



INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

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RECOGNITION · JUSTICE · DEVELOPMENT



CONTENTS

- 1 > FOREWORD BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
- 3 > INTRODUCTION BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
- 5 > WHY A DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT?
- 8 > WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE DECADE?
- 8 > WHAT IS THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE?
- 9 > WHAT CAN WE DO AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL?
 - 10 > RECOGNITION
 - 13 > JUSTICE
 - 15 > DEVELOPMENT
 - 16 > MULTIPLE OR AGGRAVATED DISCRIMINATION
- 17 > WHAT CAN WE DO AT THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS?
- 21 > WHAT IS THE UNITED NATIONS DOING?
- 27 > WHERE CAN WE GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE DECADE?





Children pose in a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs).
Photo: UN Photo/Logan Abassi | Haiti.



FOREWORD

ACROSS THE GLOBE, AFRICANS AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA CONTINUE TO SUFFER INEQUALITY AND DISADVANTAGE BECAUSE OF THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY AND COLONIALISM. FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE, PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION ARE A DISTANT DREAM FOR MANY.

People of African descent are among the poorest and most marginalized communities around the world. They have high rates of mortality and maternal deaths, and limited access to quality education, health services, housing and social security. They may experience discrimination in their access to justice, and they face alarmingly high rates of police violence and racial profiling.

We all need to do more to ensure fairness in justice and law enforcement systems and to promote and uphold the human rights of people of African descent everywhere.

The entire United Nations system is participating in the Decade's activities, from human rights bodies to specialized agencies, funds and programmes. I encourage everyone to develop and implement creative initiatives that will make a concrete difference to people's lives.

I count on all Member States to remain engaged and committed to the Decade at the local, national, regional and international levels.

This Decade is an opportunity for focused and concerted action. My hope is that a decade from now, the human rights situation of people of African descent worldwide will be vastly improved.

Ban Ki-moon

Secretary-General of the United Nations



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (centre) and Sam Kutesa (right), President of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly, cut the ribbon at the unveiling ceremony of the "Ark of Return", the Permanent Memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Photo: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe | United Nations, New York.



INTRODUCTION

THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT IS AN IMPORTANT COMMITMENT TO THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM.

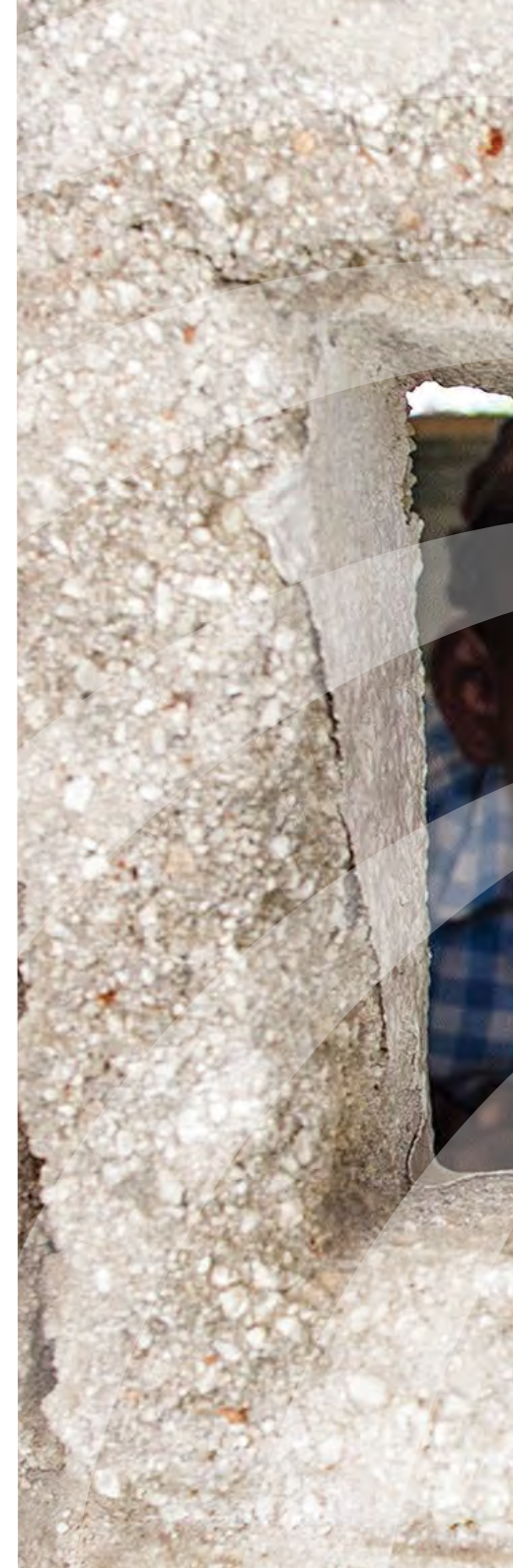
It will strengthen action to dismantle the many obstacles encountered by millions of people, in every region of the world. It will seek to reinforce laws that prohibit racial discrimination, and help ensure that they are implemented. It will promote greater knowledge about the cultural heritage of people of African descent, and the many fundamental contributions that they have made to the advancement of humanity.

