

## **Barbara Reynolds Statement Transcript**

### **25<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Group on the Right to Development**

**15<sup>th</sup> of May 2024**

Excellencies ladies and gentlemen, distinguished participants, colleagues, good afternoon.

First, I'd like to thank of the inter-governmental working group on the right to development for the invitation to the working group of experts on people of African descent, to join you at the 25th session of your working group to look at the contribution of the right to development towards combating discrimination, including racial discrimination.

Ladies and gentlemen, my starting point today is the 1986 declaration on the right to development. In the very first article, article 1 we see the right to development is an inalienable human right, by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development. That's our starting point today. But when we go on with that same article, we see that self-determination is a matter of full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources. And in Article Two, we see that people human beings are the central subject of development, and that the state shares the responsibility to facilitate, promote and make possible development.

I want to begin therefore, this afternoon by talking a little bit about the shells and clones. When we, as people of African descent, look at the situation of people of African descent, whether it is as a whole or whether it is in concentrations, large concentrations. In former colonies, we see that post-colonial structures, systems, policies and practices are continuing even after emancipation after the end of colonization. And these structures actually mimic the intent and purpose laying down during enslavement and colonization across the intersections of civil political, economic, cultural and collective spheres.

And what they do is they subject people of African descent to a third wave of deprivation and hardship. And that's what I mean by the shells on the clones. So, our current situation is that we have these shells laying down during enslavement and colonization, but they seem to have been filled or they have been cloned. And the interesting thing about it is that it wasn't just governments we see in history, the impact of powerful religious autocracies, throughout enslavement throughout colonization throughout segregation.

And so, while we talk today, in the context of the United Nations and member states, I just want you to bear in mind that religious autocracies, powerful religious autocracies, how to roll back to them in enslavement in colonization and segregation. And therefore, if they had a roll back then it means ipso facto that religious autocracies, religious groups, religious institutions should have a role in reversing the impact of enslavement, colonization and segregation.

Now, why do I emphasize those three? So, we come next to the focus today, the nexus between racism, discrimination, and development. The only reason that we can discuss this today in the context of development is because racism had an enormous role in enslavement, colonization and segregation. Racism was institutionalized. And it laid out structures and then it became systemic, during enslavement colonization and segregation. This resulted in discrimination, xenophobia, and other intolerances. Today, as we talk about people of African descent, when we look at discrimination therefore, or when we look at racism, we're actually talking about anti-black racism, or Afro phobia, because it is not just racism, but it's racism that has taken on and is fuelled and propelled by anti black racism, and Afro phobia and this is permanently permeated economic, social,

cultural and political spheres where development is supposed to take place. So, we asked the question, therefore, which comes first? Is it the racism and the discrimination or is it under development or non-development and we ask the question, therefore, can development under cut racism and discrimination or is reducing or eliminating racism and discrimination, essential to development? I want to posit today that it is a neither nor situation. We cannot break them down and say that if we succeeded in development, racism, and discrimination would disappear. Or if we were to eliminate racism and discrimination, that development will approve with that decades of doing one or the other. And what we've come to conclude is that we have to address all of them at the same time. Okay, so what does that actually mean? And how does it manifest itself?

If we take the economic sphere, we see practices and banking and finance and international insurance and issues around taxation, land rights and land use that constrain whole nation states to primary industry, unfair and on equal international terms of trade. And it's not just whole nations, but within developed nations, we see that people of African descent are concentrated in and therefore subjected to these on equal systems and structures and policies. Now we're learning a little bit about how this has come about. And part of it is what we're seeing what digitalization and artificial intelligence are helping us to unpack. And that is the baked in bias in things like identification numbers and districting and how these biases permeate everything that has happened so far. So that's on the economic sector.

On the social sector. We see a lot of inequality in education, housing, health water, and we see the adult suffocation of black childhood and youth. on the cultural side, we see the disdain for black culture. Right now there's a conversation going on about questions. Like joint enterprise and how black rap music and the way young black people dress are being brought into the courts as a form of indictment, not because they are legally wrong, but because they use in a kind of pseudo way. to indict black young people.

And then finally, on the issue of political development. Well regrettably we're seeing through redistricting and through the rollback of legislation a really negative trend of disenfranchising black people where the right to vote is being questioned. But under that, is this idea that black people cannot govern themselves, and therefore they need outsiders. External people, more intelligent people, more civilized people to govern themselves.

So that's what we see. So when I said we come back to which is it the chicken or the egg? We don't really know. So these concerns are widespread and your work in terms of promoting development is both a pathway and an outcome of reducing discrimination, and reducing anti black racism and Afro phobia. I just want therefore to touch on a current some current vehicles that you can use, get engaged in these but might help in your work, as your work reinforces what other people are doing, such as the work of the working group. We've seen as we've come to the end of the International decade for people of African descent, that there was some progress but we also seeing a kind of reversal of this progress, things like trying to rewrite the history of people of African descent or Africa, trying to say that slavery was good for black people, and we learned a lot. All these things are incipient signs. That all is not well. So there's a call for a second decade and as there's a call for the second decade, I just want to flag three issues that are of paramount importance. And that is continuing to promote racial justice, but also looking at reparatory justice, as well as environmental justice. So the racial justice is about where we are now. The reparatory justice is about writing historical wrongs and incredulous harms that were perpetrated on Africans and people of African descent. But perhaps the most important of these right now is for us to get engaged in environmental justice because it speaks not just to writing current wrongs, and repairing historical wrongs but laying down a footprint if you will, a template for not just us, but for those who come

after us. And finally, I want to talk a little bit about the drafting of the Declaration on the Rights of people of African descent. It's important to note that there are questions put by some member states about the right to development. And when we saw that this was settled in 1986, it's been comeback. So I just want to draw your attention as a working group to these three areas where you can make a difference in the call for a second decade on people of African descent in the negotiations around the drafting of the declaration. And in focusing on racial justice. What happens now on reparatory justice for writing historical wrongs and for environmental justice as we look forward to a better place, not just for people of African descent, but for every human being I thank you and I wish you good deliberations. Thank you very much chairperson.