CONTRIBUTION TO THE PERMANENT FORUM OF PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

STATEMENT

Dr. Cristina Gomes, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO-México

EDUCATION: DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE ON AFRICAN HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE, ARTS AND SCIENCE IN CURRICULA

Justification: Racism is reproduced through education and institutions. Schools are privileged spaces to dismantle racism, races and colonial concepts:

1. to deracialize the misunderstanding about Africa. Africa seems to be a homogeneous continent, in contrast to Europe. Schools and curricula don’t include knowledge of neither the names, localization and history of African regions, countries, main cities, nor their diverse levels of development, culture and composition of their people. Generalized ideas about Africa and African people and culture treat Africa as inferior and, by replication, Africans and Afro-descendants as a homogeneous and naturalized group with the same supposedly inferior biological, cognitive, economic, socio-cultural characteristics, values and behaviors. Africans and Afro-descendants are all perceived as undeveloped, uneducated, miserable people, without any kind of wealth or valued contribution. This devaluating perception denies African natural, economic, social and cultural wealth, values and contributions to humanity. Governments would be invited to include in curricula basic knowledge about Africa, its regions, countries, peoples, history and development, wealth, the main leaders, literature, arts, authors, academic and scientists in order to promote knowledge, encourage equal treatment and empathy, dismantle misunderstandings and generalizations, value the diverse contributions of Africa and Africans to the humanity and the current situation of Africa’s people and development.
2. At schools, as migrants, Afro-descendants and the African diaspora study only the history of Europe as children; they never study the history and culture of their own countries of origin, which they may know by experience, but find no reference of at school in the societies where they currently live to identify themselves and their families. Daily, children face a hard task to explain to their partners the reality about their countries and, alone, they should counteract to unbuild their counterpart’s racist beliefs and misunderstandings about Africa and African people, which are learned in formal and social communication media, presenting news mainly about conflicts, poverty, wars and crimes, and generalizing and reproducing racist concepts from the past eugenic framework. The responsibility to dismantle these misunderstandings and structural racism cannot be on African people and African descendants individually in their daily life but should be an institutional responsibility of the State, through the educational system and school curricula.
3. The PFPAD will contribute to organizing intergovernmental and academic meetings to create the main guidelines in this effort, as well as guaranteeing the collaboration, construction and translation of the basic knowledge of Africa and African peoples in different languages, as well as promoting the adoption of this knowledge in curricula and educational systems around the world.
4. To prevent and support children and adolescents who suffer racism and discrimination, schools should have trained psychologists and teachers who are African or of African descent, to guarantee that children would feel confident to ask for support, mainly if they are minority in the school or neighborhood.

PROMOTING EQUALITY: MEASURING INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH, POVERTY AND WORK TO ORIENT INCLUSIVE AND AFFIRMATIVE POLICIES

1. Africans and African descendants have the lowest survival and education rates, the highest mortality, morbidity, food insecurity and poverty and unemployment rates in most countries, compared to other groups. Governments will promote the formal recognition of these inequalities, promote data production, studies and scientific evidence of race-ethnic inequalities to orient inclusive and affirmative policies, as well as the following and evaluation of the goals and results achieved.
2. Affirmative laws and policies would be implemented in all the areas such as education, health, employment, and public services, in order to include Africans and Afro descents according to their proportional representation in the populations.

LEGAL RIGHTS: LAW, EMPRISIONMENT AND PRISIONS

1. As a result of racism and the criminalization of Africans and African descendants, these groups are over-represented in the criminal system in several countries.
2. Governments would review laws and the training of judges, prosecutors, policies to dismantle racist attitudes and practices against Africans and Afro-descents, as well as examine attitudes and practices of racialized suspicion, investigation, arrests and condemnation of primarily Africans and those of African descent. For that, it is relevant to produce data and measure the number and proportions of racialized prisoners without a judgement or without a defense lawyer.
3. Reforms in law and legal actions would promote changes in law and in security institutions to identify and remove residual eugenic perceptions, attitudes, and practices, for example, to criminalize racism and to promote educational polices and training of personnel in justice and security forces, as well as creating evaluation systems and committees with participation of representatives of the civil society to follow justice and police attitudes and practices, as well as to reward anti-racist laws and good practices.

POLITICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE

1. Political power is a relevant dimension to promote equality. Empowering Africans and African descendants in the political arena is a relevant mechanism to dismantle racism.
2. Political actions would include banning hate speech and explicit racism in political attitudes and practices, as well as in communication media.
3. African culture and religion would be protected by legislative and executive powers, through quotas to proportionally include Africans and Afro- descendants in politics and public positions, as politicians, teachers, doctors, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, guaranteeing their participation in political responsibilities and elected positions. Quotas would be established proportionally relative to their presence in the population.
4. Quotas are relevant, since Africans and African descendants have being completely disempowered for centuries, just like women.

MULTICULTURALISM AND MIGRATION POLICIES WOULD CONSIDER RACE DISCRIMINATION

1. Structural measures from the State would consider the existence of an “additional contribution” of skin color in the perception and concept of racism. There is a discrimination scale among migrants from different countries and regions, and African and Afro-descended migrants with a black skin color are at the bottom, as most discriminated against human beings, due to the unique history of cruel African slavery and dehumanization. Recognizing this specific and high level of discrimination based on race cannot be ignored, since racism has operated for centuries, specifically and mostly against Africans and African descendants when compared to other non-African or non-African descended migrants.
2. Integration politics to include migrants will have a specific focus on including African and Afro-descendant people, considering and condemning historic slavery and trafficking as structural racism, a differentiated form of racism constructed over centuries, which is not comparable to recent migration and correlated socio-cultural conflicts. To make visible this historic and structural racism is indispensable to preventing its reproduction among generations and current consequences.