The programme of activities for the Decade invites States to eradicate poverty and exclusion, and to enable full and equal participation by people of African descent in public, political and economic life. States should ensure equal access to justice and equal protection of the law, and eliminate racial profiling and police violence. Baseless and illegal notions of racial superiority, and incitement to racial and ethnic hatred or violence, must be combatted, and stereotyping of every kind should end. We ask States to take specific action to end discrimination against women and girls of African descent. They may also adopt special measures, such as affirmative action in education and employment, to overcome persistent inequalities.

This Decade is a historic opportunity. It is my hope that it will inspire all of us to grasp the deep harm that is done by discrimination, and to work tirelessly to put an end to this injustice.

Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

High Commissioner for Human Rights





The World Food Programme pushes to end malnutrition in Haitian children by supporting school feeding programs and infant monitoring and feeding.
Photo: UN Photo/Logan Abassi | Haiti.



WHY A DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT?

People of African descent¹ comprise a heterogeneous group with diverse histories, experiences and identities. The circumstances in which they live and the problems they face differ from country to country and region to region. There are around 200 million people of African descent living in the Americas² and many millions more in the other continents. Whether as descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery or as more recent migrants, they face a series of general and global cross-cutting issues that must be addressed.

> A refugee from Nigeria now living in Berlin. Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers of African descent are in many cases fleeing persecution, conflict or violence in their countries. They risk their lives in desperate attempts to find safety, and they are entitled to international protection. Photo: Mohamed Badarne | Germany.

¹ According to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, people of African descent are those referred to as such by the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and who identify themselves as belonging to this population group.

² <http://www.oas.org/dil/afrodescendants.htm>

In many cases, racial discrimination places people of African descent in the lowest positions in society, and they are grouped among the poorest of the poor. The discrimination that people of African descent face perpetuates cycles of disadvantage and intergenerational transmission of poverty, hindering their human development. The barriers in access to and completion of quality education have their repercussions in access to labour markets and the type of jobs acquired. Jobs are denied because of lack of educational qualifications or structural racism. Housing is refused because of racial prejudices, and people of African descent are forced to inhabit areas with precarious infrastructure and are exposed to crime and violence. Practicing their own culture and religion, as well as participating in the cultural life of their communities, are often met with restrictions and hindrances. In some countries they also face displacement due to threats of armed conflict or large-scale industrial development projects.

These problems are in part the legacy of terrible wrongs of the past. Racism and racial discrimination against people of African descent has its roots causes in the infamous regimes of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism. Today, these legacies, reinforced by interpersonal, institutional and structural discrimination, manifest themselves in the inequality and marginalization affecting them worldwide.

In many countries, the degree of political participation at different levels of government of people of African descent is often low, both in terms of voting and underrepresentation in political and institutional decision-making processes. Injustice traps people in poverty;

poverty becomes the pretext for injustice — and so new wrongs are piled on top of the old. The difficulty in accessing domestic judicial remedies is also a factor contributing to the persistence of racism. The absence of judicial guarantees and the prejudices of law enforcement officials further perpetuate patterns of exclusion and impunity.³

Young men of African descent are particularly vulnerable. They are at heightened risk of being subjected to street searches due to racial profiling. They experience alarmingly high rates of police violence and deaths in encounters with police officers. Men of African descent continue to be more frequently arrested, incarcerated and subjected to harsher sentences, including life imprisonment and the death penalty.

Many people of African descent suffer multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination based on other related grounds such as age, sex, language, religion, political opinion, social origin, property, birth or other status. Women and girls of African descent have historically suffered and continue to suffer compounded discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, socioeconomic status and gender. In many countries women of African descent have limited access to education, employment and security. They are vulnerable to gender-based violence.⁴ They often suffer higher rates of maternal mortality due to limited access to maternal health care.⁵

³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, OEA/Ser.L/V/II.doc.62.

