

Statement by Jamaica
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Thematic Discussion: Inclusion of People of African Descent in the Sustainable
Development Agenda – The Case for Reparatory Justice
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Madam Chair,

Jamaica commends the members of the Permanent Forum for the People of African Descent for their bold step in ensuring that the issue of reparatory justice is among the first issues addressed by the Forum at its first meeting.

As we near the close of the UN-designated Decade of People of African Descent (2015-2024), which focused on critical issues of development, justice and recognition of People of African Descent, we observe that much of its objectives have not been realized. Progress in the full implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and the Decade people of African Descent are being stymied.

Importantly, it must be recognized that these were commitments previously agreed by UN Members by consensus.

Importantly, we must note the linkages between the objectives of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (adopted in 2001) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The latter includes a commitment to combat inequalities within and among countries, establish just societies, end poverty and hunger everywhere, and to leave no one behind.

It, therefore, is an opportune time for the international community to examine the challenges to achieving:

1. Significant improvement in the lives and livelihoods of people of African Descent;
2. Justice for crimes of the past and present against People of African Descent; and
3. Recognition of the fundamental rights and freedoms of People of African Descent.

Unfortunately, the evidence shows that despite significant contribution of People of African Descent in politics, academia, health, education, culture, to name a few, they continue to be at risk being left behind. We continue to be marginalized and face racism and racial discrimination resulting in the unequal access to basic services, and financial resources.

We believe that reparatory justice, therefore, must be at the forefront of all elements of the Decade theme of justice, development, and recognition. It plays a fundamental role in addressing and correcting systemic structural inequities and inequalities facing People of African Descent at the international and domestic levels.

Of significance in this regard is the notion that injustice cannot be remedied without accountability on the part of they who were responsible for the original damage. It is also noteworthy that reparatory justice is only achievable if all actors – the enslavers-perpetrators and the formerly enslaved represented by their children – embark on a sincere and serious process of reparations and repair, as part of the outcomes of the Decade.

Though slavery and the slave trade were declared a crime against humanity and Member States were encouraged to create modalities to deal with this crime, no

State has up to now accepted responsibility or proffered an apology on behalf of their citizens who committed these egregious crimes against humanity.

This is fundamental to the case for reparatory justice – which is foundational to the promotion of sustainable development and prosperity. Without it, a large segment of the world's population – people of African descent – will be subjected to the continuation of the injustices of the past and to live in persistent poverty with its contiguous problems of discrimination, under-education, poor health care solutions, inadequate housing solutions, and other inequities and inferiorities. By extension, those who perpetrated the egregious acts may be mindful to repeat it, such as in human trafficking, since there have been no punishments or accountabilities for the crimes perpetrated.

The presentations of the panelists today, therefore, offer tangible options for us to address the challenges that persist to realizing reparatory justice.

Chair,

Jamaica, and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), for our part will continue our advocacy for reparations/reparatory justice. Notably, the CARICOM Reparations Commission has elaborated the CARICOM Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice, which forms part of the region's broader push to obtain international reconciliation.

It is hoped that through continued action, all current and future policies related but not limited to poverty reduction, housing, education, health and wellness, justice, and finance (including ownership of resources and wealth distribution), will address the need for re-enfranchisement, re-validation, reclamation of original dignity and integrity of our people of African descent, and help deliver on the goal to leave no one behind.

I thank you.