



A Synopsis of Achievements & Challenges in IDPAD 2015-2024

16-19 April 2024

INTRODUCTION

The **UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003** highlights the importance of intangible cultural heritage such as oral traditions, (e.g. Afrikan narratives and stories), for the preservation of our cultural heritage and education. With this in mind, my critical synopsis of the **United Nations (UN) International Decade for People of African Descent (IDPAD) 2015-2024**, outlines some challenges faced and outcomes achieved, in relation to the Decade's thematic objectives of recognition, development, and justice. Particularly, the situation of Afrikan women, girls and young males were to be considered at the national level, whereas at the regional and international level, the foci included:

- a) to raise awareness, disseminate, and assist states in the full and effective implementation the **Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) 2001**, and the **International Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) 1965**,
- b) collect statistical data,
- c) incorporate human rights into development programmes, and honour and preserve historical memory of people of African descent.

RECOGNITION

UN General Assembly Resolution A/Res/69/16 established IDPAD 2015-2024, with the aim to facilitate full and active participation of people of African descent, in all sectors of society, through multilevel multistakeholder intervention. An outstanding achievement being the government of Costa Rica hosting high level events for the inaugural **International Day for People of African descent** in 2021. Nonetheless, despite acknowledging marginalisation of Africa's contemporary diaspora from universal human rights, most UN member states have not implemented national action plans or provided adequate funding pledged at the beginning of the Decade. In spite of recognising lasting consequences of the Transatlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans (TTEA), and colonialism as key factors in addressing Afrophobia, former colonial metropolises such as the United Kingdom and France, have done little to repair intergenerational socioeconomic disenfranchisement of their colonial satellites such as Haiti, now in the throes of descending into a "failed state". Anti-scientific and anti-philosophical doctrines of the inequality of "races", alluded to by the 19th century Haitian anthropologist and philosopher Antenor Firmin, persist and pervade 21st century societies, demonstrating the intergenerational hegemony of systemic racism. At the end of the Decade, national, regional, and international cooperation has therefore not strengthened sufficiently, for UN member states to adequately implement the DDPA 2001, for the benefit of the African diaspora and/or African indigenes. Notably, UN member states represented in the Intergovernmental Working Group for the implementation of the DDPA 2001 have not completed drafting the **UN Declaration on the respect, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of people of African descent**. In addition, broad-based and comprehensive critical consultations with civil society globally have insufficiently solicited ALL our contributions, for the elaboration of the Declaration in compliance with **Art. 50, A/HRC/54/68**.



DEVELOPMENT

Firmin challenged his racist contemporaries' notions of "race" and racial hierarchies as wrongly implying varying "degrees of ability observable among the different human communities spread around the globe," (Bernasconi, 2008). In this regard, collaboration between of UN member states, and international civil society is a notable achievement of IDPAD 2015-2024. At the beginning of the Decade, the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD) engaged with member states, and civil society globally, through country visits (on request), regional consultations, and its sessional meetings. For example, one WGEPAD Session focused on environmental racism which disproportionately affects Africa's contemporary diaspora living in industrially polluted and environmentally degraded neighborhoods globally, such as Flint, Mossville, and Langdon Park/Brentwood neighborhoods of Washington D.C. in the USA. International civil society, has risen to the challenge by promoting inclusion, racial equity, and non-discrimination, globally, acknowledging Pan-Africanism as a vehicle for our sustainable development, **Art.68, A/HRC/ 54/68**.

Multilevel multi-stakeholder collaborations between UN mechanisms, civil society and other actors demonstrate the means to promote universal human rights through social, economic, and environmental development. This includes addressing disparities in Afrikan women's health, education, and development. For example, issues raised in regional meetings hosted by the WGEPAD in collaboration with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2017 included disproportionate maternal morbidity and mortality in African diaspora women living in the Global North. Such disparities likely result from social determinants of health, including intergenerational and transgenerational trauma, as well as microaggressions caused by economic and environmental racism. The 32nd Session of the WGEPAD in 2023, focused on economic empowerment which affects all Afrikans. Nonetheless, contrary to those of Antenor Firmin's allegedly misogynistic arguments, made in his defence of racial equality in the 19th century, contemporary Afrikan women's disproportionate mortality and morbidity rates remain important, and are the topic of a side event at the Third PFPAD.