⁴ Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African descent, A/HRC/21/60/Add.2.

⁵ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Pimentel v. Brazil*, communication No. 17/2008, Views adopted on 25 July 2011.

The relationship between racial or ethnic origin, social and economic status, and citizenship means that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers of African descent — as with other groups facing racial discrimination around the world — are often in extremely vulnerable situations.⁶ Today a large proportion of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are people of African descent. Globalization and growing disparities, both within and between countries, have contributed to the increase in international migration. Many migrants are seeking employment, educational opportunities or an improvement of their living conditions. Others want to reunite with family and still more are fleeing persecution, non-democratic regimes, conflict or violence in their own countries. They risk their lives in desperate attempts to find safety and they are entitled to international protection.

Public and political discourse, as well as the use of political platforms which promote or incite racial discrimination, fuelled by old and new prejudices and their impact on immigration policies, often result in migrants, refugees and asylum seekers being faulted for economic and social difficulties faced by societies, particularly in relation to the availability of jobs, housing and health services. Within such discourse, they are often portrayed as criminals and security threats as well as threats to the cultural identity of receiving countries, which enflames mistrust, fear and resentment. This results in further discrimination, racism and xenophobic attitudes, often manifested in violent acts.⁷ Racism therefore constitutes a great threat to democracy.

The situation of people of African descent in many cases remains largely invisible, with a lack of official disaggregated statistical data

to demonstrate the extent of discrimination. The limited social recognition and valuing of their histories, heritage and culture in education curricula, popular culture and the media and negative images of people of African descent often reinforce stereotypes.

Men and women of African descent have made contributions to their societies and nations' development throughout history, a fact that has been largely ignored. The list of those who have achieved greatness in such areas as civil rights, sciences, government, sports, arts and entertainment is vast.

The momentum created by the International Decade and relevant implementation efforts could enrich and feed into the endeavours of the international community to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which places great emphasis on tackling inequalities.

The International Decade for People of African Descent is an occasion to promote greater knowledge, value and respect for achievements of people of African descent and their contributions to humanity. It is a useful tool to pave the way for future work and cooperation between States, international and regional organizations, civil society and others to improve the human rights situation and well-being of people of African descent. The International Decade is an opportunity not only to fight racial discrimination faced by people of African descent but also to ensure the equal enjoyment of all human rights by all, and strengthen equality, non-discrimination, the rule of law and democracy in our societies.

⁶ Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, A/HRC/21/60/Add.2.

⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, A/HRC/7/19.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES OF THE DECADE?

The overall objective of the Decade is to promote respect, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by people of African descent, as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It focuses in particular on:

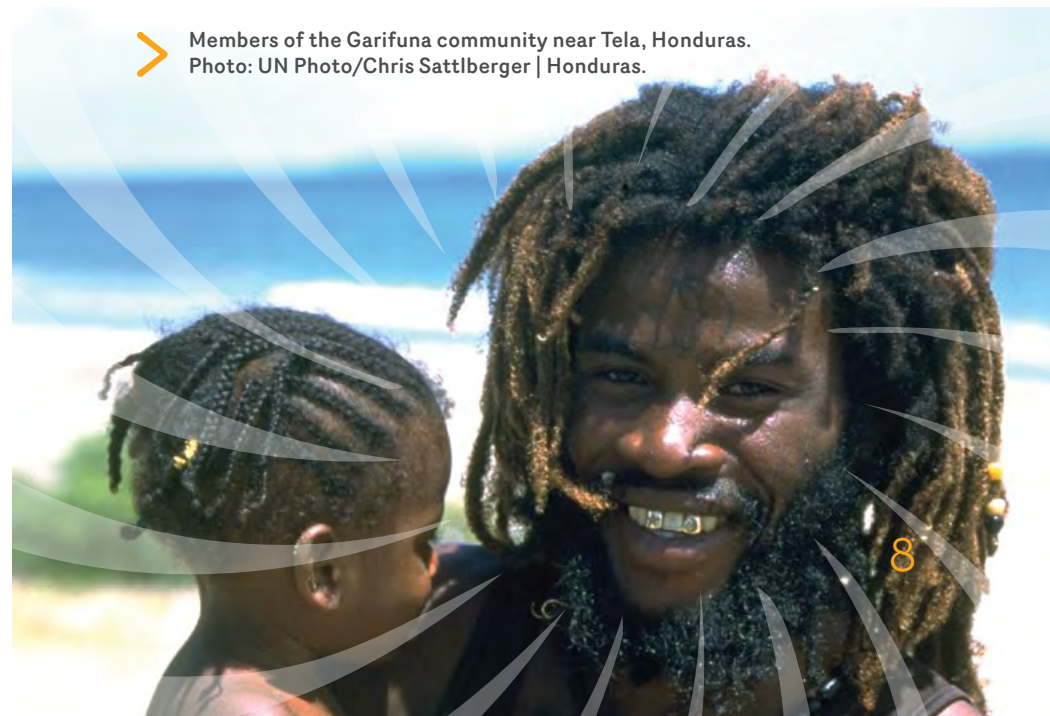
- 1 Strengthening national, regional and international action in relation to the full enjoyment of all their rights, and their full and equal participation in all aspects of society;
- 2 Promoting greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage, culture and contribution to the development of societies;
- 3 Adopting and strengthening national, regional and international legal frameworks in accordance with the Durban Declaration and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and to ensure their full and effective implementation.

