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North America: Chicago, IL

Statement For Submission: 3rd Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

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I am Dr. Iva Carruthers, General Secretary of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference (SDPC), a 21-year-old ecumenical and global justice and faith policy and organizing NGO based in Chicago, IL USA. I am also professor emeritus from Northeastern Illinois University and founding director of the Center for Reparatory Justice, Transformation and Remediation at McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago.

The Proctor Conference, which I represent, is a network connected to roughly 1.5 million people of African Descent from largely from the US, but including the Caribbean, South America and Africa. Americans- we represent faith leaders, seminarians, faith-inspired concerned citizens in North America. We are committed to the dismantling of systems of dehumanization, demonization, and criminalization, in its many forms, of people of African descent.

With that experiential lens for this 3rd Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African descent, we want to affirm the connection of systemic racism, reparatory justice and sustainable development. We emphasize the specific connective tissue and role that foundational wealth disparity, access to capital, gender and sexual bias and environmental justice play in achieving the sustainable development goals. We cannot think about these issues separate and apart from one another.

We would submit for our collective consideration several key issues around which we need focus, frame and organize our intellectual and organizational capital. They include mapping an agenda related to:

- 1) Environmental and climate justice
- 2) Emergency preparedness
- 3) Computer technology and Metaverse AI knowledge creation and
- 4) Racial data collection and genomic sciences

We are particularly interested in dismantling systemic racism in the face of increased climate emergencies and public health emergencies. In partnership with the International Coalition of People of African Descent, the SDPC submitted the Midterm Review of United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024. That document identifies the disparate and persistent impact COVID-19 crisis is having on people of African descent and declared “structural

racism, structural violence and a global economic system...put the interests of private profit over the lives of African and Afro-descendant people.” The fact is that more the COVID pandemic was a wealth creator of the wealthiest.

Oxfam found that 17 of the top 25 most profitable US corporations, including Microsoft, Johnson & Johnson, Facebook, Pfizer and Visa, were expected to make almost \$85bn more profit in 2020 compared to previous years – with the lion’s share going to the most privileged, including many of the world’s billionaires.⁶⁵ AND

Amazon paid no US federal taxes in 2017 or 2018. In 2019, the company finally paid \$162m, representing 1.2% of the pre-tax income it reported for the year, despite the federal corporate tax rate being 21%. – making CEO Jeff Bezos the richest person in the world.

We must continue to strategize to interrupt this demonic system of wealth and ultimately wellness distribution

1. The global push-and pull of environmental and climate change is creating greater unanticipated demographic shifts and geo-political upheavals that only weaken the human infrastructures necessary for just systems and well being for our communities throughout the world. This is exacerbated in a belief in a hierarchy of human value which attempts to thus justify the ways in which the lands of peoples of African descent, whether it’s the urban land in inner city America or rural lands in Brazil or natural ecosystems in the Caribbean. Extraction economic policies and disregard for the people lead to further degradation of opportunity for sustainable living and set up conditions for state, ethnic and cultural wars.
2. We need to focus on developing more effective emergency management systems in our communities that have a baseline degree of readiness and preplanning as ecosystems of crisis response to ensure the protection of our people. In this regard, the NGO and civil society community, in partnership with government, is critical. We learned during the pandemic, for example, that tools for rapid response strategies are key intervention measures to reverse the adverse effects that public health emergencies have on people of African descent around the world. The same is true around issues of food security or climate related disasters.
3. We cannot escape the manner in which computing technologies, the Metaverse and artificial and augmented intelligence is at the heart of knowledge creation and distribution. We must prioritize innovative ways in which people of African descent can create, share, protect and connect information that prevents the demonization, erasure and misinformation on our narrative. There are competing paradigms of “truths” and we must take far more seriously our African proverb that the Hunter Lion
4. The management of racial data, including genomic data, is an agenda item we must include in this round of work. Again, the pandemic foreshadowed the

importance of what and how we are counted in the local, state and global equation, literally and figuratively does matter. Above and beyond the quantitative numbers is also aggregate data related to the human genomic footprint of individuals and groups. To be sure, issues of privacy and one's genetic footprint can be violated if there is not shared agreement around data collection.

For over two decades SDPC has been committed to confronting, unveiling, addressing, centering, and responding to systemic racism and violations of international human rights law against Africans and people of African descent. *“Acts of reparatory justice are **never just about money** but includes the requisite steps of atonement, reckoning and transformation which affirms the untold histories, mutual healing and humanity of all parties involved.”*

SDPC has established an institutional research, data and collection center formed through a partnership with McCormick Theological Seminary (Chicago, IL, USA), The Center for Reparative Justice, Transformation, and Remediation. The Center for Reparative Justice, Transformation, and Remediation (The "Center"), is a historic venture that joins the church and the academy, theology and praxis, to initiate and support truth telling, sacred memory, reparatory justice, restorative justice, liberation theology and reparations. The Center is a clear signal to what is possible through civil society, institutional bodies and NGOS prioritizing reparatory justice for People of African Descent. We are diligently working with others to advocate for NIFEA (New International Financial and Economic Architecture initiative and the Zac Tax as a trigger for reparatory justice and furthering the achievement of SDGs.

There is much more work to be done. We must unite around a Pan African vision that addresses the health and safety of Black people worldwide as we face increased emergencies. We must level-set our definitions in order to address harm done around land, cultural arts, language, sacred rituals environmental and health disparities. Atonement, reckoning, and transformation is a part of the process.

