

SRREJ Cormier Smith Opening Remarks
Permanent Forum for People of African Descent
3:00 pm, December 5, 2022
Room XVIII Palais des Nations

Good morning, I'm Desirée Cormier Smith, the State Department's first Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice. I am honored to be here in Geneva for the inaugural session of the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent.

The United States championed the Forum as a necessary space to promote the collective engagement of all people of African descent and other relevant stakeholders to address racial and ethnic inequities as a means to a more just and peaceful world.

In my new role, I work to ensure U.S. foreign policy advances the human rights of members of marginalized racial, ethnic, and Indigenous communities, including people of African descent, and that our government is working to counter systemic racism, discrimination, and xenophobia globally.

Part of that work means acknowledging and addressing the ways in which anti-Black racism and the global devaluation of Black lives has plagued the world for centuries. African descendant communities around the world are still grappling with the devastating and lingering impacts of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism.

My late grandfather wrote a weekly column in Los Angeles' oldest and largest Black newspaper for almost 30 years, so it's only right that I close with a quote from him tonight. In one of his last columns, he wrote, "Black Americans [are] proud of their heritage and confident of their future. And wherever you look, you will find them working, playing, worshipping, dreaming, creating and expressing their cherished freedom in the spirit of the country they would like to help make a model for democratic peoples everywhere." This rings true for people of African descent everywhere around the world.

As a Black woman who is the descendant of enslaved people, this work is deeply personal to me. I am honored to serve in my capacity, working towards a more just world where all people are valued and included, and no one is prevented from living up to their fullest potential because of their race or ethnicity.

Thank you.