WHAT IS THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE?

In 2014, the General Assembly adopted a Programme of Activities for the International Decade,⁸ outlining specific actions to be taken by governments and all other actors whose work intersects — directly or indirectly — with issues pertaining to people of African descent in any part of the world in the three areas highlighted within the Decade: **recognition, justice and development.**

⁸ General Assembly Resolution, A/RES/69/16, Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

> Members of the Garifuna community near Tela, Honduras.
Photo: UN Photo/Chris Sattlberger | Honduras.



WHAT CAN WE DO AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL?




> A young boy with his pet parrot
in Santarem in the Amazon region.
Photo: UN Photo/Shelley Rotner | Brazil.

STATES SHOULD TAKE CONCRETE AND PRACTICAL STEPS THROUGH THE ADOPTION AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES TO COMBAT RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE FACED BY PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE PARTICULAR SITUATION OF WOMEN, GIRLS AND YOUNG MALES, BY, INTER ALIA, THE ACTIVITIES DESCRIBED BELOW.

> 1 < RECOGNITION

A >THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION STATES SHOULD:

- (a) Remove all obstacles that prevent their equal enjoyment of all human rights, economic, social, cultural, civil and political, including the right to development;
- (b) Promote the effective implementation of national and international legal frameworks;
- (c) Withdraw reservations contrary to the object and purpose of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and to consider withdrawing other reservations;
- (d) Undertake a comprehensive review of domestic legislation with a view to identifying and abolishing provisions that entail direct or indirect discrimination;
- (e) Adopt or strengthen comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and ensure its effective implementation;
- (f) Provide effective protection for people of African descent, and review and repeal all laws that have a discriminatory effect on people of African descent facing multiple, aggravated or intersecting forms of discrimination;
- (g) Adopt, strengthen and implement action-oriented policies, programmes and projects to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance designed to ensure full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by people of African descent; States are also encouraged to elaborate national plans of action to promote diversity, equality, equity, social justice, equality of opportunity and the participation of all;
- (h) Establish and/or strengthen national mechanisms or institutions with a view to formulating, monitoring and implementing policies to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and promoting racial equality, with the participation of representatives of civil society;



Child at an outdoor class
in Jamaica.
Photo: UN Photo/Milton Grant
| Jamaica.

- (i) As appropriate, establish and/or strengthen independent national human rights institutions, in conformity with the Paris Principles, and/or similar mechanisms with the participation of civil society, and provide them with adequate financial resources, competence and capacity for protection, promotion and monitoring to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

B >EDUCATION ON EQUALITY AND AWARENESS-RAISING STATES SHOULD:

- (a) Celebrate the launch of the International Decade at the national level, and develop national programmes of action and activities for the full and effective implementation of the Decade;
- (b) Organize national conferences and other events aimed at triggering an open debate and raising awareness on the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including government, civil society representatives and individuals or groups of individuals who are victims;
- (c) Promote greater knowledge and recognition of and respect for the culture, history and heritage of people of African descent, including through research and education, and promote full and accurate inclusion of the history and contribution of people of African descent in educational curricula;
- (d) Promote the positive role that political leaders and political parties, leaders of religious communities and the media could

further play in fighting racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance by, inter alia, publicly recognizing and respecting the culture, history and heritage of people of African descent;

