

REGIONAL MEETING FOR THE MIDDLE EAST ON THE  
INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT  
Organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
31 October and 1 November 2022, Room XXI at the Palais des Nations of the United

**11:00 – 12:00 PANEL DISCUSSION 1: « RECOGNITION – Sharing best practices in the promotion of equality and non-discrimination »**

*Statement: Towards greater inclusion and equality of participation at all levels of public sector for people of African descent*

*Dr. Ibrahima Guissé  
Member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial  
Discrimination*

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Your Excellencies, Ambassadors,

Mr. Ali Hussein Ali Sammak, Head of the Arabe League Mission in Geneva,

Mrs. Nada Al- Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Distinguished guests,

On behalf of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and on behalf of the Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Ms. Verena Shepherd, who is currently in New York to present the CERD annual report to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, please allow me to thank the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for organizing this Regional meeting on the Middle East just under two years before the end of the Decade of People of African Descent.

I also would like to thank the Chief of the Anti-Racial Discrimination Section and his Chief Mr. Yury Boychenko for the invitation.

It gives me great pleasure to participate in in this Regional Meeting for the Middle East on the International Decade for People of African Descent, on a panel that deals with such an important but not easy theme.

It seems difficult to deal with the issue of « Recognition- Sharing best practices in the promotion of equality and non-discrimination » in relation to the International Decade of People of Eastern Descent, without recalling some historical processes that have led to the realities of diversity of countries of the Middle East submitted here to our attention.

As mentioned in paragraph 13 of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, if slavery and the slave trade, in particular the transatlantic slave trade, are one of the main sources and manifestations of racism and racial discrimination, that people of African descent have been victims of these acts and continue to suffer the consequences; It remains that before the transatlantic trade, there was also the trans-Saharan trade or Arab-Muslim slave trade which lasted thirteen centuries according to some historians, also constituted a painful page in the history of black peoples.

This is simply to say that people of African descent constitute a much more complex socio-historical reality, and one that is perhaps not well known.

The presence of people of African descent in the region is so diverse and also quantitatively **poorly known**. If the diaspora, by definition, designates a distribution in space of peoples, this Afro-descendant population in the Middle East is in my opinion **the oldest of the African diaspora!**

Therefore, we could speak of **multiple black identities** in this region of the Middle East, which would be **Afro-Arabs, Afro-Lebanese, Afro-Iraqis, Afro-Jordans, Afro-Kuwaitis.**, etc. who over the centuries reinvent and reappraise their identities and participate in the advancement of their country.

However, these people of African descent are experiencing a certain **political invisibility and low participation in public life. Recognition requires more visibility and inclusion in all levels of public sectors.**

Some analyses indicate that the downfall of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century and the resurgence of nationalism in Arab countries in the 1950s and 1960s were a catalyst for the eclipse and invisibilization of black minorities. According to these analyses, the category of "Black Arab" sounds like a heresy with respect to the unifying political notion of Arabness, which aims to erase racial and ethnic differences in the name of an imaginary homogenized identity.

In this regard, the International Decade for People of African Descent is a great opportunity for the development of activities aimed at making people

of African descent more visible or facilitating their participation in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of their country.

The new dynamics of mobilization following the Black Lives Matter movement seem to offer Black minorities in the Middle East a new impetus to display their Black identity. It could therefore be assumed that **Special measures** can help build the capacity of these minority groups of people of African descent and develop civil society organizations dedicated to multiracial issues, so as to be able to better raise awareness and contribute, in collaboration with the States Parties of the countries concerned, to the implementation of the activities of the decade of people of African descent.

From North Africa to the Middle East, people of African descent are now claiming their complex identity as Black-Arab-Berber and are demanding equal inclusion and participation at all levels of the public sector.

At this point in my intervention, and to conclude, please allow me to recall some of the **CERD's concluding observations** with regard to certain States Parties in the Middle East.

- Statistics:

CERD has several times expressed concerns about lack of statistics and regrets that the States parties not provide specific data on the ethnic composition of their population. Such information is necessary to assess the practical implementation of the Convention.

- Hate speech

The Committee reiterates its concern that most States Parties have to amend their national legislation on racist hate speech and racially motivated crimes –in order to bring it fully into line with the provisions of article 4 of the Convention. The Committee is concerned about reports of the increasing use of racist hate speech against migrants and refugees

- Migrant domestic workers

The Committee remains concerned about the sponsorship system (*kafalah*), which results in employers exercising excessive control over migrant domestic workers, rendering them vulnerable to abusive working conditions, in particular non-payment of wages, long working hours, confiscation of their passports, and psychological and physical abuse including sexual violence.

The Committee reiterates its concern that domestic workers, who are mainly women from Africa and Asia, remain excluded from the protection guaranteed by the Labour Code.

- Lack of integrationist multiracial organizations

The Committee is concerned over the lack of integrationist multiracial organizations and movements in the States parties.

In the light of article 2 (e) of the Convention, States Parties should permit such organizations and movements and create an enabling environment for such organizations, and encourage them to maintain a dialogue with all civil society organizations.

I would like to stop while waiting for the pleasure to listen to my co-panelists.

Thank you for your attention.