In 2021, the WGEPAD was instrumental in ensuring the "George Floyd Resolution", **A/HRC/Res/47/21** was adopted in response to global outrage and protests following the televised murder of George Floyd as a consequence of systemic racism. **A/HRC/Res/47/21** established the International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the context of Law Enforcement (EMLER), in response to the high numbers of reported human rights violations by law enforcement against Africans and Africa's contemporary diaspora. In 2021 also, the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Africa's contemporary diaspora in the Global North and Latin America, hastened UN member states adoption of **A/Res.75/314** establishing the Permanent Forum for people of African descent (PFPAD). The PFPAD's inaugural sessions expressed concern about intergenerational trauma and other health disparities resulting from historic and contemporary forms of Afrophobia, **A/HRC/54/68, Art.99**. The PFPAD also expressed "its deep concern about the political instrumentalization of xenophobia and the rise of the harmful ideologies of demographic replacement and reconversion and their implications for democratic stability, peace and international security," **Art. 93-95, A/HRC/54/68**. This is apparent in the rise of nationalist populism, e.g. in the Global North, where Africa's new diaspora (African migrants) is often relegated to informal economies and impacts the political agendas of the Global South. The International Civil Society Working Group for the PFPAD (ICSWG), has engaged in capacity building to raise awareness of IDPAD 2015-2024, and supports the work of the PFPAD, and EMLER as well as the WGEPAD.



JUSTICE

Collaboration has also been forthcoming between UN organs, mechanisms, and member states, civil society, and other stakeholders, where the focus is achievement of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. The 17 goals include gender equality, good health, quality education, poverty alleviation, and environmental justice. Firmin espoused racial equality stating all races (or ethnicities) are, “capable of rising to the most noble virtues, of reaching the highest intellectual development; they are equally capable of falling into a state of total degeneration,” (Bernasconi, 2008). In this regard, **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10** aims to reduce inequality within and between countries, in accordance with the DDPA 2001, IDPAD’s Programme of Activities, and the African Union’s **Agenda 2063** aspirations. However, religious, cultural, and regional norms pose challenges to universal interpretation of international law. For example, some UN member states interpret intersectionality as only alluding to race and gender in the DDPA 2001, whereas others include other protected characteristics in their interpretation. The PFPAD’s inaugural sessions “requests that the high-level political forum on sustainable development include, in its thematic discussions, systemic and structural racial discrimination at both the domestic and international levels and include reparatory justice and climate justice,” **Art.74, A/HRC/54/68**. Failure to adequately monitor health outcomes of Afrikans in neoliberal economies, strengthens arguments for equality data collection on ethnicity. Implementation of **SDG Target 3.14**, non-discrimination in access to healthcare, is therefore imperative because Afrophobia serves as a significant barrier to accessing health services.

Africa’s new diaspora often faces human rights abuse in destination and in-transit countries, despite fleeing persecution in their countries of origin. For example, displaced Haitians were deported from the USA during the coronavirus pandemic, in spite of gender-based violence and socioeconomic deprivation they faced in Haiti, and encountered in Columbia and Panama, countries bordering the Darien Gap. The DDPA 2001 “encourages States to promote education on human rights (...) including the positive contribution of migrants to the host society and the vulnerability of migrants, particularly those who are in an irregular situation” (UN, 2001, p.26). Collaboration with EMLER can transform oppressive anti-racism policies currently enforced by border controls and law enforcement, prevent human rights violations, and provide restitution for past and present abuse. Moreover, accountability of border controls and law enforcement officials for human rights violations and crimes against African migrant communities, close trust deficits, and strengthening of institutional oversight must be ensured. It is therefore imperative governments implement **SDG Target 16.b**, to promote and enforce social development policies and non-discriminatory legislation, at the national and international level. Notably, **SDG Target 17.18**, advocates fully disaggregated equality data collection for analyses and policy development. This can expedite inclusive participation of marginalised intersectional Afrikan women, youth, migrants, the disabled, and LGBTQ2+ communities and individuals.