- (e) Raise awareness through information and education measures with a view to restoring the dignity of people of African descent, and consider making available the support for such activities to non-governmental organizations;
- (f) Support education and training initiatives for non-governmental organizations and people of African descent in the use of the tools provided by international human rights instruments relating to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance;
- (g) Ensure that textbooks and other educational materials reflect historical facts accurately as they relate to past tragedies and atrocities, in particular slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, so as to avoid stereotypes and the distortion or falsification of these historic facts, which may lead to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including the role of respective countries therein, by:
 - (i) Supporting research and educational initiatives;
 - (ii) Giving recognition to the victims and their descendants through the establishment of memorial sites in countries that profited from and/or were responsible for slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism and past tragedies where there is none, as well as at departure,

arrival and relocation points, and by protecting related cultural sites.

C >INFORMATION-GATHERING

In accordance with paragraph 92 of the Durban Programme of Action, States should collect, compile, analyse, disseminate and publish reliable statistical data at the national and local levels, and take all other related measures necessary to assess regularly the situation of people of African descent who are victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Such statistical data should be disaggregated in accordance with national legislation, upholding the right to privacy and the principle of self-identification.

The information should be collected to monitor the situation of people of African descent, assess progress made, increase their visibility, and identify social gaps. It should also be used to assess and guide the formulation of policies and actions to prevent, combat and eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

D >PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

States should adopt measures to enable the full, equal and effective participation of people of African descent in public and political affairs without discrimination, in accordance with international human rights law.

> 2 < JUSTICE

A >ACCESS TO JUSTICE STATES SHOULD TAKE FURTHER MEASURES, BY:

- (a) Introducing measures to ensure equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice;
- (b) Designing, implementing and enforcing effective measures to eliminate the phenomenon popularly known as “racial profiling”;
- (c) Eliminating institutionalized stereotypes concerning people of African descent and applying appropriate sanctions against law enforcement officials who act on the basis of racial profiling;
- (d) Ensuring that people of African descent have full access to effective protection and remedies through the competent national tribunals and other State institutions against any acts of racial discrimination, and the right to seek from such tribunals just and adequate reparation or satisfaction for any damage suffered as a result of such discrimination;
- (e) Adopting effective and appropriate measures, including legal measures as appropriate, to combat all acts of racism, in particular the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial hatred, violence or incitement to racial violence, as well as racist propaganda activities and participation in racist organizations. States are also encouraged to ensure that such motivations are considered an aggravating factor for the purpose of sentencing;
- (f) Facilitating access to justice for people of African descent who are victims of racism by providing the requisite legal information about their rights, and providing legal assistance when appropriate;
- (g) Preventing and punishing all human rights violations affecting people of African descent, including violence, acts of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, including those committed by State officials;
- (h) Ensuring that people of African descent, like all other persons, enjoy all the guarantees of a fair trial and equality before the law as enshrined in relevant international human rights instruments, and specifically the right to the presumption of innocence, the right to assistance of counsel and to an interpreter, the right to an independent and impartial tribunal, guarantees of justice, and all the rights to which prisoners are entitled;
- (i) Acknowledging and profoundly regretting the untold suffering and evils inflicted on millions of men, women and children as a result of slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, genocide and past tragedies, noting that some States have taken the initiative to apologize and have paid reparation, where appropriate, for grave and massive violations committed, and calling on those that have not yet expressed remorse or presented apologies to find some way to contribute to the restoration of the dignity of victims;



- (j) Inviting the international community and its members to honour the memory of the victims of these tragedies with a view to closing those dark chapters in history and as a means of reconciliation and healing; further noting that some have taken the initiative of regretting or expressing remorse or presenting apologies, and call on all those who have not yet contributed to restoring the dignity of the victims to find appropriate ways to do so and, to this end, appreciate those countries that have done so;
- (k) Calling upon all States concerned to take appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of those practices, bearing in mind their moral obligations.

B >SPECIAL MEASURES

The adoption of special measures, such as affirmative action, where appropriate is essential to alleviating and remedying disparities in the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms affecting people of African descent, protecting them from discrimination and overcoming persistent or structural disparities and de facto inequalities resulting from historical circumstances. As such, States should develop or elaborate national plans of action to promote diversity, equality, social justice, equality of opportunity and the participation of all. By means of, inter alia, affirmative or positive actions and strategies, these plans should aim at creating conditions for all to participate effectively in decision-making and to realize civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights in all spheres of life on the basis of non-discrimination.

