

Madame Chair
Fellow Members of the Permanent Forum
Distinguished delegates
Civil society representatives
Friends and Colleagues
Ladies, Gentlemen and Non-binary comrades

Greetings everyone. It is great to see so many people gathered here today for this inaugural session. It is especially wonderful to see so many African descent civil society representatives ((give yourselves an applause!)). This Permanent Forum of People of African Descent is especially for you. Today is a historic day for which we should all celebrate. The inauguration of a United Nations platform for people of African descent—an occasion our Pan-African forebearers could only have dreamt of.

From abolitionism to Pan-Africanism, anti-colonialism, civil rights, intersectional feminism, Black Lives Matter... People of African descent have always been at the forefront of global struggles for equal dignity, rights, and non-discrimination. This United Nations Permanent Forum of People of African Descent is no different. Not only is it a space in which people of African descent from around the world have opportunities to congregate, exchange, and address the international community. It is a space in which the international community has a unique opportunity to be in conversation with people of African descent and other relevant stakeholders about the most pressing existential questions of our times—including, how to address the global climate emergency and environmental devastation, while ensuring ecological justice; how to curb greenhouse emissions and the unsustainable use of natural resources, while increasing equality within and among countries; how to make development and human flourishing possible for all, while regenerating rather than depleting the natural world; how to ensure global freedom of migration that is non-discriminatory, equitable, safe, orderly and regular, especially in the face of growing massive flows of climate refugees; how to effectively address and redress the profound global impacts of colonialism, enslavement, apartheid and genocide that to continue to shape inequities within and among countries; and how, in general, to achieve social and international orders in which human rights can be fully realized—a world with as much social and global justice as can be mustered.

I and my colleagues are very much looking forward to being in conversation with you over the following four days. Please bear with us that this is the first session and that there will be room for improvement for the following sessions, including civil society participation on the panels. Let us all make the most of our time this week and work together towards strong and effective recommendations. Thank you all.