

International Meeting

“International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024): Ten years to take action”

19 September 2016
UNESCO Headquarters, Room IV

Concept note

Background:

In 2001, the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, which had recognized the slave trade and slavery as “crimes against humanity”, adopted a Declaration and Programme of Action proposing concrete measures to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Ten years later, in 2011, during the Durban III Conference, a mid-term evaluation that was done previously (April 2009), revealed the need to revive this momentum and mobilize Member States to translate their commitment into concrete actions.

In an effort to revive the momentum generated by the Durban Conference, 2011 was proclaimed as International Year for People of African Descent. At the end of that International Year, it was recognized that despite the large number of actions undertaken by some Member States, international organizations and civil society, the extensive work needed to live up to expectations of significant progress in the rights of people of African descent could not be achieved in a single year. Therefore, the need for a Decade was recognized by the United Nations to give Member States enough time to meet their commitments.

In December 2014, the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly through its resolution 68/237. Taking account of the burden of history, its consequences and present-day realities, the Decade is centred on the themes of “Recognition, Justice and Development”.

The proclamation of this Decade was the result of a lengthy debate between Member States from all regions regarding its utility, relevance, goals and theme. Member States from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa have endeavoured for this Decade to be proclaimed with a practical activities programme.

The Decade aims to set up a framework and an operational platform that encourage Member States to put policies into place that reduce the social injustice handed down through history from which people of African descent still suffer; to combat racism, racial prejudice and racial discrimination through education; and to promote their contributions to the progress of humanity and to the construction of modern societies.

The main objectives of the International Decade are:

- To strengthen national, regional and international action and cooperation in relation to the full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights by people of African descent and their full and equal participation in all aspects of society;
- To promote a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies;
- To adopt and strengthen national, regional and international legal frameworks in accordance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and to ensure their full and effective implementation.

Since this Decade follows on from the World Conference in Durban, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was designated as lead agency. With the support of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, a wide-scale consultation of the key stakeholders (governments, civil society, professional organizations, international and regional organizations, and experts, among others) was held to prepare a draft programme of activities for the Decade, which was submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations for adoption (A/RES/69/16).

UNESCO, whose efforts to combat prejudice and discrimination are at the heart of its mandate, was involved in the consultation through its Slave Route Project and General History of Africa, among other projects. It is explicitly involved in contributing to certain recommendations of the action programme, aiming to:

- promote a greater knowledge of and respect for people of African descent and their culture, history and heritage through research, education and inclusion in curricula;
- ensure that textbooks and other teaching materials adequately reflect the history of tragedies suffered by these people, including the slave trade, slavery and colonialism, to prevent falsifications and stereotyping of this history;
- preserve the memory of the victims of these tragedies and their descendants through the establishment of remembrance sites testifying to this past and encourage the international community to honour this memory, in various ways;
- combat discrimination against people of African descent in their access to education, particularly quality education, a tool to counteract prejudice, stereotypes, stigmatization and racial profiling.

Purpose of the meeting

More than a year-and-a-half after its launch, it is clear that the International Decade for People of African Descent is still little known, even by stakeholders working in the field of human rights and combating racism and discrimination.

To address this situation, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Frantz Fanon Foundation, UNESCO has decided to organize this meeting, under the theme “International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024): Ten years to take action”.

Its purpose is to raise awareness about the objectives and challenges of the Decade, to share national experiences regarding its implementation, and to discuss strategies of action for the key stakeholders to reach a greater synergy of efforts.

The purpose of this day of meetings is to create a moment in which to share best practices, reflect on the challenges of the Decade and suggest an action strategy to overcome the difficulties faced.

Speakers and participants

Representatives of intergovernmental organizations, UNESCO’s regional groups, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, non-governmental organizations, as well as researchers and civil society activists will be invited to share their experiences and to discuss ways in which to strengthen their collaboration to promote awareness about the Decade and to contribute to its implementation locally, nationally, regionally and internationally.