

PANEL 2: EDUCATION.  
OVERCOMING SYSTEMIC RACISM AND HISTORIC HARM  
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Accreditation and Education: Challenges and Opportunities to Overcoming Systemic Racism  
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## **Accreditation and Education: Challenges and Opportunities to Overcoming Systemic Racism**

### **I. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE OF SYSTEMIC RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

A look at the international declarations and plans of action against racial discrimination unveils the generalized recognition of the central role that education can play in advancing racial equity by overcoming systemic racism and racial discrimination. Education is an essential tool for the acquisition of critical skills and competencies, as well as for the effective exercise of human rights. It is well known that education can be a critical tool in overcoming income and wealth gaps, and in ensuring intergenerational mobility. Furthermore, access to quality education is one of the central goals of sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development proclaims that an inclusive and quality education is the basis for a better quality of life for all people. No one should be left behind; all persons must have access to quality education.

The regional and international declarations against racism make a strong case for education. The Durban Declaration (2001) recognized [92] that education at all levels and ages is *“a key to changing attitudes and behaviour based on racism... and to promote tolerance and respect for diversity in societies”*. Furthermore, it stated that [93] *“quality education, the elimination of illiteracy and access to free primary education for all can contribute to more inclusive societies, equity, stable and harmonious relations”*. Finally, the document underlined [97] the *“link between the right to education and the struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance”*, and the essential role of education *“in the prevention and eradication of all forms of intolerance and discrimination”*.

The road to Durban was preceded by many national, regional, and sectorial gatherings. The Preparatory Conference of the Americas held in Santiago (Chile) in December 2000 laid the basis for recognition of our demands in Durban the following year. In addition to the recognition of us as People of African Descent present throughout the whole region, the NGO Meeting distinguished the central role that education plays in building societies free of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related forms of intolerance. The NGO Conference urged governments to promote the recognition of diversity and inclusive programs in education and social communications.

The Durban Declaration and Plan of Action (2001) proposed, among others:

- To teach about the facts and truth of history of humankind, including the causes, nature, and consequences of racism.
- Honor the memory of the victims of slave trade and slavery.
- Commit financial resources to anti-racism education.
- Implement comprehensive programs of education, research, and mass communication to disseminate the African contributions to world history.
- Ensure access to education, including lifelong learning and education.

- Take all appropriate measures to eliminate obstacles limiting access of children to education.
- To implement standardized methods to measure the educational performance of disadvantaged children and young people.
- Develop anti racist training for public officials, including personnel in the administration of justice, teachers, and civil servants.

The proposals of the Durban Conference were expanded at the World Summit of Peoples of African Descent held in La Ceiba, Honduras, in August 2011<sup>1</sup>. The Plan of Action adopted paid close attention to education as a tool to fight racism and to promote an inclusive development in the Americas. The Declaration urged states and regional and international organizations (Par. 14) to adopt measures that ensured differentiated services consistent with our identity and access to education, health, housing, employment, income, financing, credits, food, recreation and sports, information and communication technologies, culture, and political processes. Regarding education, the La Ceiba Plan of Action included the following:

- *(22) Que todos los gobiernos se comprometan a reconocer y garantizar el derecho inalienable de las niñas y los niños afrodescendientes a una educación de Calidad, asegurando el acceso efectivo al ciclo educativo complete de educación básica y a las destrezas y conocimientos necesarios para participar en las sociedades contemporáneas.*
- *(23) asegurar que los pueblos afrodescendientes cuenten con sistemas educativos de calidad con perspectiva étnico-racial que forman personas conocedoras de la historia y contribuciones de los pueblos africanos y afrodescendientes al desarrollo de la humanidad,*
- *(24) la creación de un Fondo para el financiamiento de la producción y diseminación de la Historia General de África y la Historia del Desarrollo Cultural de los y las Afrodescendientes, textos que deben tener una distribución mundial.*
- *(25) Motivar y acompañar a las universidades y unidades de investigación en la creación de cátedras, especialidades, programas académicos y proyectos de investigación que informen y acompañen los objetivos de esta Declaración.*
- *(26) Colaborar con la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras en la implementación de iniciativas para el desarrollo de estudios sobre la Afrodescendencia, la creación de un Instituto de investigaciones sobre afrodescendencia, la promoción movilidad académica internacional, y el desarrollo de posgrados sobre Afrodescendencia.*

In conclusion, there is a long history of demands for full access to quality and culturally sensitive education that prepares all, including our peoples of African descent. Although there has been some progress, much remains to be done. If our societies are to overcome discrimination, inequalities, and underdevelopment, we must transform these aspirations into enjoyable right of the peoples of African descent.

## II. ACCREDITATION. AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Although all declarations against racism and racial discrimination include educational proposals, none address the role of accreditation institutions and processes in fighting systemic racism in this field. Today, accreditation is a key component in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational systems in all fields and at all levels. Furthermore, accreditations are playing an increasingly greater role in determining the financing of higher education.

