

RE: STATEMENTS TO THE PERMANENT FORUM

By: The Global Centre for Pluralism

3 – Panel #3: Culture & Recognition (Thursday 18 April)

My name is Nicole Ciza and I have the pleasure to represent the Global Centre for Pluralism. We are an international non-profit organization headquartered in Ottawa, Canada, dedicated to collaboratively fostering recognition and belonging for all through direct participation of marginalized communities around the world.

Culture plays a significant role in the lives of people of African descent who, no matter their geographical location, can connect to the histories and realities of Africa. Across space and time, people of African descent make significant contributions to the cultural landscape of their home and host countries. This diverse population's contributions in the arts, sciences, entertainment, fashion, and other industries, for example, have produced an undeniable influence on people internationally. Today more than ever, there is a deliberate effort by leading bodies to recognize African artists on the continent for their global achievements in the entertainment industry. The country of Ghana, a former epicentre of the slave trade, also began campaigning to encourage descendants of enslaved Africans to re-connect with their roots, particularly reaching out to African Americans. Furthermore, there has been a noticeable increase in efforts to bring into view diverse African cultures and voices in literature, cinema, and television outside of the continent. After years of dehumanization and denigration, we are seeing a shift towards better visibility and acceptability globally and a growing recognition of the benefits of acknowledging and welcoming contributions from the continent all over the world.

Nonetheless, despite the fight for the recognition of the indelible imprint and numerous contributions of cultural significance people of African descent have left globally, cultural biases and discrimination within their own communities and cross-culturally persist at an alarming rate. Legislation severely persecuting LGBTQ+ communities in Africa is on the rise, which must be addressed and redressed as a matter of human rights and even of cultural preservation. Elsewhere, Afro-descendant children and youth embracing their cultural heritage – such as in the way they style their hair, wear their clothes, or through the music they create and consume – are often unfairly treated and penalized in sports, school, or in the workplace to a degree that is unfelt by people of non-African descent. This sends the message that African culture lacks compatibility with the modern world, which is harmful to one's perception of self-worth and belonging. In many other contexts, stereotypes of African cultures, equating them with what is “primitive” and presenting them as “homogenous”, are also commonplace.

We strongly urge African states to cease limiting the freedoms of LGBTQ+ citizens and to implement legislative measures protecting the heartbeat of this community by uplifting those who are linked to it through aspects of their identity. Considering this, we also implore other

states to dedicate government resources to the protection of LGBTQ+ individuals who are disproportionately physically harassed, economically disadvantaged, and whose most basic rights are routinely violated simply for who they are.

To protect the dignity of people who embrace their African heritage, we emphasize the need for governments to implement anti-discrimination legislation against violent crimes and microaggressions; we urge educational, community, private sector, and political leaders to protect safe spaces for the expression and celebration of African cultures in public.

The role of civil society organizations is paramount in promoting human rights for people of African descent globally – at the grassroots and national levels. For this reason, we urge governments and private donors to increase funding and grant opportunities to CSOs so we can continue to provide the crucial aid required through strategic engagement with concerned communities, governments, and private entities.

Finally, we call on key social media and big tech companies to implement strict guidelines against the perpetration of violence, inequities, and abuses of people of African descent online, with consequences such as the removal of violating content and deletion of violating accounts.