

**Remarks by Tabue NGUMA,
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The WGEPAD public 27th session, entitled "The Urgency of Now: Systemic Racism and the Lessons of 2020"

My name is Tabue Nguma and I am coordinating the UNESCO Slave Route Project. I would to thank you to give me this opportunity to share with you some key information and perspectives about this important topic.

The fight against racism and discrimination has always been a driving force in the mandate and action of UNESCO. Thus, as a laboratory of ideas, the organization developed different modalities of action to tackle this issue: intellectual initiatives such as the series of publication on racism with the famous "Race and History" by C. Levis Strauss, already in 1952, in order to scientifically deconstruct the ideology of biological racism; normative work as the adoption of the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice (1978); programmatic activities still very active today such as the Slave Route Project, the General History of Africa, the Master Class Series against Racism and Discriminations and the work of the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities – ICCAR.

In fact, through different modalities, UNESCO has been busy since about seven decades, to reflect and have a transformative impact and find ways for "Repairing the Present and Building the Future".

People of African descent, whether in the Americas, the Caribbean, the Near and Middle East, and Europe, suffer from a triple denial:

- Denial of their humanity, fueled by the most phantasmagoric and infamous racist stereotypes about the animality of Africans and people of African descent.

- Denial of their history, originally from Africa, people of African descent would be like this continent, "without history". Should we simply recall that Egypt

constitutes the civilizational root which nourished Athens and which itself influenced Rome and the Europe of the Enlightenment?

- Denial of their decisive contribution to the development of the societies to which they were deported. Contributions in the world of culture and creativity. How can we not think here of an Alexandre Dumas or even of Alexandre Pouchkine? But these contributions have also been made in the fields of science, knowledge and technologies.

In this sense, the present, before turning to the future, must go through the first reparation: the history. An objective and serene history freed from the prejudices inherited from the period of slavery and integrating in its proper place the contribution of these populations in national narratives and their contributions to the general progress of humanity.

The present, before looking toward the future, must also understand what still inexorably links it to the past and therefore what needs to be “healed” before considering a future free from the wrongdoings of the past. While slavery has been abolished, its consequences are still very present through the terrible poison of racism that continues to contaminate our societies and destroy lives. There is no desirable future until we will not get rid of the ghost of the race.

Indeed, even today, racism kills, discriminates and humiliates. On all continents, and even very recently in Europe, despite international conventions, despite national laws, millions of men, women and children continue to suffer from racism and discrimination. To envision the future, we need first and foremost to put an end to structural racism and offer everyone, whatever their skin color, fair treatment in terms of education, employment, access to justice, health or housing.

Here we are, halfway through the International Decade for people of African descent (2015-2024) which has made it possible to put the issue of people of

African descent on the very center of the agenda of the international community, giving to each State and each institution the opportunity to finally give themselves the means to achieve more justice, more development, and more recognition for these populations.

Be sure that UNESCO with its long expertise on these issues is really ready to help all of you to concretely implement transformative actions for people of African descent.

Lastly, I will like to quote the great African philosopher, Professor Achille Mbembe:

“The imperative to “deracialise” is also valid for Europe, for the United States, for Brazil and for other parts of the world. The emergence of new varieties of racism in Europe and elsewhere, the reassertion of global white supremacy, of populism and retro-nationalism, the weaponisation of difference and identity are not only symptoms of a deep distrust of the world. They are also fostered by transnational forces capable of making that same world inhospitable, uninhabitable and unbreathable for many of us.”

I completely follow Prof. Mbembe in that perspective. Thus, contrary to what we may think, when you are living in a world structured by racism, Africans and people of African descents are not the only losers. Cause living in a corrupted world structured by racism, which always express itself to through hatreds, violence, destruction and injustices affects even the people who are naively thinking that they are taking benefice of the situation.

So, this work due to “heal” the present and engage us toward a better future, is necessary not only for people of African descents and Africans, it is just as "imperative" for all us in our collective way to become dignified human beings.

Thank you.