

**Remarks at the General Assembly Special Event on
the International Decade for People of African Descent**

H.E. Ms. Samantha Power
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
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Thank you, President Kutesa, for chairing this session. And I'd like to extend a very special thanks as well to Ambassador Mamabolo of South Africa, for his tireless efforts to make this resolution, and the decade it sets off, a reality.

I'm honored and humbled to be here, both in my capacity as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and in my capacity as a member of the Cabinet of the first – but by no means the last – African-American President of the United States.

The United States comes to the International Decade for People of African Descent with a full and robust commitment to ensuring the rights of persons of African descent, and to combating racism and discrimination against them. That is our commitment to members of all groups – whether they are discriminated against because of the color of their skin, because of what they believe, because of their ethnic group, because of who they love, or for any other reason.

Our commitment to addressing enduring discrimination and inequality is rooted in our belief in “the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” – a principle the General Assembly affirmed when it adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And our commitment is rooted in the understanding that when we reduce discrimination and racism – whether it is manifested in access to education or access to credit, in political participation or economic empowerment – entire societies benefit. To give just one example, a study released last month found that if the United States were able to close the educational achievement gaps between native-born white children and black and Hispanic children, the cumulative increase in our GDP from 2014 to 2050 would be up to \$20.4 trillion dollars, or an average of \$551 billion dollars per year. And that is on top of the lifetimes' worth of additional opportunities and joys that would be opened up for African American and Hispanic kids as a result of receiving a better education, and all of the enhanced contributions they could make to our communities which, as you know best, cannot be measured in dollars.

While we are proud of the progress we have made in the United States toward reducing discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity for all, we know that we are not yet where we need to be. The work that remains has been brought into sharp focus in recent weeks, in the aftermath of the local grand jury decisions in the killings of Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

For many in this audience, New York has become a home away from home. That's true for me too. And those of us who call New York home have seen first-hand the way the grand jury decisions have been felt across communities.

And I think what all of us have seen in this period is a desire to talk about the ongoing discrimination that many people in the United States feel and experience, and to bring that discussion out into the open. We are hearing from a truly diverse range of voices: community and faith leaders, policymakers, police, the press, and academics and students. The discussion is taking place in our classrooms and in our living rooms and on our city streets. Embracing this debate – with all of the heartfelt emotions and the hard questions it involves – is how we are turning this national moment into a chance to understand the work we still have to do to ensure that people of all races in America feel like they are treated with dignity and with respect.

Many of you have heard President Obama speak to these recent events, and to his commitment to ensuring that we have a country in which everybody is treated equally under the law. As the President recently said, “Right now, unfortunately, we are seeing too many instances where people just do not have confidence that folks are being treated fairly. And in some cases, those may be misperceptions; but in some cases, that is a reality. And it is incumbent upon all of us, as Americans, regardless of race, region, faith, that we recognize this is an American problem, and not just a black problem or a brown problem or a Native American problem.”

The President has laid out a series of steps we are taking to help address that reality, from creating a task force to promote community-oriented policing, which encourages strong relationships and builds trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve, to budgeting money for local law enforcement agencies to purchase body-worn cameras, which have been shown to strengthen accountability and transparency. These actions complement the reinvigorated police reform work being led by the Justice Department and United States Attorneys' Offices throughout this nation.

We understand that the most effective way to address gaps in rights and opportunities is by pinpointing where they exist, analyzing their causes, and finding targeted interventions to address them.

For example, we know boys and young men of color face disproportionate challenges and obstacles in the United States. In 2013, only 14 percent of black boys and 18 percent of Hispanic boys in the fourth grade scored proficient or better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the test we use to measure students' knowledge; by comparison, 42 percent of white boys scored proficient or better.

In response, in February, President Obama launched the “My Brother's Keeper” initiative, which is aimed at empowering boys and young men of color from cradle to college to career and ensuring that all young people can reach their full potential. Almost 200 mayors, county officials and tribal nations have committed to supporting the effort. In June, eleven of our nation's leading philanthropies pledged \$194 million in investments in organizations and initiatives dedicated to this goal; private companies have committed to developing programs as well. Communities are developing promising new approaches too, like “Becoming a Man,” a program run in collaboration with the University of Chicago, which provides students with life and academic skills. A recent study found that the intervention led to a 44 percent drop in violent crime arrests by at-risk youth, as well as improved kids' school performance and engagement. If that's the kind of result you see, we have to scale it.

We believe strongly that the Decade for People of African Descent will be most effective in tackling racism if it is rigorous in its analysis of where discrimination persists, and if it encourages fact-driven interventions to address it.

The United States also recognizes that we have to go beyond tackling racism and discrimination within our own borders, as big a challenge as that remains. In 2008, we launched a joint action plan with Brazil to promote racial and ethnic equality in both countries; and in 2010, we started a similar program with Colombia. The programs and others like them allow us to learn from and share best practices with our neighbors, such as hosting representatives of Brazil's Ministry of Health at our Centers for Disease Control to discuss ways to address racial disparities in health. We are also developing tools that can be used beyond our communities, like the "Teaching Respect for All" initiative, which we are spearheading with Brazil and UNESCO. The program launched a curriculum guide in June to instill respect and tolerance in young students, which has already been piloted in Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, and South Africa.

Sixty-six years ago today, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, affirming the human rights of all individuals, "without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or status." And fifty years ago this year, in 1964, the United States enacted the Civil Rights Act, broadly outlawing discrimination in our country. Upon signing the act into law, then-President Lyndon Johnson said, "Its purpose is to promote a more abiding commitment to freedom, a more constant pursuit of justice, and a deeper respect for human dignity."

In these two historic documents we see a common sense of purpose in working to ensure the rights of all people, and eradicating the discrimination and prejudice that undermines their inherent dignity. We remain fully committed to achieving that noble purpose.

Thank you.

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