

2nd session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent
Statement by Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
30 May 2023

Madam Chair,
Members of the Permanent Forum,
Delegates and participants,
Excellencies,

As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year, we also celebrate the enduring legacy of generations of human rights activists who have advanced equality and non-discrimination.

Today's activists and civil society representatives are present in large numbers at this Forum. Many of you have been vital to the continuing efforts of global anti-racism movements, including protests in 2020 that, among other things, helped to expedite the establishment of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent.

I pay tribute to your efforts.

The creation of this broad-based consultative Forum will facilitate the participation of many people who have been marginalized by racism and generations of oppression. It is very much in line with the Secretary-General's [Common Agenda](#), which calls for new approaches to advance participation. The Permanent Forum on People of African Descent brings numerous important actors together – States, intergovernmental organizations, the UN system, and civil society – in a shared struggle to end racial discrimination against people of African descent.

As Coordinator of the International Decade for People of African Descent, I will support the work of the Permanent Forum to advance recognition, justice, and development for people of African Descent. Well beyond 2024, these essential human rights goals will continue to have my strong support.

For far too long, racial discrimination has been treated as a social issue, instead of a severe human rights violation. For far too long, the need to confront the past in order to address the present human rights issues of people of African descent has been denied. It is urgent that we both hold individuals accountable for acts of racism and racial discrimination, and also consider more profoundly the role of structures and systems of discrimination and oppression that replicate and nurture racial hierarchies.

Many of these viciously unjust mindsets originated during enslavement and colonialism – but while enslavement and colonialism have largely been ended, these underlying attitudes are still very much alive.

Madam Chair,

I commend the Permanent Forum for its commitment to broad-based discussions of many human rights issues that impact people of African descent. These include reparatory justice, transnational migration, Pan-Africanism, the need for disaggregated data collection, and key issues of health and well-being for people of African descent.

Your recommendations can serve as an essential guide for Governments in fulfilling their human rights obligations towards people of African descent.

The outcomes of your discussions at this session will be important to much ongoing work to address legacies of the past, and to counter racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in the present.

And they will contribute to the elaboration of a United Nations declaration on the promotion, protection and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent.

I wish you a fruitful session.