

**2nd Session of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent
Economic Empowerment of People of African Descent
Hybrid format, May 1-5, 2023**

**Submitted by Dr. Vickie Casanova-Willis, Intl Civil Society Working Group for the PFPAD
Written Statement on “Memoirs of Durban by Legends of Durban”**

Greetings and Peace. All Protocols observed. Thank you so much for this opportunity to grow in understanding from Giants of Durban who were there. I am a human rights educator and cultural worker, Office of HBCU Development and International Cooperation (OHBCUD), IHRAAM- International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, ICPAD, and ICSWG PFPAD – the International Civil Society Working Group for the Permanent Forum.

I am a 20+ year student of Durban, having met my beloved husband just after his return from the conference as a member of National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL) and the Durban 400. So, I have learned first hand about the process, the people, and the promise – from another human rights legend, Attorney Standish E. Willis, who is right here today, but not here, due to progressing late stage dementia. As the keeper of his memories and 20 year partner in his community organizing and global to local activism, I had to speak up honoring his colleagues in this inspiring, necessary, visionary legacy – many of whom are now ancestors. Dr. Helen Boulware Harris, Educator - Flint, Michigan, Dr. Conrad Worrill – Chicago, and many more.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) I urge us to continue celebrating the legacy AND work to move the outcomes of Durban forward. Sankofa spirit looks back not in nostalgia, but to apply learnings from the past to move forward.
- 2) Continue to oppose the denial of agency of People of African Ancestry as you continue to fulfill and strengthen your full mandate.
- 3) For the very word “Durban” to be taboo is racist on its face, and there is backlash personally and professionally, including toward political imprisonment. Activists, educators, human rights defenders – especially if already at risk i.e. Black, require protection and affirmative support to do this work safely.
- 4) The Durban Declaration and Plan of Action is not some brilliant relic, nor an old collectible artifact, or the latest victim of cancel culture but as we have heard today, the MOST comprehensive and clear, consensus based roadmap to eradicating structural and systemic racism. It provides us all a DIRECT conversation with the ancestors! Lest we forget.
- 5) My final observation and recommendation relates to Tuesday’s discussion on Education and Enterprise: Black Agency and Achievements, the denial of which of course are reparations issues. It has to do with backlash.
 - a. Noting the UNWGEPAD stood strong in 2016 to affirm the call for full reparations after its US visit which I helped organize as an active USHRN member before it was abruptly silenced in 2021. At the time, there were similar attempts to shut this WG down. Civil Society stood up, and you still here. Stronger than ever. Solidarity and Unity matter. Speaking up for Mumia – Risky? But correct. Thank you for not bowing down.
 - b. And for celebrating Durban yesterday, there may be pressure. However, the DDPA must be made known, accepted, and applied, not abandoned nor erased like so much of our history has been.
 - i. We ask that you urge member states to fulfill their responsibility to human rights education. The UDHR 75th anniversary is a perfect time and I and OHBCUD stand ready to support the UNWGEPAD. Consider working with HBCUs in my network perhaps to develop opportunities to learn what the 3rd World Conference, Durban Experience, and DDPA mean.
 - ii. My curriculum includes experiential learning like visiting Southern Louisiana sugarcane plantation row, our Southern University HBCU archives on voices of the formerly enslaved

and their descendants. I invite the UNWGEPAD to visit and model this cultural exchange / reparation and diaspora study travel approach to reparatory justice, led by People of African ancestry.

An earlier speaker stated the world was not ready for Durban. We are always ready.

Thank you.

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