requires us to look within and to each other for the solutions to our challenges. Which we are doing. For example, removing barriers to free movement of people not just within the African continent but between members of the diaspora on the Continent. Continued progress on the AfCFTA. Promoting further relationship building between and amongst our people in central America, south America, the Caribbean, Asia, the middle east and the pacific island.

We must redefine to the world, what it means to be African. To be African is NOT to view the world through the lens of oppression. It is NOT to be downtrodden. It is NOT to be defeated. To be African is to be resilient. To be rhythmic. To be resourceful. To be African is to be creative. It is to recognize that everything is connected. To be an African – a person of African descent – is to have the ability to tap into the power and the support that our ancestors are ever present to offer us. And we have powerful ancestors.

Our charge as African people as PanAfricanists in this moment, is not to simply mimic the cultural norms, values and institutions of those who APPEAR to be winning in this current paradigm. As people of African descent we must change the paradigm. It means we must at minimum, question, and at times reject the very premise of the institutions and systems under which we currently operate – including this one that we are gathered this week to engage.

- Advance effort to cohere the various mechanisms that exist in service of people of African descent to ensure we can maximize their impact and develop collective strategies.
- Ensure that civil society is actually engaged in the drafting of the declaration on the rights of people of African descent – that this is not just an exercise between governments but must be constructed with the input of civil society.
- Recognizing the critical importance of the Durban Declaration and program of action as a tangible requirement in this resurgence of Pan-Africanism

In this day – in this age – in this emergent resurgence of Pan-Africanism, our charge is to tap into our OWN creativity – our OWN knowledge, our OWN expertise honed over thousands of years – to build the kinds of systems and institutions that reflect a worldview that prioritizes life over death. Creation over destruction. Connection over disconnect. People over profiteering.

It requires an assessment of the global financial architecture and the ways in which never-ending debt in foreign currency merely perpetuates the ongoing exploitation of people of African descent around the world. It requires that religious institutions and ideologies perpetuated to Africans that attempted to strip Africans of their Africanness or demonize the African cosmology be examined and those same institutions be invited into the process of repair.

It requires truth-telling about agricultural systems and the corporations that serve them and how they are designed to destroy traditional ways of farming- organically, mind you – to instead be replaced with synthetic products under the guise of hunger alleviation, but really – in service to profit seeking.

It requires us to reframe our approach to human rights by including economic rights into the human rights framework. Because it is no coincidence that economic rights never seem to be contemplated in human rights discussions and interventions – yet so much of human rights violations have an economic underpinning. What does a human rights economy look like?

Our deliberations and recommendations out of this 2nd session on the permanent forum on people of African descent must consistently ask: Is this system liberatory? Does it move us toward the ability to be self-determining? Is the affirmation of our humanity a fundamental feature? And if it doesn't, THIS era of Pan-Africanism requires us to dismantle those systems and structures. It requires us to REJECT the premise of those systems and structures, and to IN FACT, create and construct new ones that are affirming of our status as human beings. And this work must happen locally, nationally, and internationally.

What does it mean to be Pan African? What does it mean to be African? And not just to **be** African, but to **live** as African.

I leave you with the words of the great Pan-Africanist from Burkina Faso Thomas Sankara, who said in a famous 1987 speech at the Organization of African Unity, that **“We must accept to live as African – that is the only way to live free and dignified.”**