

~~THE NEED FOR PROGRESSIVE MEDIA CONTENT DEVELOPMENT BY PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT~~

Dear Madame Chairperson, Members, Representatives, and Delegates of the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, it is an honor to be a part of this most historic forum.

My name is Jamila Allston and I am the Founder and CEO of **PANAFRICAN CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS**, a multi-media production company that specializes in the production of vibrant entertainment products targeted towards progressive multicultural audiences; products developed across mediums and genres which showcase the music, culture and stories of people of color worldwide. The company was formed to combat the negative portrayal of media content pertaining to people and cultures of color, by developing, promoting, and marketing media products that address such disparities.

As we work to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance wherever it exists, we must also address the impact of negative images pertaining to People of African Descent as a rationale for the continuation and implementation of racist and discriminatory practices and policies.

As Filmmakers and Media Content Providers, it is incumbent upon us to develop content that is reflective of the cultural strengths of People of African Descent. We must continue to engage in the development of quality film and media related products that positively portray the history, culture, mores, and stories of African-Americans and people of African Descent worldwide in a positive, educational and inspirational manner. There is an urgent need for stories that will not focus on the monolithic and destructive portrayal that the present-day film and multi-media industries too often perpetuates but focus on stories that encompass the range of human dynamics and emotions that are universal. Family, love, relationships, spirituality, the journeys of life and its many trials and tribulations, and the tenacity, significance, and greatness of a people's struggle, must be explored from the unique experiences of people of color. Such stories can be magnificently told, and at the same time, be commercially viable and successful. Such a vision is not one that will be readily supported financially within the mainstream film industry but is imperative to addressing how we as People of African Descent internalize such negative perceptions and its consequential limitations.

The eradication of systemic racism goes hand in hand with the need to combat negative and stereotypical images. As you plan for the implementation of future strategies, it is important that media misrepresentation is addressed. A unit within the Forum needs to be developed to monitor cultural misrepresentation and its impact on communities of African Descent. Such a unit is needed to support and encourage independent filmmakers and media representatives of African Descent to produce media products that are counter to what is dictated and produced by mainstream studios.

We are more than spectators of the Marvel universe, and despite being somewhat uplifting to many sectors of our communities, we must recognize that movies such as Black Panther are still part of the fantasy world. We must begin to see ourselves as more than fantasy. We are real people with vibrant stories deserving to be told. Such a unit would be critical to encouraging and providing an alternative form of content creation, that is, the development and production of positive culturally based digital cinema, film and video products, for diverse national and international markets that can appreciate a visually different and aesthetic cultural sensibility.

As competent film related training for people of African Descent is too often inaccessible and cost prohibitive, this unit would investigate ways of supplementing and investing in the training of emerging filmmakers and other media content creators, as a way of cultivating a force of dedicated film and media professionals. It is Paramount that Our Stories Are Told Through Our Eyes!

Such strategies are key to changing the destructive internalization experienced by many people of African Descent, which will in turn, ultimately increase the numbers of People of African Descent engaged in the battle to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance wherever it exists.

Sincerely,

**JAMILA ALLSTON**  
**PANAFRICAN CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS**