

## RE: STATEMENTS TO THE PERMANENT FORUM

By: The Global Centre for Pluralism

### 1 – General Debate (Tuesday 16 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. We welcome the engagement of honourable Member States as well as UN agencies, funds, and programs, academics, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders participating in this Forum.

In 2013, resolution 68/237, known as the *International Decade for people of African Descent* observed between 2015-2024, was declared by the UN General Assembly as a reminder to the international community of the importance of making right the historical harms suffered by descendants of Africa due to structural racism, the impact of which were long-lasting and are felt to this day.

The world has since witnessed cases of police brutality exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, further stoking global movements inspired by Black Lives Matter; research increasingly shows the unnerving practices in healthcare systems negatively impacting people of African descent, and the health determinants of race, particularly as they pertain to maternal mortality rates among Black women in North America; the adverse consequences of climate change causing environmental disasters in Global Majority countries continue to be dramatically felt by low-income countries in Africa, that is to say by those who are not major contributors to the climate crisis; and African refugees seeking better opportunities are being turned away at the shores of countries that benefitted from their labor for centuries. These are but a few of the known issues faced by people of African descent which directly affect their political, social, physical, and economic wellbeing.

However, amidst the waves of injustices around the world perpetuated on this population group, we have also witnessed the extraordinary progress that happens when concerted, meaningful actions are taken to improve the conditions of people of African descent. For instance, governments have officially recognized the *International Decade for People of African Descent* and committed themselves to being a part of the solution rather than the problem; cultural artifacts taken from Africa at various points in history are being repatriated to their respective owners; some governments have established reparations task forces in efforts to rectify years of racist policies and practices against people of African descent; while other governments have established grants and programs to overcome systemic barriers faced by Black-owned business and Black entrepreneurs.

At the Global Centre for Pluralism, we work to ensure all people of African descent are recognized as equal citizens and empowered to participate in the societies in which they live. Pluralism offers an approach predicated on valuing diversity as a foundation for more prosperous, stable, and just societies. Pluralism goes beyond measures to ‘include’ previously excluded groups into existing systems and power structures. Instead, it demands engagement with difference in a more transformative way, giving actors agency to collectively design and redesign systems over time to challenge intolerance and counter power imbalances.

Pluralism is an ethic of respect for diversity, where the dignity of every person is recognized and everyone feels that they belong as equal and legitimate members of society. It refers to the decisions and actions taken to respond positively to differences, to see diversity as the basis for more just, peaceful, and equitable societies.

Through our Global Pluralism Monitor initiative, we co-developed data-driven country reports through collaborations with local researchers and specialists, assessing the state of pluralism while identifying strengths and areas for improvement across political, economic, and social dimensions. These reports take an intersectional and gendered approach. Their findings have been used through collaborative initiatives and beyond with local civil society and human rights organizations on the African continent in places like Ghana, Sudan, and South Africa, and in support of the rights of people of African descent elsewhere, in Colombia, for example. Furthermore, various laureates of our Global Pluralism Award, which recognizes the remarkable achievement of people and organizations whose work exemplifies pluralism in action – and provides funding to support their continued actions – have been of African descent or Africa-based. These Awards have brought global visibility and recognition to their work. The Centre has also co-created a variety of products, resources, and activities for the protection and promotion of the rights and well-being of people of African descent in schools in Canada.

We believe all people have the inalienable right to fully participate and belong in society. We commend political and non-political actors that have taken concrete steps to support people of African descent thrive. We urge all stakeholders to continue to find collective solutions to address the vestiges of discriminatory systems. Let us collaborate to create a world where being of African descent does not preclude people from a life of dignity, that is, one where all are recognized as full, contributing members of society.