

## Civil Society Testimony

### Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, Session 1

**Statement excerpt delivered during the opening plenary on 12/5/22  
by OHCHR delegate Dr. Vickie Casanova-Willis (ICSWG PFPAD, OHBCUD, and IHRAAM)**

Greetings, I am Dr. Vickie Casanova-Willis, U.S. member of the International Civil Society Working Group for the Permanent Forum, the International Coalition for People of African Descent, IHRAAM-The International Human Rights Association of American Minorities and OHBCUD-The Office of HBCU Development and International Cooperation with its over 200-400 HBCU universities and PBIs predominantly Black institutions of higher education. We have a solution to help with the disaggregated data gap that we continue to hear about: it would put a disparities dashboard in the hands of *the people* who are entitled to analyze for themselves and make recommendations as well as action.

A few thoughts I would like to share with you today:

- As we celebrate this historic, joyous yet serious reality – finally – we trust, pray, and are willing to work together to ensure that this Permanent Forum succeeds for People of African Ancestry, as our experiences from the Motherland across the 6<sup>th</sup> Region, are rooted in the same enemy: structural, systemic racism.
- Noting the road ahead will only be productive with hard conversations, transformative strategies and action, THANK YOU in advance for ensuring more engagement with Civil Society, early and often;
- Noting “the protection of ancestral rights” must first include the right to be respected and treated as fully human;
- Echoing Colombian VP Marquez’ emphasis on the need for United Nations member states to move beyond recommendations to concrete commitments to human rights;
- Noting that undoing structural racism includes honoring our African ancestral heritage, we urge the Forum and UN to ensure the right to culture, UDHR Article 27, and not exclude African ancestral libation and drumming from these locations. This ceremonial cultural affirmation is traditionally part of all significant life events and gatherings and was notable in its absence despite being requested for the launch of such an historic and hopeful event as this Permanent Forum on People of African descent;

- Appreciating the Human Rights Council President's remarks welcoming guidance from this Forum on new UN norms and policies going forward;
- Thanking Dr. Kanem and Forum Member Justin Hansford for your ancestor calls today, Ase;
- Observing that if “all are born equal indignity and human rights”, there is a stunning lack of disability accommodations here at the UN to ensure participation with dignity. It cannot be that there are insufficient funds for this, nor is it acceptable to exclude languages in Portuguese, at the U.N.;
- Recognizing your formidable mandate; it is ours -civil society's, as well;
- Reaffirming our partnership and that, together, we have all we need to fulfill the promises of this first Decade and to follow up to the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action (DDPA);
- Insisting structural and systemic racism MUST end, justice demands increased participation, transparency, accountability and inclusion;

To whom much is given, much is required. We recognize this, we thank you for taking this mandate and we stand ready, willing, and able to partner for its success from this Forum.

Thank you so much for your time.