

WG UNEPAD 32 Session - Thurs 4th May 2023

Response to Item 7 – Memoirs of Durban

This week feels like a full circle moment for me. I had both the pleasure and honour of attending The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa in Aug/Sept 2001, which adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action which as we know led to the establishment of this WG in 2002 by the Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/68 to study the problems of racial discrimination faced by people of African descent living in the African Diaspora, and to make proposals for the elimination of racial discrimination against people of African descent.

22 years later, I find myself here in Geneva - a proud woman of African descent at the UN speaking as a Deputy Mayor of Bristol, a leader of a city that until recently preferred to keep its dark past and key role in the trafficking & trade of my ancestors as a footnote in its history.

Today's speakers touched on many issues but I am limited in time so I want to just touch on the following:

I want to commend Ms Alleyne's unwavering leadership which resulted in the return of the Benin Rooster from Jesus College Cambridge. But let's be clear this would not have happened if she had not been elected the first PAD to her position as Master of the College. Indeed in Bristol if we had not witnessed the election of Mayor Marvin Rees - the first directly elected Mayor of African Descent in Europe - and my appointment as his Deputy, alongside many other agents of change – (the many Afrikan heritage individuals and organisations whose voices and demands fell on the city's deaf ears - we may never have witnessed Bristol City Council pass its atonement and reparations motion and the toppling of the statue of a racist slaver that resulted in protests against racism and police violence renewing attention on legacies of racial injustice & discrimination around the world.

Leadership matters. Afrikan leadership matters.

I welcome the announcement by Mr Musagi of the African and Caribbean leader's summit taking place in Barbados in June of this year. The Mayor of Bristol has established links with Barbados, Jamaica, US City Mayors in our desire to establish interdependent memorials across the three points of the triangular trade: UK (Bristol), the West Coast of Africa, the Caribbean (Barbados (former Port of Speightstown is also known as Little Bristol), Jamaica) and the United States. The memorials would represent and tell the story of struggle, resilience and contribution of the survivors and descendants of the TTEA.

African states and nations need to stand United and continue to apply pressure for the return of all our looted artefacts which as we heard remain scattered across the world in museums located thousands of miles away from our descendants. Our demands for reparations including the cancellation of the crippling debt that continues to keep us in the metaphorical shackles of our colonisers must be broken.

Since Durban there have been some advancements in the fight against racism and discrimination, including the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

However, there are still many instances of racism and discrimination around the world, including in areas such as employment, education, housing, and criminal justice and health. The Black Lives Matter movement and protests continue to highlight ongoing issues with systemic racism that cannot be ignored and predominately impact PAD all around the world.

Overall, while some progress has been made since the World Conference on Racism in Durban there is still much work to be done to combat racism and discrimination in all its forms and it's my wish that as we head towards the end of the Int Decade for PAD in 2024 our efforts must turn towards Repair, Unity and Action.

Finally, one of the earlier speakers talked about consigning our past to the history books. I respectfully disagree. The injustice of racism and colonialism on my people is deep seated and the yoke cannot be broken until the demands that we made and continue to make pre- & post Durban are met.

A point was made about the normalising of racism in parts of the world. We have have seen a rise in far-right political ideologies and movements in many countries, including the UK which often promote racist views and policies – most recently the Windrush Immigration Scandal and The Illegal Migration Bill.

In addition, social media platforms continue to allow hate speech and racist content to spread and become more widespread. Some may argue that this normalisation of racism is due to a lack of education and awareness about the harmful effects of discrimination and prejudice.

However its important to note that there are many people and organisations working to combat racism. The work of the WPEPAD is far from over.

Cllr Asher Craig
Deputy Mayor of Bristol, UK