

**Thematic Discussion on Education and Enterprise: Black Agency and Achievements with the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent**

**Statement by the Delegation of the United States of America  
United National Working Group of Experts on People of African descent  
32<sup>nd</sup> session on “Economic empowerment of people of African descent”  
May 3, 2023**

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The United States shares the goal of achieving meaningful progress on racial equity and justice for people of African descent as part of our commitment to racial equity and justice.

As part of that commitment, Secretary Blinken appointed Desiree Cormier Smith as the first Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice, to advance the human rights of members of marginalized racial, ethnic, and Indigenous communities, including people of African descent, and to combat systemic racism, discrimination, violence, and xenophobia globally.

Recognizing the systemic challenges faced by people of African descent, President Biden also signed the White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity Through Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in 2021, an executive order expanding support for these vital institutions.

HBCUs have a proud legacy of achievement in creating pathways to opportunity and educational excellence for Black students, who often faced discrimination from other higher education institutions.

For generations, HBCUs have advanced intergenerational economic mobility for Black families and communities and developed vital academic research.

HBCUs have made our country more prosperous and equitable. They are proven means of advancement for people of all ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds, especially Black Americans.

The success of HBCUs has come despite systemic barriers to resources and opportunities. To eliminate these barriers, the White House Initiative coordinates a government-wide effort to expand pathways for HBCUs to access federal funding and programs and financial and other support to students. It also convenes an annual HBCU conference for stakeholders to amplify the Administration's priorities related to strengthening the schools and their surrounding communities.

Also, earlier this year, President Biden issued an executive order further advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities. It aims to build a strong, fair, and inclusive workforce through avenues such as educational equity for students from marginalized racial, ethnic, and Indigenous communities, so our schools put every student on a path to success. In doing so, we hope to help bridge the gap between the world we see and the future we seek.

I hope the panel and working group can share further thoughts on how Member States can best expand efforts to advance educational equity and opportunity for people of African descent. Thank you very much.