

Presentation by Amanda Carneiro Santos at the 16th Session of the
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1. Introduction

Mr. Chair, fellow members of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, Ambassadors/members of the Diplomatic Corps and other States representatives, staff of the supporting offices of the UN, Members of the NGOs and Civil Society Groups, fellow presenters, good afternoon.

I couldn't start before mention the barbaric assassination of the councilwoman Marielle Franco, a black Brazilian and human rights activist. Her death, on 14 March 2018, is still without resolution. We are no closer to knowing who killed her and why. Shortly before her death, Marielle asked "How many others will have to die before this war will end?" We call for justice for Marielle Franco and an end to the killings and criminalization of activists, government opponents and People of African descent in Brazil.

In observance of the International Decade for People of African Descent under the theme, "People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice, Development", I would like to address the topic of Recognition using Brazilian society as an example.

Brazil received 40% of the estimated tens of millions of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas and in 1888 became the last country in the region to abolish enslavement. The republic was proclaimed in 1889 but racism and racial discrimination rooted in the ideological pillars of the slave system and colonization prevailed. My country was considered to be a "racial democracy" and racism and racial discrimination absent from

Brazilian society, yet they remained in the collective unconscious, and, even more serious, on the conscience of politicians.

As the national census conducted in 2010 documented, more than half of the Brazilian population (around 100 million people) have declared themselves as people of African descent. However, the task of organizing the demands of the black population may be one of the most sensitive issues for the organization of Brazilian civil society. Faced with the ideological power of the myth of racial democracy, it has been very difficult to attract a substantial portion of the population to this effort.

Therefore, I would like to recognize the fundamental importance of the Durban Declaration and the Program of Action in the conquest of a series of policies for the people of African descent in Brazil that followed the year of 2001. At that time, the reality of local struggle of the various black civil organizations found in the international forums a key space for discussion and formulation of the steps for an effective human rights practices for us, the African descendant population.

In the decade of 2000, Brazil made significant achievements on the topic with the creation of the Secretariat for policies for the promotion of racial equality (SEPPIR) in 2003, at the same year, was adopted the Law number 10.639¹, that made mandatory to teach African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture in the national curriculum. Also in 2003, the Presidential Decree number 4.887, regulated rules for the identification, recognition and the entire titling process of lands occupied by Quilombolas. In 2012, the Quotas Law was approved, determining that Brazilian federal universities reserve 50% of vacancies for students from public schools, black and indigenous peoples. Despite the points to be improved and the many other challenges that needed to be faced in Brazil concerning the African descent population and their human rights, these policies revealed the achievement of an inclusive, reparatory and anti discrimination actions for the black

¹The law 10.639/03 was changed in 2008, by the law 11.645 to include the history and culture of indigenous people.

population in Brazil that followed the Durban Declaration. The process that led to the policies, conducted in dialogue with civil society and with the support of international laws and declarations, could be an example to be improved and adopted elsewhere in the African Diaspora countries. But recently, especially in the years 2016 onwards, these policies have been dismantled, the Secretariat for policies for the promotion of racial equality (SEPPIR) no longer exist, the funds for African descent cultural groups has been cut, the support for young black students at the university have been substantially diminished and, worst, the racist discourses have been increasing. This whole situation of ending with the achievements of people of African descent has affected the way population in general perceives the importance of combating racism and the value of promoting access to culture with the respect of diversity.

2. Cultural Rights to the people of African descent

Recognizing is valuing, disseminating and respecting the historical processes of resistance unleashed by Africans enslaved people in Brazil and by their descendants in contemporary times, from individual to collective forms. Also, requires appreciation and respect for black people, their African descent, their culture and history. It means to seek, and to understand their values and struggles, to be sensitive to the suffering caused by so many forms of disqualification: derogatory nicknames, the ridicularization of our physical traits, the texture of our hair, making fun of the religions of African root.

Recognition involves creating conditions for black people not to be rejected because of the color of their skin, despised because their ancestors were exploited as slaves, do not be discouraged from pursuing studies, studying issues that concern the african descent community. Recognizing requires valuing black characters - men and

women - in the country's history, culture, media and art for a more positive and less stigmatized perception of people of African descent. To this end, access to critical historical, sociological, anthropological and literary information about the people of African descent is essential, also affirmative actions to promote the representation of black personalities and communities in the media, in literature, in art, in official monuments, memorial sites and museums.

I would like to present two examples of how recognition can or can not be addressed concerning cultural rights. In Brazil there is a museum called Afro Brasil Museum, created in 2004, it is a cultural space dedicated to put in exhibition the history, culture and art of people of African descent. The museum deeply looks to Brazilian roots and identity, being a space for recognition and appreciation of plurality as a tool for fighting against racism. And there is the Museu do Amanhã, in English the "Museum of tomorrow" it is the ironic not to say tragic name of a Brazilian technology museum opened in 2015. Despite being beautiful, there is no black representation in their collection, not even an example of the horrors related with the transatlantic slave trade. Although the museum was erected at the Valongo port, the arrival point of the largest contingent of africans were made slaves in Brazil, it is an example of how society and governments have systematically chosen to bury this part of history.

This last example is not unusual for people of African descent in other countries. Museums with African art collections do not include people of African descent in their board, they do not consulte the relevant stokeholds in regards to the diverse meanings of cultural heritages and the importance to promote anticolonial discourses. Often states refuses to officially recognize their participation in the histories of enslavement and colonialism, to be opened to discuss repatriation of objects of material culture of African people and to empower local African descent people and communities about their own history, identity and dignity.

If we recognize that to the people of African descent Recognition should be given to the rights to culture and own identity; to participate freely and in equal conditions in the cultural life; to keep, maintain and foster the mode of life, culture, traditions and religious expressions; and to protect traditional knowledge and cultural and artistic heritage. I would like to recommend to advance the achievements of the DDPA, specifying its support for the cultural rights of people of african descent:

- To promote knowledge and recognition of the cultures, histories, arts and heritages of people of African descent, including research and education, as well as funding for exhibitions and programmes at museums and cultural centers.
- To allocate sufficient budgetary resources, at both national and international levels to the protection of cultural rights and its manifestations from the past and also the contemporary ones.
- To adopt a gender-sensitive approach to the protection of cultural heritage, including recognizing the work of women defenders of cultural manifestations, promoting inclusion of women cultural heritage experts in relevant national and international forums and institutions, and addressing the particular challenges faced by women in accessing cultural rights.
- To support consultation and participation of people of African descent in museums boards, in heritage institutions considering our knowledge about all aspects of protection, preservation, reconstruction and memorialization in art and culture. Eu e muitos outros ativistas estamos dispostos a apoiar projetos em cultura.
- To eradicate stereotypes and promote the African descent legacy in official narratives and in the media recognizing its cultural and art legacy in all diversities and pluralities, adopting special measures, including affirmative action if needed.

- To implement actions to protect ancestral groups of people of African descent, such as Quilombola communities, as well as religions of African roots.