**20th Session of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD)  
3-7 April 2017**

**CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent held its twentieth session in Geneva from 3-7 April. The theme for the session was, “Leaving no one behind: People of African Descent & the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”. The Working Group thanks Member States, representatives of International Organizations and civil society for their active participation.

**Conclusions**

1. The SDGs and the International Decade for people of African descent present opportunities for concrete action to advance the human rights of people of African descent. Structural racism, racial discrimination, Afrophobia, xenophobia and related intolerance are the root causes of inequality and must be addressed. The 2030 Agenda envisages “a world of universal respect for equality and non-discrimination “between and within countries, including gender equality, by reaffirming the responsibilities of all States to “respect, protect and promote human rights, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national and social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.” In adopting the SDGs, the States have pledged that no one will be left behind and to reach the furthest behind first. The SDGs are clearly focusing on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.
2. CERD in its General recommendation 34 recalled that “racism and structural discrimination against people of African descent, rooted in the infamous regime of slavery, are evident in the situations of inequality affecting them and reflected, inter alia, in the following domains: their grouping, together with indigenous peoples, among the poorest of the poor; their low rate of participation and representation in political and institutional decision-making processes; additional difficulties they face in access to and completion and quality of education, which results in the transmission of poverty from generation to generation; inequality in access to the labour market; limited social recognition and valuation of their ethnic and cultural diversity; and a disproportionate presence in prison populations”.
3. The Working Group has a mandate to monitor the human rights situation of people of African descent, elaborate proposals for the elimination of racial discrimination against people of African descent and to contribute to development programmes for people of African descent. The Working Group is therefore well-suited to advocate for prioritization of programmes specifically tailored for combating structural racism and racial discrimination against people of African descent in implementation of the 2030 SDG agenda and the International Decade for people of African descent.
4. Implementation and monitoring efforts must assess progress in achieving results for people of African descent specifically. This requires, inter alia, consultation and participation of people of African descent at all stages of the process; the collection and analysis of disaggregated data that reveals the situation of the most disadvantaged groups and those groups affected by discrimination, and the development and implementation of specific programmes to address the human rights violations and disparities faced by people of African descent.
5. The Working Group concludes that inequalities are deeply entrenched by structural barriers that intersect and reinforce each other. Given its cross-cutting nature, the goals and targets will not be met if we do not acknowledge that racism, racial discrimination, Afrophobia, xenophobia and related intolerance will continue to function as structural and systemic barriers to sustainable development for people of African descent.
6. The Working Group concludes that growing income, wealth and other forms of inequalities are threats to social stability. Without change, growing inequalities and segregation disrupt our societies and people of African descent are the first victims. The eradication of structural racism is key for attaining the SDGs. . This is further underlined in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which emphasizes that "poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion and economic disparities are closely associated with racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and contribute to the persistence of racist attitudes and practices which in turn generate more poverty".
7. The Working Group is convinced that there is a clear connection between poverty and structural racism. Discrimination can both cause poverty and be a hurdle in alleviating poverty. It is not a coincidence that in countries with a history of the Transatlantic Trade in enslaved Africans, enslavement and colonialism, the poorest population group is composed of racial or ethnic minorities.
8. Women and girls of people of African descent suffer from multiple forms of discrimination on account of race, gender, class and other identities. The Working Group agrees with the Afro feminist theory of intersectionality that women of African descent face multiple forms of oppression which are interconnected and cannot be addressed separately from one another. Women of African descent face discrimination in all areas of life and their specific human rights concerns must be addressed.
9. Education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development. It is a mechanism through which economically and socially marginalized peoples including people of African descent can lift themselves out of poverty. It plays a vital role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment, and fostering tolerance and respect between people.
10. The stark reality is that people of African descent continue to suffer from many multiple, aggravated or intersecting forms of discrimination. As a result, educational outcomes for people of African descent are much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, including skilled teachers and quality curriculum. There is copious evidence that in some States, students of African descent routinely receive dramatically different learning opportunities based on their social status. This poses a fundamental challenge to Goal 4, which aims at ensuring an “inclusive and equitable quality education” for all. Intimately connected to the right to education is the right to work. With poor educational outcomes at all levels in addition to racial discrimination, people of African descent are unable to secure decent work.
11. The Working Group regrets that people of African descent generally do not enjoy peace and security as a result of structural discrimination endemic within the criminal justice system. . They do not have access to effective justice. They are subjected to racial profiling, police violence, and are disproportionately incarcerated with impunity.
12. The Working Group concludes that enslavement, colonial and post-colonial injustices as well as constant struggles with structural racism, intolerance and Afrophobia have had direct influence on health and well-being of People of African Descent. Among many pivotal issues, special attention was given to challenges faced by People of African Descent in the area of mental health and the urgent need for adequate health care and support policies for People of African Descent.
13. The Working Group welcomes Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO)’s work in the field of health of people of African descent. PAHO’s work is based on an intercultural approach to health and equal treatment among the different groups from the standpoint of equality and mutual respect, recognizing the value of culture and the elements that comprise it, which includes, among others, lifestyles, value systems, and traditions. PAHO/WHO is working in the development of specific plans on health of people of African descent in the Latin American and the Caribbean region.
14. The role of civil society in the work of the Working Group remains critical. The Working Group noted that civil society reported common manifestations of structural racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, Afrophobia and related intolerance faced by people of African descent. The Working Group seeks to strengthen its engagement with civil society to further enhance its work by exploring innovative ways including the use of modern technology to allow wide participation of people of African descent.
15. The International Decade for people of African descent aims at raising the issue of the historical, economic, political and cultural non-recognition of the people of African descent who were victims of the Transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, enslavement and colonialism. It also aims to deconstruct racism. The International Decade offers the possibility of bringing together States, civil society, multilateral institutions, to elaborate ways to effectively address the fundamental basis of knowledge and rights of people of African descent . The Agenda 2063, adopted by African Union and rooted in pan-Africanism and African renaissance is also an important reference in this regard.

