Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Excellencies, distinguished panellists, representatives of states, members from civil society and dear comrades.

Addressing systemic racism against people of African descent in education necessitates realizing, as Audre Lorde says, "There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives." As we navigate through the complexities of contemporary education systems, it is imperative to acknowledge the unique challenges and obstacles faced by people of African descent. Education is a crucial tool in the fight to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, as recognised in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. As an institution, it is meant to function as a tool for empowerment, liberation and building societal support for diversity and tolerance. It unfortunately has however in too many cases been turned into an instrument that perpetuates systemic bias and discrimination due to the effect of decades of policies rooted in Afrophobia that have perpetuated systemic racism, resulting in the disenfranchisement of people of African descent.

It has repeatedly been found that African descendant communities experience a higher level of socioeconomic marginalization in accessing second and third generation rights compared to other ethnic groups. Thus, centering race and ethnicity in discourses regarding educational equity requires adopting a critical race theory lens, the very theory that has attracted much controversy and pushback from anti-black racist groups due to its ability to unveil uncomfortable truths about the deeply

entrenched structures of power and privilege. In terms of pedagogy, to ensure the academic success of students of African descent within educational institutions, it is crucial for educators to analyze the influence of systemic anti-Black racism and anti-blackness on these learners, as well as how these patterns are sustained. Studies conducted in several Western countries including Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland consistently demonstrate elevated rates of student attrition among Black individuals. It is crucial to confront and challenge harmful stereotypes, racial discrimination, and social hierarchies that contribute to the marginalization of certain groups. It cannot be ignored how everyday interactions and practices of educators such as hyper policing of their bodies, "adultification" bias, harsh discipline, pathologizing of Black families and cultures, and the absence of diverse and inclusive curriculum all contribute to the perpetuation of systemic racism against people of African descent in education. Furthermore, disciplinary actions in schools often disproportionately target Black students, resulting in higher suspension and expulsion rates compared to their non-Black peers. The inequitable and unjust application of such disciplinary actions can have a profound and lasting impact on the life prospects of affected students and leave deep scars.

This misconception is reinforced through educational practices and course content, leading to the exclusion of Black students from their extensive historical heritage and wisdom. Antiblack oppression stems from power dynamics and is evident in various practices, structures, and systems. It's important to recognize how anti-Black racism has evolved over time in relation to state power, national identity, philosophical discussions, biological discourse, political rhetoric, and more. In

education, it is visible in the long-standing culture war around what knowledge is valued and whose history is taught and how.

Access to high quality education is a core component of ensuring the right to education for those of African descent. It is also a tangible means through which States and educational institutions, including those that have reaped vast benefits from chattel slavery, can provide reparations. Therefore, it is deeply concerning that we are seeing pushback against special measures in education in several settings, despite provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination clearly mandating such measures. For example, the recent striking of affirmative action policies in the United States is a stark reminder of the persistent barriers that inhibit the academic advancement of black students. Affirmative action, served as a necessary tool to address historical injustices and promote diversity within educational settings and institutions. Its removal threatens to further entrench existing disparities and limit access to higher education for black students. Affirmative action, despite benefitting women, people with disabilities and other historically marginalized group, has all too often been framed, maliciously and incorrectly, as something that gives unfair advantage to those of African-descent.

Scholars of African descent, particularly women, are not only underrepresented but also face barriers in terms of recognition, tenure, and access to resources and endure severe mental health repercussions due to the pervasive racism in educational spaces across many countries in both the global north and south. In particular, academics who are openly political and anti-racist in their scholarship often find themselves marginalized, facing risks, and seen as threat by the system. Backlash against anti-racist education consistently follows a pattern of inciting fear by portraying it as

ideological extremism. This tactic precludes honest discussion and analysis, while also twisting the moral imperative of anti-racism by casting education on systemic racial injustice as "reverse racism" against dominant groups.

Hence, the pursuit of educational justice for people of African descent requires both pedagogical innovation and a radical shift in the approach to social development at a global level. In terms of pedagogical methods, it's crucial for those in educational institutions to recognize that antiblackness influences their work in schools and represents a type of constant daily harm against Black children and their families. This recognition must go beyond a general opposition to intolerance or racism, or an acknowledgement of White privilege. The development of an anti-racist framework against racism in education requires the utilization of the experiences and accounts of Black educators and leaders within the educational system.

The creation of such a framework must not be conceived of as a one-time initiative but rather should be an iterative and generative process, suited to the unique conditions and context of each educational institution. Additionally, it is also important to highlight calls for not just an anti-racist framework but an actively pro-Black framework in which educators aim to establish environments that prioritize the needs of Black students, engage with literature from Black scholars, and explore ways to integrate love and compassion into their teaching. However, for these changes to truly have a lasting impact, it is imperative that there is a radical approach to social development for Afro-descendants.

This approach should focus on acknowledging and correcting historical injustices that have formed the basis of current policies hindering social development. Even

today, only a small number of countries have fully or partially put into effect a national action plan to develop and execute comprehensive tactics aimed at addressing Afrophobia, in collaboration with Afro-descendant communities and in alignment with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the International Convention of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the thematic objectives of The International Decade for People of African Descent. SDG 4 which advocates inclusive quality life-long education for all and is an overarching goal of the 2030 Agenda provides a human rights based approach that aims to ensure equitable access to education, eliminate discrimination and promote inclusive learning environment for vulnerable communities including people of African descent.

Policy interventions that address the unequal social development of Afro-descendant communities should incorporate SDG 4 Targets to support IDPAD's thematic goals. For instance, meeting SDG Target 4.2 entails ensuring comprehensive inclusion of the history and contributions of Africans and Afro-descendants in educational curriculum. Additionally, reparatory justice should also be prioritized to address the historical and ongoing impacts of systemic racism on people of African descent in education. It is imperative that implementation of the 2030 Agenda achieves social development that addresses historical and contemporary manifestations of Afrophobia, through policy interventions that facilitate reparative justice for descendants of enslaved and colonized Africans globally by ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels.

In light of these challenges, it is imperative that we take decisive action to dismantle systemic barriers and create inclusive educational environments that empower people of African descent. Here are a few substantial recommendations to achieve this goal:

1. Educational institutions must reaffirm their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion by implementing proactive measures to recruit, retain, and support black students, faculty, and staff. Member States should also develop and implement policies and laws like affirmative action, diversity, equity and inclusion and create progressive initiatives to address the unique needs and challenges faced by individuals of African descent.

2. Governments and other related institutions must apply a lens that analyses systemic racism and the harmful legacies of colonialism, apartheid and slavery to current education policies and practices, and reform based on relevant international human rights standards, particularly the DDPA and ICERD.

3. Educational curriculum must be decolonised to reflect the diverse perspectives, histories, and contributions of people of African descent. This includes incorporating African and African diasporic content across all disciplines, challenging Eurocentric narratives, and empowering students to critically engage with and interrogate dominant structures of power and privilege.

4. Governments and educational institutions must invest in community-led education initiatives that prioritise the needs and aspirations of people of African descent.

5. Finally, we must foster global solidarity and collaboration to advance the cause of education empowerment for people of African descent. This includes building networks and partnerships across borders, sharing best practices and resources, and amplifying the voices and experiences of black communities on the world stage.

In conclusion, addressing systemic racism in education against people of African descent requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses inclusive and emancipatory pedagogy, as well as policy interventions that not only prioritize equitable access and opportunities for all, but also acknowledge and rectify the historical and ongoing injustices faced by people of African descent.