

Statement by the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
Opening of the High-Level Segment of the 3rd Session of the
UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

16 April 2024, 10am, Palais des Nations Room XX

Madam chair,

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

It is a real privilege to be here today amidst so many leaders, human rights defenders and anti-racism activists present at this 3rd session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent.

And let me start by paying tribute to your commitment and your relentless struggle for dignity, human rights, and equity for people of African descent all over the world.

The Permanent Forum has clearly contributed to building a momentum in advancing the racial justice agenda for people of African descent. Convening its 3rd session in less than two years since it became operational. It is a testament to its rapid progress and the potential for outreach. It has asserted itself as a formidable convening power, through what is now clearly recognised as the largest platform for people of African descent in the United Nations.

Alongside the plenary proceedings that will continue in this room, there will be more than 70 side events - a majority of which are in-person events - taking place in the Palais des Nations, around Geneva but also in different parts of the world - a remarkable effort, amplifying the reach and impact of our collective commitment.

In its first two sessions the Permanent Forum considered systemic racism, climate justice, reparatory justice, health for people of African descent and Pan-Africanism, among others. This 3rd session is focusing on themes that reflect major human rights concerns for people of African descent. It will delve further into other important themes, education and culture; also more in-depth discussions on reparations, economic justice, and sustainable development for people of African descent. The recommendations that will emanate from these discussions must be acted upon by Member States in order for them to be meaningful. Only then can we ensure that all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of people of African descent can be fully realized without discrimination or bias.

The Permanent Forum also plays a critical role in informing the intergovernmental process related to the elaboration of a United Nations Declaration on the promotion, protection, and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent based on its engagement with civil society through soliciting the views and harnessing the aspirations of people of African descent globally. This process will no doubt further strengthen the international human rights framework for people of African descent. And I urge Member States to actively participate in these discussions in order that we can transform this Declaration into tangible reality.

As the International Decade for People of African Descent comes to a close, it is important that we take stock as we heard from the President of the General Assembly. The discussions on Thursday afternoon on the subject will certainly contribute to charting a course forward. The High Commissioner, who is the Coordinator for the International Decade, has also expressed his support for the extension of the Decade to a Second Decade, as have the United Nations' anti-racism human rights mechanisms. We look forward to the outcome of the discussions of this session; and we will be following the intergovernmental discussions in relation to the International Decade throughout this year.

In this context, ensuring the meaningful, inclusive, and safe participation of people of African descent in public life is essential in the fight against systemic racism. The recent Guidance Note of the High Commissioner serves as a tool for States and other stakeholders to make sure we can achieve this crucial goal. More broadly, our Office continues to pursue vigorous efforts to achieve transformative change for racial justice and equality. In order to be truly transformative, we know that this change must be anchored in sustained collective commitment and actions.

Your vibrant and assertive presence here today is a resounding call for racial justice and equity but also for reparations, for human dignity and human rights. It is a call to address the longstanding historical legacies of enslavement and colonialism, which continue to fuel racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the inequality that very tragically persists today.

I wish you all a very fruitful session and hope the next four days will chart many new avenues for advocacy towards impactful change for people of African descent around the world.

Thank you.