



FAO: The United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD)

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INPUT

RE: Economic Empowerment of people of African Descent - United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD) 32nd public session (1-5 May 2023)

Introduce yourself/your organisation:

Greetings and salutations WGEPAD.

I am an independent scholar and activist working in pursuit of the United Nations IDPAD goals; 'Recognition', 'Justice' and 'Development'. I work in the U.K. with the IDPAD Coalition U.K. and related Civil Society organisations and activists¹. Following the WGEPAD visit in January 2023 I also follow the work of the U.K. U.N. Fellows.

¹ Including; GAC (Global African Congress), ACACAC Friends of Maat (Afrikan Caribbean and Continental Afrikan Communities: Friends of Maat), PASC (Pan African Society Community Forum) BBM (British Black Music) BTC (Black Thought Collective) INOSAAR (the International Network of Scholars and Activists for Reparations) CPA (Caribbean Philosophical Association) 'Tottenham Rights', TUC Black Workers (Trade Union Congress) Rastafari; and, thanks to the United Nations 2017 Regional meeting in Geneva and the 1st session meeting of the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent I also work in support of a wide range of inspirational international colleagues including your distinguished selves.

The IDPAD Coalition U.K. campaigns to raise awareness of the U.N. Decade and its goals; all members and representatives of affiliated organisations participated in the 2023 WGEPAD country visit to the U.K. and are in full support of the Fellows' work going forward.

Our Coalition meetings were regularly held at the Maa Maat Community Centre in Tottenham London; but, the Centre is itself at the centre of a storm which threatens the existence of this key community cultural space². The plight of the Centre also brings into sharp relief a number of questions that bear directly on the themes of this conference.

I am a doctoral researcher at Kingston University³ my research is a work of intellectual reparation that calls for the *recognition justice* and *development* of the African philosophical contribution to the world. I also work as an artist, broadcaster and filmmaker, focusing on our Afrikan Caribbean oral tradition and its sublime capacity to express the creative intelligence born in Africa; i.e., the 'sapientia' which defines homo sapiens; and, the unique vocation of our species. In that context I have been immensely privileged to learn from interview-discussions and dialogues with great exponents of our oral tradition and lyrical culture. I am fully aware that the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024 is a truly great and world historic calling.

Whereas, in 1903 WEB Dubois, famously described the problem of the 'colour line' as, "the problem of the 20th century"; this *millennium*, began with what we can *recognise* as the landmark articulation of the challenges we still face; of "racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance"⁴.

I worked with the Prison Reform Trust here in the U.K. including on a report entitled, 'Double Trouble: Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement'⁵ which I single out here because of the practical insights it gave me into the needs of people

² www.boukmanacadamey.com

³ I hold a B.A. honours degree in History and Philosophy and a Master's degree in Modern European Philosophy. At present I am a PhD candidate with, 'Creolising [K]anthropology' as my working title. I address the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and his writings on 'Anthropology' and 'race' as they relate to his famous canonical works. Kant remains at the foundation of the modern liberal order; his canonical works define the vocation of *humanity* as the pursuit of *Perpetual Peace* through the establishment of a cosmopolitan legal order: a system designed to preserve peace through world citizenship and international morality; to be protected and enshrined in a rules based order. Analysing the theoretical gap between this noble conception of the human vocation, on the one hand; and, on the other, the anthropological writings on, 'race' provides an important insight into the origins of problems that we still face today; furthermore, because this gap is reflected back to us in the lived experiences of our own contemporary reality it also helps to shed light on the nature of the challenges; indeed, this gap continues to be something that we have to address in both theoretical and practical terms. Critical reflection on this gap as it was presented in the late 18th century can assist us in our work of 'recognition' - for Justice and sustainable development. This is the focus of my PhD research. The practical engagement with these issues is the history of the United Nations and the UDHR celebrating its 75th birthday this year.

⁴ World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Declaration and Programme of Action. (United Nations department of public information New York 2002)

⁵ [Double Trouble? Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement | Prison Reform Trust](#)

of African descent who have finished a custodial sentence⁶. Working on the report also allowed me to see first-hand the strengths and weaknesses of those ‘service provider’ organisations engaged in the challenging work of meeting those needs.

Some providers are better than others and I came to the conclusion that a culturally conscious community based provider of these rehabilitation / ‘resettlement’ services would produce better results all round. To that end I am in the process of building another community based organisation, ‘Constructive Solutions’ – that will address these issues by facilitating access to culturally conscious education, training and employment for young People of African Descent who have been released from the penal system, and, those that are at risk of custodial sentences or criminal exploitation prior to any ‘offending behaviour’ taking place.

