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## **The Daniel Initiative's Statement Before the UN Permanent Forum for People of African Descent as Delivered by Founder, Breon N. Wells (December 6, 2022), Geneva, Switzerland**

Madam Chairwoman, Members of The Permanent Forum, Distinguished Colleagues, I am Breon Wells, President and Founder of The Daniel Initiative (TDI). TDI is a private sector strategies firm that specializes in government relations, strategic communications, and social impact. I founded TDI ten years ago to help dismantle structural racism, particularly through public policy, and to help move our world towards collective liberation. I address you today on behalf of several international public policy coalitions that TDI Convenes: The Coalition on International Aid, The Economic Equity Roundtable, The Reentry Working Group, the Tech Equity Council, and the Federal School Discipline and Climate Coalition. These coalitions span three Continents and bring together activists, advocates, NGOs, private sector entities, educational institutions, and business together to inform the development of public policy.

TDI expresses our congratulations to The Permanent Forum for People of African Descent (PFPAD) on its Inaugural Session. While we are encouraged following the initial opening statements made by Permanent Forum Members, we remain acutely aware of the ongoing task that sits before us all. Systemic, institutionalized, and structural racism pervades every system and aspect of life. Social, political, and economic violence are consistently employed in tandem against Black bodies, creating a trifecta of violence. Anti-Black ideologies enshrined in laws embed racism in every structure and institution on the planet. And unfortunately, the advancement of technology has compounded these harms in intersectional ways. This reality demands a response. Therefore, we recommend that the Permanent Forum make Tech Equity an integral part of its work.

TDI believes that tech equity must include ensuring that People of African Descent (PAD) are not harmed, preyed upon, or exploited by technological advancements. The right to privacy and the ability to access and opportunity through digital means must be viewed as basic fundamental rights. For us, tech equity also means ensuring that access to broadband is a reality for multi-marginalized communities including PAD. Finally, and most importantly, tech equity is about ensuring that PAD who do have access to broadband are protected and have the ability to live and thrive.

As we sit here today, the United Nations is drafting a Global Digital Compact, which is scheduled to be finalized in September of 2023. We believe that UN mechanisms like the PFPAD and the Working Group of Experts of People of African Descent (WGEPAD) must capitalize on this moment by enhancing and expanding the conversation on tech equity. These advisory bodies can guide Member States through the development of requisite digital and technological solutions that address the reality and needs of PAD. While access to broadband is an important discussion on Tech Equity, exclusively focusing on it is shortsighted and inadequate. We are calling on the Permanent Forum to expand the conversation to consider PAD who can access broadband, yet remain unsafe and face systemic, institutionalized, structural and anti-Black racist barriers to living and thriving.

The global pandemic exacerbated existing digital inequities and further excluded multi-marginalized communities by increasing technological dependence while simultaneously neglecting to provide adequate resources. Algorithmic Bias, threat assessments leveled against Black youth and students, incomplete data sets, the surveilling of Black bodies, exclusionary and discriminatory hiring practices in the tech sector globally, cyberbullying, misinformation and disinformation all adds to the ongoing burden of the trifecta of violence against People of African Descent. This is most clearly seen when we consider barriers that People of African Descent face in accessing and navigating the digital space.

- Disinformation and misinformation predate technology. However, we recognize that technology and social media serve to amplify its harms against PAD across the globe.
- Disinformation and misinformation targeted at People of African Descent globally is on the rise and must be addressed at the same scale and scope in which it is happening.
- Whether it is on the continent of Africa (Ethiopia), Europe (Ukraine/Poland), or both North and South America (US elections/Brazil elections), targeted campaigns against PAD have taken a multitude of shapes and forms.
- The lack of access to digital opportunities, whether in education or business, or the lack of consistent funding towards programs and policies that advance the interests of Black people, neither helps close the digital divide nor does it help combat disinformation and misinformation.
- Technology that is either untapped in our communities, is biased against People of African Descent, or even weaponized against PAD hurts the Global economy.
- The future of the world is one where it is more interconnected, not less, and technologies that keep all people in mind and allow equal access regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or nation of origin are going to be the technologies that are the most adopted and utilized.
- Keeping in mind that the world is going to see an increase in black people moving forward, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa, building technologies that work for PAD is critical to our collective global success.
- The future is going to be digital, whether it is fighting climate change, addressing global health disparities, educational equity, or providing People of African Descent with more access to economic opportunities and services, making sure that technologies work for People of African Descent is critical to the future success of both the technology sector but also of the Global economy
- Disinformation and misinformation play a critical role in access to these digital technologies, and both nation states and technology companies need to review their devastating impacts on PAD globally.
- Black people globally are not well represented in data sets. These willfully incomplete data sets skew machine learning and impact how algorithmic decision-making systems are trained and calibrated. This results in technological systems that disproportionately harm and discriminate against Black people globally.
- At a time where the technology sector needs more innovation, disinformation and misinformation has pushed people away from broad adoption and innovation. Disinformation and misinformation create environments where Black people and nation states are increasingly unlikely to adopt certain technologies and lose interest in

technology issues. This only exacerbates the problem of both representation in the workforce and data sets, fostering a self-perpetuating cycle of harm.

- Tech companies and nation states leading on technological issues must address representation in both who they hire and their policies. There has been a heavy pivot towards engaging countries in Asia on technology issues. This same pivot has not been afforded in the same manner to the Global South. Whether it has been investment, workforce, or bilateral or multilateral cooperation, we have not seen this prioritization with the Global South, particularly nations with large Black representation.

**Considering these realities, we strong urge you to adopt the following recommendations:**

It is our recommendation that the Permanent Forum push for an expansion of the Decade for People of African Descent to further derive community-oriented data and solutions on issues related to People of African Descent, to include Tech equity.

We recommend that the Permanent Forum prioritizes Tech and Digital Equity in its work. This can be done by drafting white papers, reports and other resources that contextualize the status of PAD in an increasingly digital world. Other efforts could include hosting panels and discussions on digital equity at each Session and incorporating digital equity in the Declaration of People of African Descent.

We recommend that the PFPAD work with civil society to develop a “*Document on The Declaration of Digital Rights of People of African Descent*” that outlines standard protections for PAD that private sector entities and governmental institutions must provide.

TDI recommends that the PFPAD view tech equity from an intersectional lens, contemplating its connection to all other social justice and human rights issues which impact People of African Descent.

We recommend that the Permanent Forum work with similarly situated UN mechanisms (WGEPAD, CERD, the International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the context of Law Enforcement), the Internet Governance Forum, and civil society to incentivize Member states to draft and support resolutions on digital equity that are affirming of PAD’s ability to live and thrive in the Digital Age.

We recommend that the PFPAD use every lever to push the UN to consider the implications of technological development and its impacts on PAD from the fullest context possible.

We look forward to working with the Permanent Forum to further the cause of digital equity for People of African Descent. Thank you and congratulations again on this historic occasion!

Sincerely,

**The Daniel Initiative  
The Tech Equity Council  
The Coalition on International Aid  
The Economic Equity Roundtable  
Federal School Discipline and Climate Coalition**