**Recommendations**

1. The Working Group will consider the development of operational guidelines for use by stakeholders (Governments, UN and civil society) on how to prioritize people of African descent as a particularly discriminated group at all stages of implementation of the SDGs. The Working Group will advocate for (i) special attention to the human rights situation of people of African descent, based on analysis of disparities and specific programmes of action to address gaps and improve their human rights situation; (ii) the designing of special projects, in collaboration with people of African descent and civil society, to support their initiatives.
2. The Working Group will continue to assist and facilitate the exchange of information and connect financial and development institutions with people of African descent and civil society for this purpose. It will share its country visit reports and request development and financial institutions and continue to assist Member States and people of African descent in implementation of its recommendations.
3. The Working Group urges Member States to allocate additional investments to people of African descent in the health systems, education, and promoting equal opportunities in employment, as well as other positive measures and strategies within the human rights framework.
4. The Working Group will consider contributing to a baseline study on data about people of African descent, including the collection of disaggregated data in accordance with human rights principles of participation, disaggregation, self-identification, transparency, privacy and accountability. . The study will be followed with an expert meeting on the importance of data collection on people of African descent to close the gaps and address the inequalities and discrimination that they face.
5. The Working Group will conduct consultations in countries of interest to its mandate on prevention of racial discrimination against people of African descent with development and financial institutions. The consultations will be organized in cooperation with Governments, UN Country Teams, National Human Rights Institutions, Equality Bodies and civil society and other relevant national stakeholders. The purpose would be to field test the operational guidelines on how to integrate the human rights concerns of people of African descent into SDG implementation.
6. The Working Group encourages financial and development institutions to support civil society and government programmes and projects which aim to implement the Working Group recommendations.
7. States should make a genuine commitment to the standard of “leaving no one behind,” by collecting disaggregated data. To monitor the implementation of the SDGs, it will be important to improve the availability of, and access to data and statistics disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts to support the monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs. The SDGs indicators should include the use of data from the existing mechanisms for monitoring compliance with human rights standards, especially the Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) of the Human Rights Council and reviews on compliance with the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).
8. Include opportunities for national, regional, and international civil society organizations to submit reports on progress of the SDGs in countries for which they have the expertise and experience and to participate in intergovernmental review processes at the regional and international levels.
9. In order to eradicate poverty, particularly affecting people of African descent, it is essential to deconstruct all the elements of power and knowledge which maintains and promotes the ongoing structural racism of which people of African descent are victims.
10. In order to advance the SDGs, States must provide effective, accountable and inclusive public institutions which must, inter alia, effectively protect the human rights of people of African descent. The Working Group is recommending community-based monitoring of the SDGs. Grassroots organizations can become active partners for change.
11. The Working Group urges States to eradicate multiple forms of discrimination and oppression faced by women and girls of African descent according to the concept of intersectionality in all areas of the SDGs.