> A day care centre in Colombia.
Photo: UN Photo/Mark Garten | Colombia.



Portrait of a young girl in the Citrana area of Oecusse, Timor-Leste.
Photo: UN Photo/Martine Perret | Timor-Leste.



> 3 < DEVELOPMENT

A >RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT AND MEASURES AGAINST POVERTY

Consistent with the Declaration on the Right to Development, States should adopt measures aimed at guaranteeing active, free and meaningful participation by all individuals, including people of African descent, in development and decision-making related thereto and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom.

Recognizing that poverty is both a cause and a consequence of discrimination, States should, as appropriate, adopt or strengthen national programmes for eradicating poverty and reducing social exclusion that take account of the specific needs and experiences of people of African descent, and should also expand their efforts to foster bilateral, regional and international cooperation in implementing those programmes.

States should implement actions to protect ancestral groups of people of African descent.

B >EDUCATION

States should take all necessary measures to give effect to the right of people of African descent, particularly children and young people, to free primary education and access to all levels and forms of quality public education without discrimination. States should:

- (a) Ensure that quality education is accessible and available in areas where communities of African descent live, particularly in rural

and marginalized communities, with attention to improving the quality of public education;

- (b) Take measures to ensure that public and private education systems do not discriminate against or exclude children of African descent, and that they are protected from direct or indirect discrimination, negative stereotyping, stigmatization and violence from peers or teachers; to this end, training and sensitization should be provided to teachers and measures should be taken to increase the number of teachers of African descent working in educational institutions.

C >EMPLOYMENT

States should take concrete measures to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in the workplace against all workers, in particular people of African descent, including migrants, and ensure the full equality of all before the law, including labour law, and eliminate barriers, where appropriate, to participation in vocational training, collective bargaining, employment, contracts and trade union activity; access to judicial and administrative tribunals dealing with grievances; seeking employment in different parts of their country of residence; and working in safe and healthy conditions.

D >HEALTH

States should take measures to improve access to quality health services to people of African descent.

E >HOUSING

Recognizing the poor and insecure housing conditions in which many people of African descent live, States should develop and implement policies and projects as appropriate aimed at, inter alia, ensuring that they gain and sustain a safe and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity.

> 4 < MULTIPLE OR AGGRAVATED DISCRIMINATION

States should adopt and implement policies and programmes that provide effective protection for, and review and repeal all policies and laws that could discriminate against, people of African descent facing multiple, aggravated or intersecting forms of discrimination based on other related grounds, such as sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.

States should mainstream a gender perspective when designing and monitoring public policies, taking into account the specific needs and realities of women and girls of African descent, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences and ensure adequate access to maternal health care.

WHAT CAN WE DO AT THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS?

STEPS TO BE TAKEN BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, AND INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

The international community; international and regional organizations, in particular relevant United Nations programmes, funds, specialized agencies and other bodies; international financial and development institutions; regional organizations; and other international mechanisms within their areas of competence should give high priority to programmes and projects specifically tailored to combating racism and racial discrimination against people of African descent. They should take fully into account the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the political declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and, should, inter alia:






> Two children in a New York City school solidifying their friendship with a spontaneous expression of mutual understanding. Photo: UN Photo/Marcia Weistein | United States of America.

- (a) Take measures to raise awareness about the International Decade, including through awareness-raising campaigns, and organizing and supporting other activities, bearing in mind the theme of the Decade;
- (b) Continue to disseminate widely the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference and the political declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;
- (c) Continue to raise awareness about the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- (d) Assist States in the full and effective implementation of the obligations arising under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and in ratifying or acceding to the Convention, with a view to attaining its universal ratification;
- (e) Assist States in the full and effective implementation of their commitments under the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;
- (f) Incorporate human rights into development programmes, including in the areas of access to and enjoyment of the rights to education, employment, health, housing, land and labour;





**“I LIVE BETWEEN AKKA
AND JERUSALEM.
MY FATHER TOLD ME
THAT WE CAME FROM
CHAD A LONG TIME AGO.”**

> Photo: Mohamed Badarne | Jerusalem-Akka.

- (g)** Assign particular priority to the projects devoted to the collection of statistical data;
- (h)** Support initiatives and projects aimed at honouring and preserving the historical memory of people of African descent;
- (i)** Use the Decade as an opportunity to engage with people of African descent on appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of slavery, the slave trade and the transatlantic slave trade in captured African people and, to this end, ensure the participation of and consultation with non-governmental organizations, other stakeholders and civil society at large;
- (j)** In planning activities for the Decade, examine how existing programmes and resources might be utilized to benefit people of African descent more effectively;
- (k)** Give due consideration to the goals and objectives aimed at the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance against people of African descent in the discussions held by the United Nations on the post-2015 development agenda.

