

Black Women for Liberated Workplaces Statement and Recommendations
3rd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent
Geneva, Switzerland
April 2024

Submitted in Response to Reparations, Sustainable Development, and Economic Justice

In 2023, Dr. Yanique Redwood published a book called *White Women Cry and Call Me Angry: A Black Woman's Memoir on Racism in Philanthropy* to detail her experiences of racial trauma at work. Since then, Dr. Redwood has heard from hundreds of Black women with similar experiences at NGOs, in academia, and in the philanthropic and public sectors in the U.S. and around the world.

After Dr. Claudine Gay was forced to resign from Harvard University as its first Black president, Dr. Redwood conducted an informal survey of Black women who had been fired or forced to resign under racialized circumstances. The results were devastating. Black women shared their experiences of depression, anxiety, insomnia, fatigue, despair, hopelessness, self-harm, and suicide ideation following racial trauma at work. They spoke about increases in blood pressure, gastrointestinal issues, body aches, and headaches. They spoke about the emotional toll, including feelings of isolation, shame, humiliation, anger, and outrage.

The unrelenting stress of being a Black woman in racially hostile environments wears the body down. Not only are Black women living in sicker bodies due to this stress, but we are also dying earlier. Dr. Arline Geronimus coined the term weathering to describe this phenomenon of accelerated aging among Black women and other marginalized communities. In simple terms, weathering means that a Black woman's biological age is likely older than her chronological age due to racism-related stress. In addition, workplace racism contributes to financial impacts as Black women's careers are derailed and income and wealth are denied. We cannot forget the devastating economic impact that Black women experience in a capitalist society.

As we deliberate about reparations and economic justice issues at the 3rd meeting of the UN Permanent Forum for People of African Descent, let's not forget that Black women have experienced a particular kind of harm from the beginning of colonization to present-day workplace plantations. This current manifestation of harm against Black women at work is simply a continuation of the extraction from Black women that we have seen for centuries.

Our coalition Black Women for Liberated Workplaces joins others in recommending that the Forum create a working group or other mechanism that focuses on issues specific to Black women's health—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, maternal, and financial.

We also recommend that the Forum:

- Declare it a crisis that both low-wage and higher-wage Black women workers (i.e., NGOs, nonprofits, philanthropy, government, and academia) are in trouble. Both have been on the forefront of reparations and racial justice advocacy in their communities and inside of institutions. Without their efforts, our movements for racial, economic, and environmental justice will be weakened, including the movement for reparations.
- Commission research (including public opinion research) and launch a public education and awareness campaign specific to the histories, experiences, and particular harms Black women workers face. This research should address the frameworks and language that can support advocacy efforts related to the violence that Black women experience at work, including the interrogation of frameworks such as misogynoir, gender-based violence, human rights, economic justice, weathering, and colonialism.
- Incorporate healing justice in all efforts to advance racial, gender, and economic justice for Black women. A term coined by Cara Page, healing justice is a framework that identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene on generational trauma and violence and bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts, and minds. We cannot expect to be successful in our efforts to build the world we deserve if Black women do not also heal from the extraction and exploitation that we have experienced at work.