**Statement of Ms. Epsy Campbell Barr, Chair-Designate,
UN Permanent Forum of People of African Descent
at the Regional Meeting for the Middle East on the
International Decade for People of African Descent,
31 October 2022**

*Check Against Delivery*

Deputy High Commissioner Nada Al-Nashif,

Assistant Director General Gabriela Ramos,

Ambassador Ali Hussein Al Sammak,

Excellencies, representatives of civil society, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here with you today at the opening of this two-day meeting focusing on the recognition, justice and development of people of African descent in the Middle East region.

People of African descent around the world share an experience as victims of enslavement, colonialism and racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

It is also a shared experience of the erasure of the knowledge and recognition of, and respect for the culture, history and heritage of people of African descent; a shared experience of racialized violence and discrimination in all aspects of our lives, and a shared experience of striving to rise against all odds.

Based on this shared experience, I want to convey my strong solidarity with the people of African descent in the Middle East in their struggle to attain recognition, justice and development, as well as in your calls for the protection and respect of your human rights and dignity. As a woman of African descent, I would also like to express my strong support to all the women of African descent in their struggle against the multiple forms of discrimination. We stand together in our collective efforts to seek racial equity for all people of African descent globally.

The United Nations has come a long way in acknowledging that people of African descent have withstood a long historical legacy of racial injustice. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of 2001, the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference in 2009, as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination including its specific General Recommendation on People of African Descent, provide a comprehensive framework to address the challenges we face in combating racism and racial discrimination.

The proclamation by the UN General Assembly in 2011 to proclaim the International Year for People of African Descent, followed by the proclamation in 2014 to launch the International Decade for People of African Descent, has sought to shed more light on our issues of common concern. I am proud to have been part of the process to leading to proclamation by the General Assembly of declaring 31 August as the annual International Day for people of African descent.

Despite all these efforts, as rightly pointed out by the Durban Declaration two decades ago, the lack of political will, weak legislation and lack of implementation strategies and concrete action by States, as well as the prevalence of racist attitudes and negative stereotyping, continue to be main obstacles in our collective efforts to eliminate racism and racial discrimination.

We are also alarmed by positions of some Member States that do not appear to acknowledge the harmful legacies of the past and the calls for reparatory justice being made by people of African descent around the world.

The global anti-racism movement has demanded more from Member States to address the human rights concerns of people of African descent. And I would like to emphasize that unless we address all the core concerns as identified by the three pillars of the International Decade for People of African Descent- Recognition, Justice, Development- we will not see tangible progress in our efforts to combat racism and racial discrimination. As we come closer to the end of the International Decade, we need to develop a stronger agenda and also apply our analysis to other processes, mostly importantly the Sustainable Development Agenda, as it is clear that that its call to “Leave no one behind” will not be realized if people of African descent are left behind.

On behalf of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, whom I represent, I would like to inform you that this is a newly established body that serves as an advisory body to the Human Rights Council, a consultative mechanism for people of African descent and other relevant stakeholders as a platform for improving the safety and quality of life and livelihoods of people of African descent. The Permanent Forum consists of ten members and we are committed to ensure that the body will amplify the voices of people of African descent in the struggle against racism and racial discrimination.

Among other areas of our mandate, we have also been mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to monitor and review progress on the effective implementation of the programme of activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent, and to this end gather relevant information from Governments, United Nations bodies and organs, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and other relevant sources.

Most importantly, we have been tasked by the General Assembly to elaborate a United Nations declaration on the promotion, protection and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent. This will be an important step in our common efforts to seek strengthened international commitment to

In this connection, we are meeting in Geneva for our very first session next month, from 5 to 8 December 2022, where will be discussing issues of systemic racism, climate justice, reparatory justice, and on the declaration, among others. We look forward to seeing many of you participate in the session and support the important work of the Permanent Forum.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to engaging with all of your and wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you!