

**High-Level Meeting to Commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the
Adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

**OPENING REMARKS MADE BY
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**ROUNDTABLE II (3-6 PM)
“VICTIMS OF RACISM: RECOGNITION, JUSTICE, DEVELOPMENT”**

**The United Nations, New York, USA
22nd September 2011**

Distinguished Co-Chairs,
Excellencies,
Madam High Commissioner,
Ladies and Gentlemen, residents of New York City (who I know are among the many still mourning the victims of 9/11), a very good afternoon to you all.

I am honoured to have been asked to represent the Chair and other Members of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGPAD) at this high level forum; a forum in which we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action which emanated from the historic World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001; a forum at which reaffirm the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), that critical roadmap to our shared futures.

My Working Group is deeply disappointed that in the lead up to this commemoration, as to the 2009 Review Conference, so many have tried to undo what so many others had accomplished in Durban, even in the midst of the opposition, the boycotts and walk-outs then. Indeed, my Working Group laments the boycotting of this High Level Commemorative Event by many of those who need to work with victims to ensure that the travesties of history in which some of them participated are never repeated.

Even as we applaud those who ensured that this 10th DDPA anniversary was not ignored, let us not forget all the antecedents; all those human rights movements before and after the anti-racism conference in Geneva in 1979, designed to ensure justice and recognition for the victims.

These victims with whom we express solidarity today are clearly identified in the DDPA. We could further include people like the Rastafarians who still suffer discrimination on the basis of their ideology, religion, dread lock hairstyle and Afro-centric dress; and all those marginalized on the basis of religion, culture, class/caste; age; gender, sexual orientation and skin color.

The plight of many of these victims demonstrates, as others have remarked, that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance remain stubborn features of the global landscape. Indeed, my colleague's observation made in 2009 is still relevant. We see these manifested in Afrophobia, Islamophobia, religious intolerance, anti-semitism, xenophobia towards migrants, refugees, displaced persons and, asylum seekers; in the general abuse of human rights; in penal systems and in other discriminatory actions on the basis of age, gender, color, class, sexual preference/orientation and culture. We see these actions demonstrated in the persistence of modern day human trafficking and even slavery. Guarding against all these discriminatory practices as well as finding ways to address them so that we can dismantle an inequitable global social order are all practical solutions enshrined in the DDPA.

As we gather here today, in this place, in this International Year for People of African Descent, in this 10th anniversary year of the DDPA, just a few months after the ending of the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Dialogue amongst civilizations, it is imperative that we commit ourselves anew to a future in which everyone has a rightful place and collectively seek to address the problems being faced by victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance identified in the DDPA.

As the WGPAD's mandate is to assist the victims who are African/African-descended, I now turn to them specifically.

It is no secret that People of African Descent have for centuries been victims of racism, racial discrimination and enslavement and of the denial by history of many of their rights. Indeed the coincidence of the 10th anniversary of the DDPA with the International Year for People of African Descent offers a unique opportunity to redouble our efforts to promote the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that affect African people and their descendants in all regions of the globe. In trying to explain the roots of such attitudes the DDPA stated:

“We acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity”.¹

We use this high-level meeting to call on states that sanctioned this crime against humanity to take immediate steps, first to apologize unreservedly and not resort to linguistic obfuscation that mimics apologies; and secondly to negotiate with the representatives of victims, a respectful reparation package, based on the contributions of their ancestors to European development.

Students of history will recall that in 1944, Trinidadian Eric Williams published *Capitalism and Slavery* and placed Caribbean slavery within the context of Atlantic modernity.² Chattel slavery was an integral part of North Atlantic capitalist accumulation and subject to the forces of the market economy.

We call on Africans and people of African descent everywhere to lobby for support for the recommendation that there be a UN Permanent Forum for African and People of African Descent. We also restate the call for reparation. Reparation is a route to world peace and understanding. Some of us may scoff at the idea that world peace is even achievable, but maybe we should not. Maybe we should just work toward it as an ideal. All that is needed is political will, which we are trying to mobilize today.

Part of that march to world peace, justice and equal rights involves righting the injustices of the past set out so clearly in the DDPA. The late Jamaican artiste Peter Tosh already told us that there will be no peace without equal rights and justice and Bob Marley, using the philosophy of His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie the 1st long cautioned (and I paraphrase):

Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned; everywhere is war. Until there no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation; until the color of a person's skin is of no more significance than the color of his/her eyes; until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all, without regard to race - Dis a war. That until that day, the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship and rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained.

I thank you.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ DDPA, article 13.

² Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944)