Recent proposals and programmes that seek reparations, such as the Caricom Ten Point Plan for reparatory justice, the UK’s All Party Parliamentary Group for African Reparations, as well as NAARC, and H.R. 40 in the USA are commendable milestones achieved during IDPAD 2015-2024; as are local trailblazing reparations commissions established in California and New York in 2023, and Bristol, UK. They comply with the DDPA 2001 and Abuja Proclamation 1993’s call for governments, “to set up national committees for the purpose of studying the damaged Black experience, disseminating information and encouraging educational courses on the impact of enslavement, colonization and neo-colonialism on present-day Africa and its Diaspora” (OAU, 1993).



CONCLUSION

As the sun sets on the first International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024, we can celebrate our achievements, acknowledging challenges remain in the way forward. *“Nations and races interact in the stage of history, exit and return in different roles (...) none of these roles is insignificant. Equally imbued with dignity, each actor takes a turn at the main role,”* (Bernasconi, 2008). These sentiments attributed to Antenor Firmin, were echoed by the renowned 20th century Pan African leader, W. E. B. Du Bois, (Bernasconi, 2008). They remain as relevant as we end of the first quarter of the 21st century. It therefore is imperative that international human rights norms including ICERD 1965, and the DDPA 2001, are transposed into domestic legislation, to promote and protect Africa’s contemporary diaspora’s universal human rights equally, generally, and globally. **Resolution A/HRC/47/53** provides a Four Point Plan for Transformative Change, in this regard. Notably, Step 2 asserts state parties and other stakeholders should **pursue justice**, by ending impunity and building trust; and Step 3 admonishes us ALL, to **listen up**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations made at the first two inaugural PFPAD Sessions relate to this synopsis:

1. That regional consultations between UN mechanisms, representatives of civil society, and other relevant stakeholders be organised to facilitate elaboration of the United Nations Declaration on the respect, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of people of African descent, **Art.57, A/HRC/54/68**. Moreover, that the IGWG’s elaboration of the Declaration advocate full inclusion of all people of African descent, and with strong and specific references to the rights of our women and girls, **Art.73, A/HRC/ 54/68**.
2. That a second International Decade for People of African Descent focus on reparatory justice, recognition, and racial equity, to address systemic and structural racial discrimination at the national, regional, and global levels, **Art. 60, A/HRC/54/68**.
3. That a fund for the development of people of African descent which addresses the lasting consequences of enslavement be established, as well as a specialized UN tribunal to address reparations for enslavement, apartheid, genocide, and colonialism, in coordination with other UN anti-racism mechanisms, **Arts. 65- 67, A/HRC/54/68**.
4. That UN agencies, funds, and programmes are urged to collaborate closely with the PFPAD to expedite the development of fully disaggregated data collection practices, analyses, and evidenced based projects on people of African descent, and their intersectionality with other protected characteristics, **Arts. 85 & 86, A/HRC/54/68**.
5. That UN Member States put an end to arbitrary detention, deportations, and pushbacks, to separate civil migration systems from criminal legal systems, and to ensure that migration processes are purely administrative. Therefore, especially as they affect Africans and people of African descent, the use of disaggregated data on racial disparities in national and international migration regimes is imperative to effect sustainable transformative change, in accordance with international human rights norms, see **Art. 96-98, A/HRC/54/68**.
6. Lastly, that the World Health Organization, in collaboration with other UN entities, member states, and civil society organisations, establish a task force on racial disparities in the areas of health, intergenerational and transgenerational trauma, **Arts. 100-103, A/HRC/54/68**.



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