

Opening statement  
Justin H.

Good morning, ladies, and gentlemen. My name is Justin Hansford. I am a law professor at Howard University School of Law, as well as the founder and Executive Director of the Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center. Most importantly, I am deeply committed to the causes of Pan-Africanism and Black Liberation. I am honored that you have granted me this intriguing assignment.

Before I begin, I want express gratitude for those who have made today's discussion possible. I extend my warm thanks to the United Nations General Assembly for my election to the Permanent Forum on December 21, 2021. I want to thank members of the United States State Department, including Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, United States Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas Greenfeld, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Human Rights Council Ambassador Michelle Taylor, and the United States Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice, Desiree Cormier Smith, whose tireless efforts played a major role in my appearance before you today.

I see this work as the realization of a dream held by Black people around the world for many generations. From Ida B. Wells to Marcus Garvey, from Malcolm X to Claudia Jones, from Paul Robeson to Lorraine Hansberry to Kwame Nkrumah. They all dreamed of a chance to bring the plight of Black people before a global platform. We finally have arrived at this moment, but it was hard earned. It took the gruesome murder of George Floyd. It took protesters around the world facing tear gas and arrest and police brutality. It took some of you in this room sacrificing hundreds of hours of your personal time, often without pay, advocating and organizing late in the evening and early in the morning. You wouldn't rest until the UN stepped up and responded.

I cannot announce that today marks a turning point. That remains to be seen. The world still puts Black people at the back of the line. When war erupted in Ukraine, Black Ukrainians were the last ones allowed to leave. When in need of asylum or forced to flee conflict, Black migrants and refugees are the last allowed in. When ravaged by natural disasters, from covid to climate change, our needs are low on the list of concerns.

This forum's existence won't change that in of itself. But the days of us being quiet about our problems, if there ever was such a day, is long over. I hope and pray that this forum will help us lift our voices.

You see, our voices together could push for every member of the U.N. General Assembly to endorse a declaration of rights for people of African descent. Our voices together could push for a United Nations resolution to provide reparations for our people. Our voices together could push for a seat for people African Descent on the UN Security Council. Together, we could dream big and win big.

So let's celebrate what we do honestly have today—a chance to make a promise to each other. Let's promise that this forum will not be a place for empty talk and speechifying. That this forum will not be a place for infighting. No, this forum will only be a place for us to promote dignity and human liberation for our people in our lifetime. The great African Scholar Dr. John Henrik Clarke famous said that "Every single thing that touches your life, religious, socially and politically, must be an instrument of your liberation or you must throw it into the ashcan of history."

The U.N. Permanent Forum of People of African descent is no different. I hope and pray for you, as you are doing God's work, and our dream is that our efforts help the struggle from the grassroots that you are leading.