What is accreditation in education? Accreditations are standards of quality; measures that ensure that students receive the quality education promised to them, their families, their communities, and their societies. The identification, monitoring, and evaluation of those standards of quality are the responsibility of specialized organizations, thus ensuring that the recognition is made by external experts and not by the programs themselves.

There are multiple forms of accreditation institutions worldwide. Most countries have public accreditation institutions with the primary responsibility of overseeing the quality of educational systems, including universities. Oftentimes, these public institutions provide a justification for continued public funding of educational institutions. There are also non-governmental accreditation institutions that monitor educational standards of quality in higher education and professional programs. Although participation in accreditation programs is usually voluntary, it is becoming a pre-requirement to maintain access to public funding and to be valued in a global competitive market. Consequently, it is increasingly common to find that universities planning new developments, particularly those aspiring to attract international students and to participate in international collaborations, to include accreditation in their transformation agenda.

Accreditation standards will vary with the expectations of the discipline and the labor market, and, thus, they are regularly revised to accommodate disciplinary and social changes. In general, the standards used to evaluate the academic institutions include the following:

- Adequate curriculum
- Qualified faculty
- Quality and pertinent research
- Student recruitment, retention, and graduation rates.
- Sufficient financial resources and administrative capacities to meet its obligations.
- Social responsibility

Why should this Permanent Forum have educational accreditation processes on its agenda? First, the main objective of accreditation is to assure a quality education. By constantly reviewing the quality standards and creating wide networks of professionals these institutions can become important allies of the PFPAD in advancing racial equity and inclusion. Second, most of the fields identified in our Programs of Action have at least one accreditation organization. And third, many accreditation institutions already include Diversity-Equity-and-Inclusion in their educational quality goals and standards.

Let me briefly describe one case that is very close to me: the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration, commonly referred to as NASPAA. NASPAA is a nonprofit

membership organization of public affairs educational programs that has become a leading global standard of accreditation in this field. It has over 317 members in 25 countries, of which 209 are accredited in 11 countries: namely USA (including the territories of Puerto Rico and Guam), Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, China, Viet Nam, South Korea, Egypt, Qatar, and Kazakhstan. It also has 10 accredited programs in HBCUs in the U.S.A. The organization also maintains collaborative agreements with public affairs education programs on all continents. One feature of NASPAA pertinent to the PFPAD is its commitment to diversity and inclusion. Accredited programs must develop and sustain inclusive programs that produce graduates that can “*communicate and interact productively and in culturally responsive ways with a diverse and changing workforce and society at large.*” These programs must have a DEI Plan that covers their curricular activities, faculty performance, and student achievements. NASPAA has repeatedly affirmed that all graduates of public affairs programs must recognize discriminatory actions and have the competencies to combat them effectively.<sup>ii</sup>

Fortunately, there are more organizations like NASPAA that can become important allies of the PFPAD in overcoming systemic racism in education. Many share the same concerns and goals of the PFPAD. Several of these organizations are working closely with other UN bodies such as UNDP, the Gender Equity Seal, CEPAL, 2030 SDG Agenda, and environmental justice programs, to name a few. It is time to seek out these organizations to create collaborations in the pursuit of racial justice and equality. Furthermore, the recognition of the PFPAD can help many of them overcome the attempts to dismantle DEI programs.<sup>iii</sup>

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTIONS**

Considering the analysis, I recommend the following actions to the PFPAD:

1. To reaffirm the recognition of the vital role of education in fighting racism and racial discrimination consistent with the Declaration of the Durban Conference and urges the implementation of standardized methods to measure educational performance and achievements.
2. The PFPAD recognizes the use of accreditation processes in education to advance the adoption and implementation of anti-racist and inclusive education, including racial discrimination against people of African descent.
3. We urge national and specialized accreditation organizations to incorporate the objectives of Diversity-Equity-Inclusion, including Afrodescendants, in their educational quality goals and standards. Those policies and standards must include at minimum the curriculum, the recruitment and graduation of students, and the recruitment and support of faculty and staff.
4. Urge all educational institutions to deliver anti racist and inclusive training for public officials.
5. The PFPAD rejects the attempts to abolish and downgrade diversity-equity-inclusion initiatives and programs. Hence, the Forum shall monitor the continuity of these measures.

6. The PFPAD encourages the funding of DEI initiatives such as academic programs, research and dissemination, pipelines, scholarships, training, and internships.
7. The PFPAD shall lead an international alliance with educational and accreditation institutions to inform and accompany the implementation of this Declaration.

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<sup>i</sup> Available in Miradas (propias) sobre el Decenio Internacional de los Afrodescendientes by J.A. Sánchez, P.N. Ríos González, P.E. Murillo Martínez & A.I. Rivera Lasen (2022, Ecuador: Editorial IAEN-Fundación Azúcar).

<sup>ii</sup> For more information on NASPAA see [www.naspaa.org](http://www.naspaa.org)

<sup>iii</sup> For additional information on accreditation organizations see [www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)