



**Permanent Forum on People of African Descent
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Panel #1: Reparations, Sustainable Development & Economic Justice

International Decade of People of African Descent Association- Guyana

Statement on Economic circumstances of the people of African descent in Guyana.

17th April 2024

The following statement is presented jointly by the International Decade for the People of African Descent Assembly (IDPADA-G) a network of seventy eight non-governmental organizations and in particular the Cuffy 250 Committee and the HOMCS Cooperative.

IDPADA-G is committed to the pursuit of the goals of the Decade; however, the current Government of Guyana has sought to decimate it by defunding the organisation without merit.

We draw the attention of this body to the concluding observations of the recent Human Rights Committee hearing on Guyana under the ICCPR. To quote “. . . the Committee remains concerned about the absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that may extend beyond discrimination in employment, provide full and effective protection against all forms of discrimination prohibited under the Covenant, including direct, indirect, and multiple discrimination, . . . “. African Guyanese are its daily victims.

Since IDPADA-G's report last year at this august forum there has been an absence of any action on the part of the Government of Guyana in relation to reparations, sustainable development within communities of African Descendants relative to other ethnic groups that would relieve economic hardships.

While prominently calling for reparations on the global stage, the GoG ignores the lasting legacy of the crushing post-emancipation oppression endured by African Descendants in Guyana and the resulting obligations of the state for reparative justice. Even more concerning has been its recent pronouncement equating the enslavement of Africans with the indentureship of others for the purpose of reparations. Equating cruel life-long, forced labour with voluntary contract workers resembles the lack of recognition of the lived realities of African Guyanese. IDPADA-G denounces this GoG policy in the strongest terms and calls on this body to reject this interpretation as it is promoted at the regional and international levels.

IDPADA-G brings to the attention of this body that the economic condition of the people of African descent in Guyana has suffered further degradation. Efforts at sustainable development are non-existent and evident in the lack of a cogent National Development Plan and Strategy

Their continuing, imperiled economic circumstances now face an additional threat with the recent announcement by the Government of its intention to introduce 500 Bangladeshi nurses and their families into the health services in circumstances where the African nurses are unable to secure economic benefits similar to the those guaranteed to the Bangladeshis. Further, public school teachers have been protesting for a living wage and government has been unyielding to all recommendations that would alleviate the economic hardships of public servants, majority of whom are African descendants, claiming there is a fiscal space to improve salaries.

Repeated calls for the collection and publication of disaggregated data on the allocation of state resources remain steadfastly unattended.

In the award of contracts for infrastructural development, the disparity between the awards to Indian Guyanese business compared to any other community continues at 4:1 and higher in favor of the Indian community. In some cases, no allocations have been made to companies owned by African Guyanese. The same skewed ratio applies to allocations of licenses in the areas of quarrying, gold mining and healthcare providers.

The Government of Guyana has taken no action on IDPADA-G's 2023 recommendations. We therefore repeat our call to the Government of Guyana:

- (i) to collect ethnically disaggregated data and to report to the Permanent Forum or UN Special Mechanisms on steps taken towards reparative justice for persons of African Descent in all sectors.
- (ii) to establish a national commission of multidisciplinary experts to undertake at a minimum two national assessments of the African Guyanese contribution to the development of Guyana with a view to compensation.
- (iii) to use these assessments to determine a national compensation package set aside from national revenues coupled with other forms of affirmative action.
- (iv) To remove and redress structural and institutional barriers within the delivery of public goods and services that disempower Guyanese of African Descent or do not enhance the well-being on equal footing with other groups.
- (v) To pay urgent attention to the threat to villages developed on land purchased by freed Africans in the post-emancipation era; lands subject to arbitrary possession by the State or other entities under its control and patronage. To end the dispossession of ancestral lands and denial of state resources to ensure the economic viability of historically owned African Guyanese villages.

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