

World Council of Churches

General Recommendations for UN PFPAD Third Session (16-19 April 2024)

The World Council of Churches (WCC), a global fellowship of 352 churches representing more than half a billion Christians from around the world, has been deeply involved in the work of the United Nations from as early as 1946 through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). The WCC is a platform for common action by churches on issues that negate or threaten the dignity of all people.

In partnership with other faith actors, the WCC hosted a pre-session event on 15 April 2024 to discuss the lived experiences of Africans and People of African Descent in preparation for the United Nations' Permanent Forum on People of African Descent's third session (16 – 19 April 2024) in Geneva. The gathering sought to engage, from a faith perspective, the theme of the third session, *“The Second International Decade for People of African Descent: Addressing Systemic Racism, Reparatory Justice, and Sustainable Development.”*

Reading the Signs of our Times

As faith actors, we are made up of racially diverse communities: some among our key leaders are People of African Descent, and as churches, we also work with People of African Descent in and around the world. As such, we must acknowledge with a sense of disappointment, that interpersonal racial prejudices and discrimination, as well as systemic racism, continue to be major obstacles to the lives and dignity of People of African Descent. Government policies covering economic participation, access to education, health, housing, migration, and political interventions in conflict zones continue to display elements of racial profiling and racial partiality.

We are saddened by the realization that even as we draw nearer to the end of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2030, we see many of these goals as unrealized and clearly unrealizable within the time frame, we are particularly worried by increased inequalities throughout the world as opposed to SDG10 whose goal is to reduce inequalities. What we witness are widening gender inequalities, racial inequalities, education inequalities, digital inequalities and economic inequalities. This observation is sadly true of all SDGs, but SDG13 and 16 and their implementation is a genuine cause for concern.

As we gather, we cannot help but feel the weight and pain of the dark cloud that engulfs our sisters and brothers in Haiti. The consequences of enslavement and colonization and the injustice of paying for one's liberation and the continuing impact of coloniality in the affairs of Haiti are responsible for the experiences of rejection, exclusion, abandonment and hopelessness among our sisters and brothers. Sadly, the world remains indifferent!

We are equally disappointed that the economic extraction activities of multinational corporations from the Global North, including Russia and China, continue to dwarf the credits and aid that is flowing to states that are predominantly inhabited by People of African Descent. This economic imbalance is a major threat to the development of these states, that have been exploited since the emergence of this global economic regime.

While there is no dispute as to who are the major contributors to the climate crisis that the world faces today because of its association with industrialization, there is equally no doubt about who are carrying the heaviest burden of the climate crisis. Africans and People of African Descent are among the most vulnerable people. Together with the Marshall Islands and the Solomon Islands

in the Pacific region and other low-lying island states, the African continent is also paying a heavy price for the excesses of the developed countries.

We bemoan the senseless and avoidable loss of lives of people on the move, in the Mediterranean Sea, Rio Grande River, English Channel, in the forests of Asia, as people are forced by climate change, conflict and economic problems to seek for alternative spaces for earning a decent living.

We are saddened by the indifference and inaction by those who have the means but not the will to solve the problems that disproportionately affect People of African Descent, whether it be the climate crisis, conflict, extraction without beneficiation of natural resources in their countries of origin, and the lack of meaningful participation by Africans and People of African Descent in decision-making beyond mere token representation.

As a faith-based organization, acknowledging the religious plurality of our world, we want to observe with great concern that states are sometimes creating a toxic environment in the world by singling out some faith communities as sponsors of violence, even when it is clear that only some elements within the religious traditions concerned are responsible for violent responses. The continued association of religion and violence, conflict, and the disregard of human rights continues to negatively impact the good work that most religious communities are doing throughout the world. While we acknowledge the need for peer accountability mechanisms in order to hold ourselves to the highest standards possible, we call on the UN to acknowledge and continue to partner with faith communities.

We wish to acknowledge that the events of the past few years, especially the creation of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in August 2021, as an indicator of the momentum that has been gained in addressing the lived experiences of People of African Descent. However, we are concerned that the International Decade for People of African Descent is coming to an end at a time when it had actually become visible for many people. We are concerned that unless swift concrete follow-up is undertaken, the gains of the past few years might be lost.

