

Statement at the First Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

Johnson Elijah Amamnsunu - Ghana
The Open University, Milton Keynes.

Madam Speaker, permit me to congratulate you on your nomination to the chair of this historic event, a well-deserved recognition indeed. This forum is a timely conversation on issues of people of African descent – the wrongs of the past, and the evils of slavery and colonialism, the severity of which it is difficult to imagine a parallel. Yet, one aspect of this struggle that so far, we have not talked about enough is the issue of racism and discrimination against our black African students across university campuses and classrooms in Europe, Asia, and America.

Madam Speaker, Black African students have helped to contribute to sustaining the research and innovation base of countries in Asia Europe and America, and bring in considerable income into the receiving countries through direct costs such as tuition, food, and accommodation; and indirect costs such as visits from family, other leisure expenses etc. Yet, again and again, African students in Europe, America, and Asia face frankly unnecessary assaults on their person.

Madam Speaker, black is always strong and beautiful. However, nobody should face the indignity of being treated as inferior, unintelligent, or simply racialised as the African students are treated in these countries. Nobody should have to second-guess their decision to want to go to school and better their lives.

I am, therefore, calling on this forum to treat this as an important issue, and in doing so, I recommend the following:

First, we must work to ensure that existing laws on racial equality are enforceable. There are good laws, such as the EU "Racial Equality Directive" which aimed at prohibiting discrimination based on race or ethnic origin. However, these laws have no teeth. There are no significant sanctions for non-compliance, and there is no pressure on national authorities to enforce compliance. I recommend that we begin by working to ensure that these laws become fully enforceable.

Second, in countries where there are no clear directives regarding the protection of black Africans and people of African descent in their universities, I recommend that we work to ensure that new, and enforceable laws are enacted.

Third, universities should ensure equitable representation in classrooms. Two black students in a class of forty white students is always a questionable attempt to close the racial gap, and such a representation mostly put the minoritized in awkward positions in the classrooms, it should not be acceptable. We can accomplish this by ensuring admissions procedures are fair. There are smart, intelligent and capable Africans and applicants of African descent; we must ensure that their applications are evaluated based on their merits and qualifications. Universities should also commit to addressing issues of racism and discrimination against black Africans and people of African descent by enforcing new and existing directives in classrooms and campuses.

Lastly, Representation and racism in the world of work. The implications of representation and racism in the workplace for the work. This is significant due to the knowledge-based economy. This racism manifests itself in the workplace, but it must be addressed on campus too. Racism in schools is comparable to racism in the workplace – it exists in nearly every industry and profession. I recommend that we look also into this thoroughly.

Regarding any of the aforementioned points, I am available at any time to clarify, provide examples, or otherwise assist the committee in any way I can.

Thank you.