Thanks to the WGEPAD U.K. visit - and in particular the main London gathering you facilitated - I met with colleagues who are already successfully engaged in similar work in our community, and they have offered advice and help. I am also extremely grateful for in-person conversations with yourselves.

The historic 2023 WGEPAD visit has focused attention on the urgent needs of our community and sharpened my own sense of both; what needs to be done and what can be done. It is my firm belief that a properly functioning community centre is essential to the work of community reparation. Your visit has inspired me to work harder towards that end.

I have a clear practical interest in further developing my own understanding of the new and traditional financial models that are relevant here; whether, categorised as Environmental Social Governance, Impact Capital or simply the pursuit of the 17 sustainable development goals; the key point I am interested in, in relation to reparation and rehabilitation (as far as finance is concerned) was expressed succinctly in an interview I conducted with an imprisoned Rastaman serving a twelve year sentence, “if dem coulda spend half the money pon wi out there, wha dem a spend pon wi in here; we woulda never been here”.

There is a bitter irony here, in the fact that the cost of incarceration does far exceed anything spent on preventative provision and it is this insight that I believe needs to be further developed and cultivated.

I have a large number of employer contacts across a range of sectors including construction, sport, retail, media and education. This means that in addition to educational programmes - we would be able to offer courses ranging from basic literacy and numeracy to higher level

⁶ The research I conducted for the report gave me an acute sense of the work that needs to be done to address the racial injustice still faced by People of African Descent in the penal system; which, we must never forget, has its brutal origins in the periods of enslavement and colonialism. On release from prison people are all too often abandoned to the predations of poverty and destitution. In a sense this abandonment echoes the experiences of those ‘released’ from enslavement at the time of *de jure* ‘emancipation’. In the same way that our African ancestors were able to draw from the deep rivers of spiritual power - to organise themselves - for the cultivation and preservation of autonomous human life, so too must we engage in this aspect of the work of reparation; i.e., to ensure that a ‘Just’ and lawful path to development exists for all our brothers and sisters who have been through the prison system.

diplomas and degree level support – we would also be able to help with C.V.'s and employment opportunities; the basic requirements for Economic Empowerment. The disparities faced by people of African descent are exasperated for those being released from custodial sentences and meaningful action is urgently required.

With regard to the development of an organisation to address these needs the intention was to develop programmes with the Maa MAAT Centre in Tottenham London as the central location. The building itself requires work but is a beautiful and profoundly inspiring location with a number of floors and rooms on each level. I myself worked on the refurbishment of the floor with my brother and became deeply inspired by the vision of Maat that resonates throughout the building.

The 'Maa Maat African Community Centre and Shrine to Maami Waata' at 366 High Road, Tottenham, London N17 9HT is perhaps, as Imani Nassor from the National Association of Black Supplementary Schools put it, "one of the foremost repositories of African cultural books and archives in Europe" (please see attached video for background information)⁷.

The location in Tottenham London is also important because of the area's history (please see reference below)⁸.

The building is under financial threat of repossession and our communities have mobilised to resist this proposed action by the bank.

The Bank in question was 'bailed out' following the crisis in the global financial system that came to light in 2007: a full 200 years after the abolition of the trade in enslaved Africans had produced so much of the wealth that these institutions have held, to this day. Indeed, the fact that the earlier 19th Century British Banking bailout (of the enslavers - for their loss of property rather than the formerly enslaved for their hard won liberty -) – the fact that this government 'debt' was still being 'paid off' in 2015 by the British tax paying public (i.e., during the period of 'cuts' and 'austerity' imposed to 'bailout' the financial institutions in the wake of the 2007 crisis) demands, 'recognition' if 'development' is to be based on 'Justice' and 'sustainability'.

To this end our communities have – as the 'Friends of Maat' – written to the Bank at its highest level in order to facilitate their engagement with this context; so, that a course of action may be determined on the basis of a fully comprehensive consideration of all the facts.

Details of the campaign and the landmark letter can be found here (please see reference below)⁹ – in essence the letter invites the bank to recognise this critical context and to accept the invitation to dialogue; and, to their credit, and to the surprise of some, the bank has confirmed that their consideration of the matters raised in the community letter is taking place at the highest levels.