Key Affirmations

As we gathered here in Geneva, we affirm:

1. That some of our members (Christian churches), and Civil Society Partners are taking leadership in many places in championing the dignity, rights and humanity of People of African Descent in ways that are transformational and transformative both locally and globally. This includes work on reparations and reparatory justice, as well as implementation strategies to challenge systemic racism.
2. The resilience of People of African Descent beginning with our ancestors who survived conditions that made them less than human, even thrived not only in their faith but socially, culturally, economically and politically making contributions that remain pivotal for our world even though most of it still not fully acknowledged.
3. The resilience of Women and Girls of African Descent, who despite carrying a disproportionate burden of inequalities, continue to thrive and continue to claim and advance their cause.
4. That economic independence is a sign of sustainable development.
5. The right of the people of Haiti to self-determination.
6. We will continue to play our role with and among People of African Descent in the Second Decade for People of African Descent.

7. The long-standing relationship between the WCC, and other faith bodies, with the United Nations, a relationship that begins in the aftermath of World War II and is still going strong 75 years later. Continued cooperation on issues of common concern are key to our ongoing working practice.
8. The right to racial dignity and equality in worship in our places of worship.

Key Recommendations

We, therefore, make the following recommendations:

Panel #1: Reparations, Sustainable Development & Economic Justice

1. We recommend an explicit acknowledgement that all People of African Descent are entitled to human dignity and all human rights, including the right to development.
2. We recommend a declaration and recognition that enslavement and colonization were and are “crimes against humanity” and “genocidal”.
3. We recommend the recognition and acknowledgement of the economic impact of enslavement and colonization and the fact that People of African Descent, Africans and “Black” people are victims of racist political and economic systems that have inhibited their economic progress and right to development.
4. We recommend and acknowledge the need for intentional and holistic reparations for People of African Descent, Africans and Black people for the centuries of racially motivated plunder and exploitation and continuing vulnerabilities to climate crisis and unfair economic practices, including an unconditional debt cancellation for states in the global south.
5. We recommend humane migration, refugee and asylum-seekers’ policies, that acknowledge and uphold the dignity of people who are fleeing from dangerous situations.
6. We recommend a declaration that extraction and repatriation of natural resources without beneficiation and adequate recompense for the origin countries and communities is an unfair economic practice.
7. We recommend a declaration that acknowledges the impact of the intersections of gender and racial inequalities as they pertain to the wellbeing of Women and Girls of African Descent.

Panel #2: Education: Overcoming Systemic Racism and Historic Harm

8. We recommend for all states to institute thorough equity, diversity and inclusion audits of education curricula to reframe the narrative on People of African Descent to stem racial violence that is perpetuated by the school and tertiary curricula.
9. We recommend a deliberate and thorough decolonization of the epistemologies of the West that have been responsible for centuries of epistemicide (the genocide/murder of epistemologies) in former colonized communities and an intentional rehabilitation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems from around the world.
10. We recommend a declaration recognizing that the historic debt imposed on the people of Haiti for their independence was unlawful and must therefore be returned and a

comprehensive reparations mechanism be put in place for the historic and continuing harms perpetuated against the people of Haiti.

Panel #3: Culture & Recognition

11. We recommend a decolonization and deconstruction of whiteness as the universal standard of human cultures, which has been responsible for the death or marginalization of non-western cultures resulting in widespread spiritualicide (the genocide/murder of spiritualities), including for People of African Descent.
12. We recommend an unconditional return, with compensation, of all stolen cultural artifacts, artistic items and musical inventions that are held or commercialized in the Global North to their rightful owners under decolonized property rights. These cultural items are not simply lyrics, wooden or stone pieces; they are symbols of a people's spirituality.

Panel #4: The Second International Decade for People of African Descent: Expectations and Challenges

13. We recommend the declaration of the Second International Decade for People of African Descent to capitalize on the momentum that has been generated in the past few years. We sincerely request the UN to declare January 2025 to December 2034 as the Second International Decade for People of African Descent.

Partners Co-Signing

Center for the Repair of Historical Harms, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Pennsylvania Council of Churches (USA)

Africans for Africa's Liberation Organisation (Africa)

United Church of Canada