12. States must ensure that people of African descent have access to quality education which enables them to compete at an equal footing with others in the labour market. States must acknowledge the persistence of structural racism and multiple forms of discrimination within the education system and must therefore put in place appropriate legislation and affirmative action policies to tackle the problem. School curriculum for all should take into consideration an accurate account of history of Transatlantic Trade in enslaved Africans, enslavement, and colonialism.
13. States should ratify international agreements related to the fight against racism and discrimination in education. To this end, the Working Group calls for the universal ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) as well as its Optional Protocol, approved in December 2007 by the United Nations General Assembly, and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education.
14. The Working Group calls upon States to promote access to decent work for people of African descent in key occupations and economic sectors, without any discrimination as required by ILO Convention 111. Other measures include improving anti-discrimination legislation and its enforcement by focusing and addressing multiple forms of discrimination such as discrimination based on race, colour, gender and disability.
15. Taking advantage of the International Decade for people of African descent, States must cut mass incarceration of people of African descent in half by 2024, at the very least.
16. The challenges and specific risks faced by People of African Descent in regard to health should be adequately addressed by States, inter alia, through efficient health insurance schemes, targeted programs reducing maternal mortality and improving pre- and post-birth medical care, providing adequate health service in all areas, including mental health and psychological support, raising awareness of specific and culture-related health issues of People of African Descent among the public as well as medical professionals.
17. The Working Group welcomes the efforts being conducted by PAHO/WHO regarding health for people of African descent and recommends that such work is extended to other regions and organizations.
18. States should promote a new appreciation of traditional knowledge, practices, and cultural expressions through transmission mechanisms specific to each culture, as related to the exercise of sovereignty over territory and with regard to the protection of the biological and cultural heritage of people of African descent.
19. All international, regional and national organizations, including UN agencies, should have a specific mandate on people of African descent. It is essential to promote social participation and strategic partnerships with people of African descent, ensuring the representation of women, men, and the entire population concerned when designing policies and activities.
20. The Working Group encourages civil society to constructively engage with States in the implementation of the Working Group’s recommendations. The Working Group urges CSOs to make use of its complaint procedure in order to bring to its attention any concerns relating to Africans and people of African descent.
21. The Working Group calls upon Member States and the UN agencies and programmes, as well as international development and financial programmes to empower and connect grassroots and other civil society representatives who are working together to seek recognition and justice for legacies of enslavement and colonialism.
22. States and international agencies, funds and programmes, are called upon to ensure continued engagement with the Working Group, including at the upcoming High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and other relevant fora.
23. The International Decade and the SDGs must meet the aspirations of people of African descent. The Durban Declaration and Plan of Action must be reaffirmed and States must guarantee its implementation. The Working Group urges Member States to reach consensus so that the Forum for people of African descent can be held as soon as possible, before the end of 2017. In order for the Forum to reflect the concerns of the States and civil society, it is desirable to open a consultation with civil society organizations to work on the format of the Forum. The Forum should, inter alia, discuss on sources of racism and Afrophobia, the question of reparatory justice, as well as the overall theme of the International Decade- recognition, justice and development. The work in the Forum should primarily lead to the development of the UN Declaration on People of African Descent and other tangible results.