

**United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent  
32nd session on "Economic Empowerment of People of African Descent"**

**Room XVII, Palais des Nations**

**1 May 2023**

**10:00 a.m.**

**Opening Statement by**

**Mr. Abdoul Thioye**

**Chief a.i. of the Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch**

**(ROLENDB)**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for inviting me to address you.

It is an honour for me to join you this morning to warmly welcome the convening of the Working Group's 32nd session on "Economic Empowerment of People of African Descent".

I would also like to thank the Working Group, in particular the outgoing Chair, Ms. Catherine Namakula, for the tireless work and achievements in advancing the Working Group's mandate to promote the human rights of people of African descent.

Some of the Working Group's achievements include substantive recommendations provided to Member States and other stakeholders, stemming from multi-stakeholder consultations during fact-finding country visits, as well as from cross-cutting thematic reports and operational guidelines for the inclusion of the rights of people of African descent in development programming. Furthermore, the Working Group continuously takes action on cases of reported violations through its communications procedure.

I would like to take this opportunity to call on all stakeholders, in particular Member States, to take heightened action against the persistence of racial discrimination in general in all corners of every society globally, and, in particular, against racial discrimination faced by people of African descent – wherever, whenever and however it may manifest.

In his global update to the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner called for solutions to manifestations of racial discrimination to be rooted in the universality of rights. I echo this important message, which behoves Member States to enact action-oriented policies to ensure effectiveness to that end.

Also in his global update, the High Commissioner underscored the importance of a human rights economy and described it as an economy "in which the aim of advancing human rights informs all national economic, fiscal, monetary, investment and business decisions".

It is undoubtedly clear that a human rights economy must ensure swift action on debt relief as a key element of reparatory justice. I have no doubt that these considerations will be of great significance to the theme under discussion during this session.

In this 75th year since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), we must remember that the 30 articles of the UDHR not only laid out the foundations of international human rights law, but also bequeathed, with non-

discrimination as the foundation, the universality and inalienability of rights and freedoms to all peoples. As evident as this is, it is deplorable that it necessitates reminding that this includes people of African descent.

It is in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) that the collective conscious of the international community found the moral courage to acknowledge that the harm and suffering caused by colonialism, slavery and the trade in enslaved Africans as constituting a crime against humanity and, furthermore, that the effects and persistence of these practices have been among the factors contributing to lasting social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world today.

What is long overdue is for national governments to transform this moral courage into concrete action.

Therefore, despite any political posturing that the DDPA may be subjected to, it undeniably remains a fundamental blueprint for the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. It remains the moral compass of the international community on racial discrimination.

This year also being the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, we are reminded of the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights.

It is evident, now more than ever, that denial, exclusion and exceptionalism can never constitute adequate measures against the trans-boundary toxicity of racism and racial discrimination.

As the global fights against climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have shown us, humanity is inextricably bound by the fate of both its collective action and inaction.

It is in this manner that I call attention to the dangers of the normalization of institutional, structural and systemic racism.

The forbearance to promote racial justice and equality must always be deplored, for such indefensible actions not only deprive their victims of their inalienable rights enshrined in the UDHR and in accordance with legally binding international human rights treaties such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, but they further underpin harmful manifestations of their pernicious legacies that destroy the very fabric of equal and peaceful societies.

The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, together with the collaborative, anti-racial discrimination efforts of other mechanisms and the OHCHR, works to address systemic racism and advance the full enjoyment of all human rights by people of African descent.

This weaving of racial justice and equality for people of African descent must critically be shaped by the triple threads of recognition, justice and development, as envisioned in the pillars of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

The establishment of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, with its inaugural session held last year, is a promising development of the International Decade.

It is notable, however, that with the International Decade ending in 2024, an incredible amount of the Decade's Programme of Activities remains to be implemented, thus not all the main objectives have been achieved with a view to advance racial justice and equality for people of African descent, including the ongoing drafting process of the Declaration on the promotion and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent.

Consequently, I reiterate the High Commissioner's appeal to Member States to consider what can be done to continue this important work.

The global fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and more specifically the fight for racial justice and equality for people of African descent, must not be fragmented and solely advanced on the basis of past failures, for it demands the comprehensiveness and pro-activeness called for in Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. It further demands the positive measures outlined in the Right to Development.

In this regard, the Operational Guidelines on the inclusion of People of African Descent in the 2030 agenda, developed by the Working Group and its many clear recommendations in its thematic reports, speak to this endeavour.

Economic empowerment of people of African descent requires not only their inclusion in all spheres of life, but their direct and active participation, including in decision-making processes, in all sectors of society.

To this end, I share my support, and that of the Office of the High Commissioner, to this process.

I thank you for your attention and wish you success in your deliberations.