24th Session of the **Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent**

DATA FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

Palais des Nations, Room XXI, Geneva
25-29 March 2019

Concept Note

Introduction

The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent is pleased to announce its upcoming public session ***Data for Racial Justice***, which will be held in Geneva from 25-29 March 2019. This thematic session will involve specific focus on its mapping exercise and bring together experts to discuss the human rights situation of people of African descent globally. It will also involve a comprehensive look at varied intersections of big data and racial justice (and injustice) globally. All interested Member States and other stakeholders are warmly invited to join the session.

Background

The Working Group is currently gathering all available data and analysis to conduct a mapping exercise and prepare a baseline report on the human rights situation of people of African descent wherever they are in the world. In December 2018 the Working Group issued a call for data and analysis on the human rights situation of people of African descent[1]. The baseline report will serve as a tool to increase visibility, identify gaps and guide the formulation of policies and actions to prevent, combat and eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, Afrophobia and related intolerance faced by people of African descent.

The Working Group emphasizes the importance of a human rights-based approach to data. They advocate for the collection, analysis, dissemination and publication of disaggregated data based on self-identification and in accordance with human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as data protection and privacy guarantees, to regularly assess the human rights situation of people of African descent with the objective of developing legislation, policies, practices and other measures aimed at preventing and combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, Afrophobia and related intolerance.

The mandate of the Working Group involves examining and addressing racial discrimination faced by people of African descent, including structural, institutional, and covert racism that are often most apparent through racial disparities rather than overtly racist incidents. Pervasive institutional racism impacting people of African descent is well-documented globally, including in education, employment, criminal justice, child

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[1]
https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/WGEAPD/GuidanceNoteRequest_for_Data_EN.pdf

welfare, access to credit, access to public goods and services, access to capital, and other opportunities. The link from historical colonialism and the trafficking in enslaved Africans to the modern-day circumstances of people of African descent in diaspora populations remains apparent in our work.

In its country visits, communications, and mandate-related activities, the Working Group has repeatedly encountered a lack of disaggregated data pertaining to people of African descent. This raises difficulties in ensuring diaspora populations of African descent are visible and counted, in documenting their unique experience of racism, and in measuring the exercise and enjoyment (or lack thereof) of their human rights and developing targeted and holistic responses. In the age of big data, a lack of data on people of African descent is a form of erasure.

Without question, where data exists, data analytics have helped highlight institutional racism and racial disparity. Big data tools offer evidence that racism against people of African descent has been transformed rather than eliminated, presenting new and sometimes more subtle manifestations over time. On the other hand, data systems and algorithms often incorporate, mask, and perpetuate racism in their design and operation— and that this is considered an acceptable cost for convenient data solutions. The ongoing concern for "algorithmic justice" recognizes that the political and economic decisions made about data systems reflects the way society values certain communities. Thus, whether big data will be a tool for justice or oppression heavily relies on political decisions, not scientific ones. For member states, civil society, and other stakeholders, data justice is an important frontier in our shared commitments to end racial discrimination and promote justice globally for people of African descent.

Objectives and Outcomes

The Working Group's public session will discuss available data and analysis on the human rights situation of people of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, North America, Asia and other parts of the world, the idea of "data for racial justice" as it relates to people of African descent in different regions, reparations and racial justice, racial stereotypes, and different ideas on the ways in which data systems can impact visibility, justice, the greater exercise of human rights, and engagement with the 2030 SDG Agenda. The International Decade for People of African Descent coincides with a Big Data Revolution that has the capacity to both uplift and injure people of African descent, both individually and systemically. The Working Group seeks to examine aspects of these issues, facilitate public debate, and promote engagement by varied stakeholders internationally.

Some key questions will inform the discussion throughout the session, including:

1. **What do we know about the human rights situation of people of African descent in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Asia and other parts of the world?**

2. **What data, analysis and studies exist on the composition of the population; the human rights situation; and on measures to address racial disparities and provide redress and remedy for racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, Afrophobia and related intolerance and historical injustices constituting crimes against humanity.**
3. **What are the gaps?**
4. **What good practices could we use to promote a human rights based approach to the collection of disaggregated data on people of African descent, particularly where member states do not ask race-based questions on surveys and censuses?**
5. **What open data initiatives exist that may inform racial justice advocacy, specifically with respect to people of African descent?**
6. **What new data systems, algorithms, and technological applications can inform racial justice advocacy, promote the enjoyment of human rights, and facilitate efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda as it relates to people of African descent?**
7. **How can the International Decade for People of African Descent benefit from data systems or a focus on algorithmic justice?**

The Working Group will aim to resolve these questions and others in exploring how to promote considerations of *Data for racial justice*.

At the end of the session the Working Group will adopt conclusions and recommendations. A report on the session will be presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council in September 2019.