Justin Hansford

**Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent Consultation with Civil Society**

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Two and a half years ago I was here with a number of Ferguson activist and Mike Brown’s parents on a trip we called #Ferguson to Geneva.[[1]](#footnote-1) I sat in the same room where I sit now, and Mike Brown’s mother gave her testimony. She was able to communicate the pain and the trauma that she experienced by having to see her son lay on the street dying before her. He was left there for over 4 hours, and at that point the police didn’t seem to even want to give her an explanation as to what was happening.

Despite the fact that the Ferguson grand jury decided not to bring any charges against Darren Wilson, despite of the fact that our civil trial never has been completed, it was here at the United Nations that people heard her for the first time, and that she was able to tell her story and to have it listened to by people from all over the world. So I tell folks today, over the past two years I’ve been reflecting on the good that this body did that day, and I’m very happy to be back here to the site of that wonderful moment.

Over the past 2 in half years I’ve had an amazing experience working with the movement. We have re-invigorated the spirit of protest in the United States around issues of human rights, specifically on issues of criminal justice. We have engaged in a new found analysis of the criminal justice system and what we call mass incarceration in the United States. I’ve engaged in legal analysis along with my students and colleagues, and many of us have concluded that the United States criminal justice system could—if it were a party to the Rome statute—satisfy the requirements for being a crime against humanity. So we are planning to continue to pursue that thought over the course of the short term, and fully prosecute to the best of our ability this case and show the injustice that is done within the United States.

I also had an opportunity over the course of the past 2 years to spend time in south Africa, and I was blessed to be in Johannesburg when a number of students at Wits university initiated the Fees Must Fall Movement ,which came after the roads must fall movement. It was there that I saw people “toi toing” and singing the songs of Nelson Mandela and other antiapartheid activist who were their parents and reinforcing the importance of their human right to education and access to higher education. They insisted that they would not allow neo liberalism or racism to keep them from inheriting what was their rightful heritage as a result of the struggle of their fore parents. And so I was blessed to present during the fees must fall movement, and I want to make sure that their work is recognized here today as a human rights project and as human rights work. And it reverberated into the United Kingdom with Rhodes Must Fall Movement, its reverberated into the United States where we had our own student protests decrying the state of higher education and the lack of the ability of our institutions of higher learning to open doors and create a racial climate that is conducive to the study of injustice, and the study of equal justice under the law, and the study of African decedents’ history. And so we’ re craving for a curriculum that will allow us to learn about who we are as a people wherever we may be, in South Africa, in Europe, in the Caribbean, in Brazil, in the United States, in Canada. People of African descent are rising up.

Many of them are using #BlackLivesMatter as a rallying call. Many of them are willing to go into the streets and protest and conduct “die ins,” block streets and sometimes go to jail. So we are at a moment of resistance and it couldn’t of come at a more perfect time because we know we’re also at a moment of renewed fervor—with the election of president trump, with Brexit, Marine Le Pen—we are at a moment of rising ethnic populism, that most people interpret as nothing less than white nationalism. So it’s going to be up to our youth to provide the energy to resist this growing international threat. We know at least three members of the U.N Security Council are sites of where this growing threat has been something that has continued to scare us. However, we refused to be cowed by it and I want to say motivated and optimistic. And seeing you all here, members of civil society from around the world, it makes me optimistic that we are going to have the courage and the strength to fight these battles over the next few years. I’m happy to be here and I can’t wait to hear what your ideas are going forward.

1. [www.fergusontogeneva.com](http://www.fergusontogeneva.com) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)