

RE: STATEMENTS TO THE PERMANENT FORUM

By: The Global Centre for Pluralism

2 – Panel #2: Education: Overcoming Systemic Racism and Historic Harm (Wednesday 17 April)

My name is Nicole Ciza and I have the honour to speak on behalf of 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.

At the Centre, we see education as a tool that can either serve the perpetuation of anti-Black discrimination or help promote respect for human diversity within and beyond the classroom. People of African descent encounter unique challenges and barriers to success in education systems as a function of historically contrived, structural inequalities. These include, but are not limited to, access to quality education – from early childhood to post-secondary studies – on the African continent in Brazil, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In the Global North, higher suspension rates in K-12 education as compared to students of different races; pervasive underrepresentation of Afro-descendant intellectuals and inventors in curricula and learning materials that are not culturally responsive; psychological harm from unbalanced approaches in History education that reduce African history to the history of slavery and colonialism; socioeconomic inequalities leading to the exclusion of Afro-descendant students from extracurricular activities; and various obstacles in facilitating the transition and integration of newcomers from Africa into schools, whether as students or as personnel.

The structural nature of such harmful situations and outcomes can be attributed to social, political, historical, and economic inequalities experienced by children and families of African descent. The resistance to adopting sophisticated language and conceptualizations describing the experience of racism and systemic inequalities – particularly in francophone communities; the unavailability of financial, human, and other resources in underserved communities; the discriminatory policies and practices in education that foster low engagement in students of African descent; the underrepresentation of people of African descent in senior leadership and management levels in education systems; and the early polarization of Black students in schools have been confirmed in research and substantiated by lived experiences. Furthermore, the lack of disaggregated data on race in education increases the challenges of accurately assessing the extent of issues, tailoring interventions to address them, and monitoring the effectiveness and wider impact of these interventions.

In our effort to re-imagine and restructure education, civil society organizations encounter several obstacles in both conflict- and non-conflict zones. Hostile or uncooperative governments committed to maintaining the status quo make deep engagement and transformation of systems,

practices, and lived experiences difficult to achieve. We call on Member States to endorse and amplify the efforts of civil society organizations and marginalized African descendant communities through sustained support and multisectoral cooperation.

We beseech all states with a strong French presence to advance the conversation of anti-Black racism through in-depth engagement with researchers and educational leaders, to develop a heightened awareness of the need to expand language as it pertains to racism. We also call for all parties to make the collection of data disaggregated by race an ordinary monitoring, evaluation, and organizational learning practice within their contexts.

We call on educational leaders to work towards strengthening practices and policies that build the capacity of educators in every classroom and context to meaningfully integrate anti-racism teaching and the use of equitable, culturally sustaining, and trauma-informed approaches in ways that enable the flourishing and full participation of Afrodescendant individuals and communities in school and beyond. Furthermore, the integration and use of African knowledge systems in pedagogy and curricula requires researchers and practitioners to work in tandem with traditional knowledge keepers and educational institutions. And let us recognize that the creation of such learning and teaching environments is not only beneficial to people of African descent but to the wider community as well.