

Intervention Message by the **Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith**

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Member of the National Baptist Convention USA, Incorporated

The 3rd Meeting, 1st Session (1.55 on the Recording) of
The Historic Launch of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent
at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland on December 6th, 2022

Good morning Madame Chairperson and All distinguished leaders of the UN Permanent Forum of People of African Descent. Congratulations! It is indeed my honor to speak in this moment at this amazing historic Forum of People of African Descent. I come to you as President of World Council of Churches from North America. I come to you as Senior Associate for Pan African and Orthodox Faith Engagement of Bread for the World in the USA in Washington, DC. I come to thank you, but I also come with a couple of observations I hope you will consider.

Number 1. I am delighted to know that The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA - https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Durban_text_en.pdf) includes references to religion, spirituality and the importance of the voices and perspectives brought in by the multi-faith community. We are delighted to say the words in the DDPA speak boldly in this moment (General Issues 60 and 61 & Programme of Action 46,47,49). I have heard doing this time together of the engagement of the Roman Catholic Church which is a partner with the World Council of Churches. We are delighted about this engagement. We have also heard from our religious friends from traditional religious communities for which we are grateful.

I would offer to you that much more needs to be said and done relative to this aspect of religious and spiritual engagement relative to the DDPA. In this regard the World Council of Churches has, since its inception, been a partner with the United Nations. And therefore, the UN has a long history with Civil Society groups like us and others who can help us go forward. I am pleased to inform us that the World Council of Churches made up of over 355 national church bodies in 100 countries has adopted the “Statement on Confronting Racism and Xenophobia, Overcoming Discrimination, Ensuring Belonging” at its 11th World Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany this year for the next seven to eight years and offer it as a resource for partnership with the DDPA going forward.

Of course, it is very clear, particularly in the case of churches, that there has been complicity with justice and injustices. We invite a very critical and important dialogue about this. I am pleased, as a member of the International Civil Society Working Group that partners with this UN Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, we will be offering a Side Event on this on this Thursday. I am glad to share more information about this.

Second point I would like to share with you is about the Pan African Congresses that we have engaged with our Africans and Africans in Diaspora (AAD) work at the World Council of Churches. I am honored to serve as their Co-Convener. Here I would remind us that in 1920 there was The Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World (<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/declaration-rights-negro-peoples-world-1920/>) . It was drafted and adopted at the Convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association. The occasion was presided over by one of the ancestors called earlier, Marcus Garvey, who was the Chairman.

I refer to this document because it pre-dates the founding of the United Nations and was formulated before the founding of its predecessor, the League of Nations, which was founded the same year as the presentation of this document, also in 1920. The Universal Declaration was not adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations until December 10th, 1948.

I also mention this because I believe we must give more applause to these kinds of persons and movements who have helped to rewrite the narrative historically for this work with “the Forum.” We certainly look forward to future opportunities to work together. God bless you.