

April 15, 2022

Michelle Bachelet Jeria, High Commissioner
Anti-Racial Discrimination Section
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations Office at Geneva
CH 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Greetings High Commissioner Bachelet:

The Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference (SDPC) is a 501(c)3 and United Nations Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) located in Chicago, IL (in the United States of America).

As an interdenominational network, the mission of the SDPC is to nurture, sustain, and mobilize the African American faith community in collaboration with civic, corporate, and philanthropic leaders, to address critical needs of human and social justice within local, national, and global communities. SDPC seeks to strengthen the individual and collective capacity of thought leaders and activists in the church, academy and community through education, advocacy and activism.

SDPC represents the voices and experiences of millions of people of African descent. SDPC is uniquely positioned to convey its point of view from the framework of ethical and moral authority in alignment with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Dr. Iva Carruthers serves as the General Secretary of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, is a member of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent and has been long engaged in the global reparations movement.

Our contribution is greatly informed by our work to protect People of African descent living in the United States and speaks directly to your four-point agenda to end systemic racism and human rights violations by law enforcement against Africans and people of African descent. For nearly 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. We believe that through this work, together, we can disrupt, rethink, reimagine and reinvent the ways in which we create safe societies for all- especially for those historically underinvested, overlooked and violated communities on the margins.

Ongoing Attack on Black life: Police, Politics & Founding Narratives

A deeper level of racial reckoning took place here within the United States in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, and waves of awareness were felt across the globe. Unfortunately, we also witnessed the energy for institutional change derailed by criminalization bias and voter

disenfranchisement. Further, on January 6th, 2021, communities of color watched as the democratic project unraveled in our nation's capital city.

With sustained political disarray within our borders, and race tensions at continued high in the aftermath of the Trump Administration, the advocacy and unity of the global community means more now than ever before. We are hopeful that as a direct result of the International Decade for People of African Descent, it will be determined without question that the norms of policing in the United States of America must change. The facts of the matter are that policing in North America was conceived in the idea that the lives of Black people – enslaved or free – were never to be considered more valuable than those of white people. Policing as we know it evolved from the Slave Patrols which gave white people the right to kill Black people; ordinary citizens were deputized and authorized to shoot and kill Black people if they even thought a Black person was trying to flee enslavement. Young men were required to serve on these patrols and could be penalized if they did not perform as their bosses – i.e., wealthy, white men – did not think they had done enough to keep Black people under control. These are the historical violent roots of the system that we must contend with to confront and dismantle injustice.

Alarming, the core of this nation's founding narrative is being re-written as curriculum and core teaching norms that are pillars to a primary subject in school, history, and the framework for critical race theory, is being challenged and changed right before our eyes. The danger in the road that the United States is traveling down is of epic proportions for minorities- particularly for Black Americans who are more likely to be criminalized, whose stories and histories are distorted and whose voices are silenced through various forms of punitive injustice and voter suppression. Scholars of Atrocity Studies have shown us that under the right conditions, a divisive founding narrative has the power to mobilize a genocidal policy.

Further Action Taken: Transformative Change for Racial Justice & Equality

Promising Practices & Initiatives

Truth Telling Commissions

SDPC has been on the frontlines in the fight to defend and protect Black lives for decades. Notably, in 2010 the SDPC partnered with Michelle Alexander to produce an accompanying faith-based study guide for her text *“The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness”*. Soon after that initiative, SDPC worked to host “Justice Commission Hearings” in ten states throughout the south where they amplified the voices of our Sisters and Brothers who had returned from an incarceration experience. We also work with the Drug Policy Alliance, committed to ending criminalization.

Our Truth Telling process (which are done in partnership with local communities and largely directed by their lived experience and expertise), reveal the horrific human rights violations that have taken place. When appropriate, these process offer next steps led by the local communities impacted to address transgenerational consequences correlated and tethered to racialized policies in specific areas of American life.

