



General Assembly

Distr.: General
21 January 2011

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Eighteenth session

Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

Tenth session

Geneva, 28 March – 1 April 2011

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

Thematic discussion on the situation of peoples of African descent

Note by the Secretariat*

1. The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 8 September 2001, adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action containing recommendations intended to strengthen the international human rights framework to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

2. The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent was established by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 2002/68. The Commission, in its resolution 2003/30, reformulated paragraph 8 (d) of resolution 2002/68 and expanded the mandate of the Working Group. In its resolution 9/14, the Human Rights Council decided to extend the mandate of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for a further three years. The mandate is as follows:

(a) To study the problems of racial discrimination faced by people of African descent living in the diaspora and, to that end, gather all relevant information from Governments, non-governmental organizations and other relevant sources, including through the holding of public meetings with them;

(b) To propose measures to ensure full and effective access to the justice system by people of African descent;

(c) To submit recommendations on the design, implementation and enforcement of effective measures to eliminate racial profiling of people of African descent;

(d) To make proposals on the elimination of racial discrimination against Africans and people of African descent in all parts of the world;

(e) To address all the issues concerning the well-being of Africans and people of African descent contained in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;

* Late submission.

(f) To elaborate short-, medium- and long-term proposals for the elimination of racial discrimination against people of African descent, bearing in mind the need for close collaboration with international and development institutions and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system to promote the human rights of people of African descent through, inter alia, the following activities:

- (i) Improving the human rights situation of people of African descent by devoting special attention to their needs through, inter alia, the preparation of specific programmes of action;
- (ii) Designing special projects, in collaboration with people of African descent, to support their initiatives at the community level and to facilitate the exchange of information and technical know-how between these populations and experts in these areas;
- (iii) Liaising with financial and developmental institutional and operational programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations, with a view to contribute to the development programmes intended for people of African descent by allocating additional investments to health systems, education, housing, electricity, drinking water and environmental control measures and promoting equal opportunities in employment, as well as other affirmative or positive measures and strategies within the human rights framework.

3. At its first and second sessions, the Working Group decided to recommend that specific themes relevant to the situation of people of African descent be addressed at its forthcoming sessions (E/CN.4/2003/21). The Working Group considered that this approach would allow invited panellists on the selected themes to inform the discussions and enrich the debates at the sessions, and lead to the formulation of measures and recommendations addressed to the Commission. The Working Group followed this methodology at its third, fourth, fifth and sixth sessions. At its seventh session, although following a similar methodology, the Working Group analysed the observations and conclusions adopted at its previous sessions in order to distil and formulate its contribution to the Preparatory Committee of the Durban Review Conference. At its eighth session, the Working Group reviewed the work accomplished in previous sessions and methodologies employed and analysed the situation of children of African descent. At its ninth session, the Working Group examined the theme of structural discrimination as it affects people of African descent, as well as possible activities to mark the International Year for People of African Descent (2011).

4. In its resolution 64/169, the General Assembly proclaimed 2011 to be the International Year for People of African Descent. The aim of the Year is to strengthen national actions and regional and international cooperation for the benefit of people of African descent in relation to their full enjoyment of economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights, their participation and integration in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society, and to promote greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage and culture. The General Assembly encouraged, inter alia, the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, within their respective mandates and existing resources, to make preparations for and identify possible initiatives that could contribute to the success of the Year. In accordance with the resolution, the Working Group, at its tenth session, will seek to contextualise the Year through a discussion of, and the drafting of conclusions and recommendations on, the situation currently faced by people of African descent; positive action to combat discrimination against people of African descent; the contribution made by people of African descent to global development; and the lack of knowledge of the culture, history and traditions of people of African descent.

5. The discussion on the situation currently faced by people of African descent will have a special focus on the right to food and on poverty rates. The World Food Summit and Millennium Development Goals call for cutting hunger and extreme poverty, two related concepts, by half by 2015. Many Afro-descendant communities still suffer from malnutrition and food insecurity not because of lack of food, but of poverty. Over the next five years, there will be a need for measures to reduce poverty and eradicate hunger affecting people of African descent.
 6. Positive action is recognized as a key element in the international struggle against racism and racial discrimination in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and in the Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference. Furthermore, the concept of positive measures is accepted by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and was further examined by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination in its general recommendation 32. The aim of positive measures is to create conditions for all to participate effectively in decision-making and to realize civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights in all spheres of life on the basis of non-discrimination. In areas such as employment, housing, education, culture and participation in public life, however, people of African descent often face discriminatory treatment. Positive action policies have been implemented in various countries, particularly with regard to employment in the public sector and education, and have shown to be an effective and often necessary tool to reach *de facto* equality in those areas for people of African descent.
 7. The contribution made by people of African descent to global development often goes unrecognized. Scientists and economists of African descent, such as Philip Emeagwali, who contributed to the invention of the Internet, Lewis Latimer, who helped develop the electric light bulb, and Sir William Arthur Lewis, who developed important theories on economic development, have contributed greatly to social progress and global development, but their names often remain widely unknown.
 8. The history of people of African descent goes back through the Atlantic slave trade and migration to the African continent. The population of people of African origin, living all over the world, though predominantly in North and Latin America and the Caribbean, is very ethnically mixed. Africans of the diaspora have brought and preserved traditions from the African continent and have generated unique and dynamic cultures. African descendants have contributed to the cultural development in their countries in areas such as language, music, literature and the visual arts. Owing to years of segregation and racial discrimination, however, the traditions and culture of people of African descent have often developed separately and remain today little known by a large part of the population and unreflected in many educational curricula.
 9. The Working Group will discuss the above phenomena and draft conclusions and recommendations that seek to address the ongoing challenges faced by people of African descent.
-