

## **First Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent**

5-8 December 2022

Statement of Lisa Borden  
Southern Poverty Law Center

We are grateful for the presence of United States Special Representative Desiree Cormier Smith at this historic forum, and confident in her sincere dedication to the important work with which her office is charged. But something is missing. What is missing is the presence of anyone from the US government whose charge is to implement its international human rights obligations for the protection of the rights of people of African descent domestically, in the US. That person is missing because there is no such person. Yes, the US has refused to support the Durban Declaration and Program of Action, but perhaps even more tellingly, it has taken no steps at home to implement even the human rights instruments it has ratified and claims to support, such as the ICERD. It is no one's job to do that in domestic law or policy. And we are disappointed that the White House doesn't seem to have sent anyone responsible for domestic policy making to participate in this Forum, just as it did not send anyone in that role to the CERD review, because this does not demonstrate any commitment to change.

Special Representative Cormier Smith expressed strong US support for the work of this Forum, and we applaud that commitment. But the US can't only support the work of this Forum, or any other mechanism for the protection of the rights of people of African descent, on foreign shores. Responsibility begins at home. We call on the Biden administration to take substantive steps to demonstrate a firm commitment to implementing the recommendations of the CERD, and the recommendations of this Forum, for the benefit of its own people of African descent.