It is our goal to continue in this work during the summer of 2022, launching a multi-year, multi-state truth telling movement to address the imperatives of a painful, but necessary, racial reckoning in the U.S. This initiative is essential as this nation moves out of a global pandemic and into new realities of its global geopolitical positioning. We will begin with a national truth commission in Richmond, Virginia this summer. We are naming Virginia as ground zero because Virginia played an unparalleled role in the early history of North America and so, too, Virginia can play an unparalleled role in this historic season in which, we believe, North America's very soul and very future is at stake. Foundational assumptions, policies, and relationships, evidenced in early Virginia history, represent the types of untold American stories needed to be unearthed to understand why today the U.S. has not successfully addressed the racial divide.

As you know High Commissioner, with your inclusion of *listening* in your four-point agenda, it is imperative that we chart a way forward hearing firsthand from families, communities, activist, scholars and practitioners on the frontline stories that will add invaluable depth and perspective to your lens on the minorities face. In your continued reporting we are hopeful that your recommendations will remain to be framed towards a clear trajectory of reparatory justice and healing that counters the historic and collateral damages of the transatlantic slave trade system and its legacies. Interventions must stand on ethical and moral principles of Human Rights and real remedies for transformation. Minority communities in the United States are in need of an international mechanism that provides a platform to be heard-- in a real sense, their lives and their very futures depend on it.

Partnership with Theological Institutions

The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference is pleased to report on the development of an awareness raising institutional research, data and collection center that was formed through a partnership this academic year- The Center for Reparative Justice, Transformation, and Remediation at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL (United States of America). 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's mission focuses on the following three areas:

1. Public education, academic courses, scholarship, and engagement on issues of reparative and restorative justice, racial remediation, and systemic transformation;
2. Creation of leadership curricula related to the Center's purpose for use in seminaries, churches, and other institutions; and
3. Participation in the creation and implementation of public policy and public theology related to the mission of the Center.

As the Center will serve to situate theology and ministry in the public discourse on reparations, reparatory justice and models of remedy to address centuries of foundational and systemic racism in North America, SDPC looks forward to the ways in which the Center will serve as a blueprint for what is possible between NGO and academic partnerships centered on the experience of People of African descent living in various countries across the diaspora. With a global vision for justice, grounded in the prophetic tradition, SDPC reports on the establishment of the Center with hope and determination to engage the challenging work ahead. The Center is poised to uniquely contribute to the human rights movement for people of African descent and other groups subject

to related injustices, and we look forward to all that we will learn together and achieve together through this unique partnership.

Local Reparations Initiatives

Finally, SDPC is pleased to report on the development of a reparations program being implemented by the Evanston city council (a northern suburb of Chicago, IL). This reparations initiative represents a legislative commitment and funding to address the historical injustices that continue to impact the lives of People of African descent living in Evanston, IL. Specifically, this initiative includes acknowledgement of the harm, designated taxes for a reparations fund, and stakeholder independent authority to grant individual and communal claims of reparations, initially related to housing injustice and related consequences. Program components include:

- 100% of the sales tax revenue from recreational marijuana in the city going to the city's reparations initiative
- Training for jobs and other benefits
- A committee of residents committed to researching how to spend the money and how to best support the black community through housing, education and economic incentives
- The initial fund is appropriated at 10 million dollars

In the past year, over 250 municipal and state reparations legislative bills have been passed. They include major cities, small municipalities, and the state of California. SDPC is engaged in monitoring, providing resources and counsel to Evanston, several other initiatives, including Elaine, Arkansas. Affirming the International Decade of People of African Descent, the SDPC is amplifying and appropriating the moral agency of the faith community to engage in education, advocacy and actions to implement reparatory justice and healing initiatives in alignment with the UN IDPAD goals and objectives.

We believe that reparatory justice is beyond financial transactions but must also address the psychosocial trauma and histories, iconography and story-telling that goes along with it. This example of local organizing in Evanston, IL is a hopeful beginning.

In closing, we know the truth of who the United States of America is. As Black people living in a country built on anti-Black racism, we know that more than ever, the case for reparatory justice and demand for reparations, the call for a truth telling movement that begins to explore the transgenerational consequences of white racism upon generations of people of African descent must become central to the way forward. We are grateful for the commitment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to do this work, and we are grateful for the opportunity to submit this report.