

**OAS States must adopt measures to ensure  
the rights of persons and People of African descent**

Special Session of the Permanent Council to Celebrate the  
International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and  
the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Inter-American Week

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

*Remarks by Commissioner **Gloria De Mees**, Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons  
of African Descent and against Racial Discrimination*

It is an honor to address the Permanent Council on behalf of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. We are honored to join the Inter-American community, both State and civil society representatives, to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Today, we honor the tireless resistance and the historical agency of people of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean, and we join their ongoing efforts to achieve recognition, justice, and development. Our call to the States, on these commemorative dates, is to double down on their efforts to achieve the goals set out by the UN's Second Decade for People of African Descent; building up on a very successful first decade and a historic Plan of Action here in our own organization.

In December 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 68/237, which proclaimed the period from 2015 to 2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent, with objectives to guarantee the rights of this population and their equal participation in society. The first decade promoted important advances in discussions on comprehensive restorative justice for historical human trafficking and slavery; the recognition of lands and territories of tribal communities of African descent; and the incorporation of the racial approach in education systems.

Within this framework, it is essential to give continuity to international, regional and national cooperation efforts for the enjoyment of the rights of people of African descent, in line with the OAS Plan of Action, 2016-2025. The Plan of Action includes measures to expand and foster cooperation, the exchange of experiences and good practices, to strengthen government structures that develop public policies and mechanisms in each state to promote racial equality,

and to promote enhanced knowledge and respect of the diversity of the legacy and culture of persons of African descent and their contribution to societal development. With that Plan of Action, the OAS reaffirmed its strong conviction that only through coordinated efforts can we achieve the goals of the interamerican system and address historical inequities.

Before us is the opportunity to reassert the OAS leadership in this matter. The Second Decade for People of African Descent which, declared in January 2025, will run until 2034 with the theme "Afro-descendants: recognition, justice and development". Within the Inter-American system, efforts are underway to adopt a future Declaration to promote the human rights of persons and peoples of African Descent, an effort that my office is proud to be accompanying. The Declaration will be historic, as are all the existing Conventions in the System. I kindly invite all Member States of the OAS to ratify the American Convention on Human Rights; the Inter-American Convention Against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance, and the Inter-American Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights urges States to recognize and respect the historical agency of people of African descent in the Americas and Caribbean, whose resistance, cultural contributions, political activism, and economic participation have fundamentally shaped the region. We should call upon States to adopt comprehensive legal and policy frameworks to eliminate all forms of discrimination, including intersectional and structural patterns that perpetuate historical injustices, systemic marginalization, and socioeconomic exclusion of persons and peoples of African descent.

Furthermore, States must implement effective measures to address persistent disparities through comprehensive strategies that guarantee equality and non-discrimination, informed by robust data collection on the socioeconomic conditions of Afro-descendant populations. These strategies should simultaneously protect collective rights to ancestral lands and cultural heritage, ensure equitable access to education, healthcare, employment, and political representation, and facilitate meaningful participation in decision-making processes that affect these communities, in accordance with international and regional human rights obligations to combat poverty and structural inequities affecting people of African descent.

Regarding the right to full reparation, States should adopt measures to provide full reparation to Afro-descendant persons and tribal communities for gross human rights violations, based on discrimination and related forms of intolerance for reasons of ethno-racial background.

Concurrently, provide for special mechanisms to ensure for this population access to justice, measures of satisfaction, restitution of rights, guarantees of non-repetition, and compensation. These policies must incorporate a gender and intersectional approach, considering specific vulnerabilities. that lead to various forms of multiple aggravated discrimination with differentiated impacts.

Racial profiling and police brutality against African-descent people continues to be a pressing human rights issue in our region. States should design and implement effective measures to eliminate the stigma resulting from racial profiling, in keeping with international protocols to prevent and combat racial profiling and excessive police violence against Persons of African Descent. Consequently, conduct sensitization campaigns and training of justice operators and prison and law enforcement officers on the prohibition of the use of racial profiling and other explicit or implicit discriminatory practices for reasons of race, ethnicity, skin color and national origin.

The Inter-American Commission maintains its commitment to the rights of Afro-descendants, while reaffirming its willingness to provide technical cooperation to States for the development and implementation of actions aimed at guaranteeing the rights of this population. We work hand in hand with States to strengthen legal protections, combat racial discrimination, and advance justice, because true progress requires collaboration. At the same time, we actively engage with civil society, listening to the voices of Afro-descendant communities, amplifying their demands, and ensuring that their concerns are heard at the highest levels. Through public hearings, country visits, and technical cooperation, we are building bridges — bringing governments and communities together to drive meaningful change. Our message is clear: we are here, ready to work with all stakeholders, because the fight for racial justice and human rights is a shared responsibility.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to participate.