WHAT IS THE UNITED NATIONS DOING?



A wide view of the special event at UN Headquarters launching the International Decade for People of African Descent.
Photo: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas | United Nations, New York.

NON-DISCRIMINATION AND EQUALITY CONSTITUTE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW. THE NOTION OF EQUALITY IS INSEPARABLE FROM THE NOTION OF HUMAN DIGNITY ESSENTIAL TO EACH AND EVERY PERSON. RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION ARE INTERDEPENDENT AND UNDERPIN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE MAIN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES.

The promotion and protection of the human rights of people of African descent has been a priority concern for the United Nations. The **Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**, adopted in 2001 at the World Conference against Racism, identified key elements of international, regional and national strategies that need to be implemented in the struggle against racism affecting people of African descent. It also acknowledged the suffering caused by colonialism, and regretted 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. It finally recognized that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade, and are among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The Durban process raised the visibility of people of African descent and contributed to a substantive advancement in the promotion and protection of their rights. Still, despite these advances, racism and racial discrimination, both direct and indirect, continue to manifest themselves in inequality and disadvantage.

In 2013, the General Assembly, in resolution 68/237, proclaimed the International Decade for People of African Descent, to be observed from 2015 to 2024, under the themes of recognition, justice, and development. In the same resolution, the General Assembly appointed the High Commissioner for Human Rights as coordinator of the Decade, in order to follow up on the implementation of the activities in the framework of the International Decade.

The proclamation of the International Decade constitutes an important political commitment by States in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Building on the **International Year for People of African Descent**, which was observed by the international community in 2011, the International Decade is an opportunity to take real and concerted action to improve the human rights situation of one of the population groups most affected by racism.

The Programme of Activities requests not only States, but also relevant United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to undertake specific actions in pursuit of the objectives of the Decade.

In order to implement the Programme of Activities for the International Decade, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other UN agencies have undertaken activities in the following areas:

Capacity-building

OHCHR has given special attention to strengthening knowledge and practical expertise in human rights amongst leaders of African descent, in particular through its **Fellowship Programme for People of African Descent**. The programme provides participants with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the United Nations human rights instruments and mechanisms, with a focus on issues

of particular relevance to people of African descent. The three-week programme, held in Geneva, generally coincides with various ongoing sessions of human rights mechanisms. The fellows are also offered the opportunity to gain practical experience and receive direct training from various experts. The objective of the programme is to contribute to the creation of a new generation of African descent activists who can contribute to the protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of Afro-descendants in their respective countries.

OHCHR continues its work with governments on the formulation and development of national policies against racism and drafting equality legislation.



“I AM A PALESTINIAN OF BRAZILIAN ORIGIN, LIVING IN ISRAEL.”

Photo: Mohamed Badarne | Akka.

Empowerment

Protecting the rights of people of African descent requires not only committed global efforts but also the direct and active participation of people of African descent, community-based organizations and local government officials and agencies.

In the Programme of Activities, the General Assembly recommended the establishment of a **Forum for People of African Descent** to serve as a consultation mechanism and a place where the voices of people of African descent could be heard. In 2015 the Human Rights Council is expected to take action and provide guidance on the Forum's format and modalities.

Awareness-raising

The UN Department of Public Information, OHCHR and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are carrying out an awareness-raising campaign to inform the general public of the history, contributions, challenges, contemporary experiences and situation of human rights of people of African descent.

As part of the awareness-raising programme, OHCHR is organizing **regional meetings** to identify trends, priorities and obstacles at the national and regional levels to implement the Programme of Activities for the Decade. The regional meetings will formulate specific recommendations for action to be carried out to combat the racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance faced by people of African descent in that given region. The first

meeting will be organized for the Latin American and Caribbean region. It will be held in Brazil in December 2015, hosted by the Government of Brazil.

Every year, 25 March (**the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**) and 23 August (**the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition**) offer the opportunity to honour and remember those who suffered and died at the hands of the brutal slavery system. These International Days also aim at paying tribute to the cultural resistance and struggle for dignity and liberty and at raising awareness about new forms of slavery and the dangers of racism and prejudice today.