⁷<https://youtu.be/ESCWLJvh7bc>

⁸ www.tottenhamrights.org

⁹ www.boukmanacadamey.com

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, correspondence from another section of the bank appears to be operating in complete ignorance of the above mentioned deliberations and dialogue.

State your area of concerns:

I am profoundly concerned that this vital community asset is lost as the consequence of a failure to 'recognise' the historical nature of the Bank's relationship with our community; and that the opportunity for sustainable development based on innovative forms of reparatory justice may be lost or further delayed.

I am concerned about the ways in which these issues can and should be navigated given the discursive context established by OHCHR documents relating to the Sustainable Development Goals and their incorporation into the Principles for Responsible Banking¹⁰ (Principles 1 through to 6 are all relevant; Principle 1: 'Alignment' - explicitly refers to the Sustainable Development Goals¹¹).

I am concerned with the potential contradictions that this discursive regulatory context illuminates under section 4 of the 6 topics to be considered in this session; i.e., The Role of the Global Economic and Financial Architecture and Mechanisms; and, further, under section 2, The World's 600 years Black Debt: from Exploitation to Economic Emancipation; as well as sections 3 and 5.

State your recommendations:

In the U.K. the annual Reparations March has the slogan "**Stop the Maangamizi**" which thereby calls upon us all to recognise the fact that this transatlantic legacy, like our struggles for equal rights and justice, continues.

At the most fundamental level I am duty bound to lift my voice in harmony with all people of good will who demand that this economic exploitation is brought to a swift and final cessation; in all its contemporary manifestations. The WGEPAD, the OHCHR and the United Nations more broadly are, in the words and spirit of our great inspiration, "mankind's last hope" – and I hope that these apparent antagonistic contradictions in the field of economic empowerment and regulation can, through the work of your good offices, become dynamic productive contradictions that lead us in to dialogue with the Bank; i.e., towards the development that we must all pursue – for all - in this 75th year of the UDHR.

¹⁰ <https://www.unepfi.org/banking/bankingprinciples/>

¹¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

References: (current reports/statistics/previous reports):

This input document has drawn explicitly or implicitly from the following : -

- 1) www.boukmanacadamey.com
- 2) *World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Declaration and Programme of Action*. (United Nations department of public information New York 2002)
- 3) [Double Trouble? Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement | Prison Reform Trust](#)
- 4) <https://www.un.org/en/events/iypad2011/background.shtml>
- 5) www.tottenhamrights.org
- 6) A/HRC/24/52/Add.1
- 7) A/HRC/41/54/Add.2
- 8) A/HRC/41/39/Add.1
- 9) A/74/274
- 10) www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/liberty-challenges-met-polices-discriminatory-gangs-matrix/
- 11) Metropolitan Police Statement
<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=33f293982f72d44dJmltdHM9MTY3NDAwMDAwMCZpZ3VpZD0wYmQxZDMwNy0zN2Q1LTZhMGUtMWQ5Yy1jMzU2MzY2ZTZiYjUmaW5zaWQ9NTE5OQ&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=0bd1d307-37d5-6a0e-1d9c-c356366e6bb5&psq=Met+police+announce+change+to+gangs+matrix&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9uZXdzLm1ldC5wb2xpY2UudWsvbmV3cy9nYW5ncy12aW9sZW5jZS1tYXRyaXgtG8tYmUtdmVkb251ZC1hc19mb2N1cy1vbi10YWNRbGluZy12aW9sZW5jZS1jb250aW51ZXMtNDU3MzQ2&ntb=1>
- 12) Church of England statement
<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&p=2551b27883a8c67bJmltdHM9MTY3NDA4NjQwMCZpZ3VpZD0wYmQxZDMwNy0zN2Q1LTZhMGUtMWQ5Yy1jMzU2MzY2ZTZiYjUmaW5zaWQ9NTlyNA&ptn=3&hsh=3&fclid=0bd1d307-37d5-6a0e-1d9c-c356366e6bb5&psq=church+of+england+slavery+compensation&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmJlLnV3S9uZXdzL3VrLTYOMjI4Njcz&ntb=1>
- 13) Friends of Maat Campaign letter available at www.boukmanacademey.com
- 14) H.I.M Haile Selassie address to the United Nations October 6th, 1963
- 15) Principles of Responsible Banking
<https://www.unepfi.org/banking/bankingprinciples/>
- 16) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

I/We the undersigned:

(Full Name, Organisation and Signed)

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