In order to more permanently honour the victims, a **memorial** was installed at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 25 March 2015. The winning design for the memorial, The Ark of Return by Rodney Leon, an American architect of Haitian descent, was selected through an international competition conducted by UNESCO and announced in September 2013.

The **Slave Route Project: Resistance, Liberty, Heritage**, launched by UNESCO in 1994, examines the foundations, forms of operation, and consequences of the slave trade and slavery in different regions of the world. Through research, development of pedagogical materials, preservation of archives, oral traditions and sites of memory related to slavery, it aims to contribute to a better understanding of the impact of this history on our modern world, highlight global transformations and cultural interactions, and contribute to inter-cultural dialogue.

UNESCO's **General History of Africa** tells the story of Africa from the origins of humankind up until the aftermath of independence, challenging stereotypes, prejudices and clichés. Its first phase mobilized some 350 historians who worked together for more than 35 years to produce eight volumes, completed in 1999 and translated into 13 languages, including three African languages. The collection offers an endogenous perspective highlighting the contribution of African peoples to the general progress of humanity. Its second phase will develop pedagogical tools to integrate the General History of Africa into all levels of the educational system and will update the collection, including by addressing the challenges faced by Africa and its diasporas.

The International Coalition of Cities against Racism, launched by UNESCO in 2004, established a network of cities and municipalities committed to global advocacy against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and exclusion. By sharing good practices, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and expertise and supporting participatory city-level policies and initiatives, the coalition aims to demonstrate leadership and mobilize stakeholders to foster cities as spaces for social inclusion, tolerance, human rights and intercultural dialogue.

Since its creation in 2002, the **Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent** has shed light on numerous issues of concern to people of African descent. And human rights mechanisms, including the **Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** and the **Special Rapporteur against Racism**, have consistently raised concerns about the human rights situation of people of African descent.

Research

The Programme of Activities also calls on United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to develop studies in their respective areas of competence and expertise and to report on the themes of the Decade. OHCHR is developing a publication on people of African descent and the **right to development** as well as a practical guide to counter **racial profiling**. Other research on issues of interest to people of African descent will be developed during the Decade.

Information sharing

As requested by the General Assembly, OHCHR created a new section in the **Anti-Discrimination Database**⁹ devoted to the objectives of the International Decade. It includes news related to the Decade, as well as relevant information, documents and useful links.

Strengthening cooperation

OHCHR is working closely with other UN system partners, particularly the Department of Public Information and UNESCO, and other stakeholders to effectively implement the aims and objectives of the Decade. The **United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities** is also planning a number of initiatives to help promote and protect the rights of people of African descent. In terms of regional cooperation, OHCHR is working actively with the European Network of Equality

⁹ OHCHR has launched an online database on practical means to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance: adsdatabase.ohchr.org

**“I ESCAPED THE WAR IN
SIERRA LEONE AND NOW
LIVE IN HOLLAND.”**

> Photo: Mohamed Badarne | Berlin.



Bodies (Equinet) and the Ibero-American Network of Agencies and Organizations against Discrimination (RIOOD).

Stocktaking

The Programme of Activities requests the President of the General Assembly to convene a mid-term review to take stock of the progress

made and decide on further necessary actions; and requests the Secretary-General to convene a final assessment of the Decade.

Funding

All relevant stakeholders are encouraged to contribute generously to the OHCHR special fund/specific project established for the activities of the International Decade.

WHERE CAN WE GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE DECADE?



> Group of fellows of the 2015 OHCHR Fellowship Programme for People of African Descent.
Photo: Silvia Diaz | United Nations, Geneva.

USEFUL RESOURCES

International Decade for People of African Descent >

un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights >

ohchr.org

Durban Declaration and Programme of Action >

un.org/en/durbanreview2009/ddpa

Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent >

ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Racism/WGAfricanDescent

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination >

ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CERD

Special Rapporteur against Racism >

ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Racism/SRRacism/Pages/IndexSRRacism.aspx

Fellowship Programme for People of African Descent >

ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Racism/WGAfricanDescent/Pages/FellowshipProgramme.aspx

Database on practical means to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance >

adsdatabase.ohchr.org

International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade >

un.org/en/events/slaveryremembranceday

The Slave Route Project >

unesco.org/culture/slaveroute

The General History of Africa >

unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/general-history-of-africa

FURTHER INFORMATION

Readers may contact the following address: decade.africandescent@ohchr.org

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WWW.UN.ORG/EN/EVENTS/AFRICANDESCENTDECADE



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