Fourth session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent
14–17 April 2025
United Nations Headquarters, New York, United States

Concept Note

The fourth session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent will be held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, United States, from 14 to 17 April 2025, with the theme: **Africa and people of African descent: United for reparatory justice in the age of Artificial Intelligence.**

Global calls for reparations for the historical legacies of enslavement and colonialism gain new urgency in this digital age, where systemic inequities within and among countries risk being replicated in emerging technologies. This session will focus on the roles and contributions of key actors in shaping and promoting the global agenda for reparatory justice. Discussions on the human rights of women and girls of African descent will reflect on the integration of an intersectional perspective, looking notably at race and gender, in the global agendas for reparatory justice and for digital justice. The session will also examine how a human rights-based approach to policymaking towards addressing systemic racism can advance all rights, including collective rights, for people of African descent by ensuring the elaboration of policies based on equality and non-discrimination. Lastly, participants will discuss the need to build ethical and inclusive AI systems that protect the human rights of people of African descent, ensuring justice and accountability in this new technological era, while exploring how AI can be used to advance racial justice. To that end, participants will have the opportunity to join four thematic discussions:

Panel #1: Reparatory justice for Africa and people of African descent

The panel will take place on Tuesday 15 April from 10:00 to 13:00.

Reparatory justice for Africa and people of African descent is a critical and urgent global priority, addressing the enduring legacies of colonialism, enslavement, apartheid, and genocide. For centuries, Africa and its diaspora have suffered the consequences of these injustices, manifested today in systemic and structural racism within and among countries. These historical injustices continue to undermine the development of African nations and hinder the full enjoyment of human rights for people of African descent.

The demand for reparations stems from the recognition that the lasting and structural harms of enslavement and colonialism were not only a violation of human rights but also a moral and an economic debt that continues to impact generations. The legacy of systemic racism, economic exploitation, unequal access to opportunities, and enjoyment of human rights still plagues both Africa and its diaspora. In this context, reparations are seen not merely as a financial call, but as a means of redress that can address systemic and structural inequalities, restore dignity, and promote long-term development.

Collaborative efforts between governments and regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), are crucial in advancing reparatory justice. The CARICOM's 10-Point Action Plan and the AU's designation of "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations" as the theme for 2025, have laid the groundwork towards reparations for people of African descent, and provide frameworks for pursuing reparations for enslavement, colonialism, and their enduring legacies.

This panel will highlight the roles and contributions of these key actors in shaping and promoting reparations. It will delve into opportunities for international cooperation, and the mobilization of resources, while also addressing challenges such as political resistance and limited resources.

Panel #2: Human rights of women and girls of African descent

The panel will take place on Tuesday 15 April from 15:00 to 18:00.

The unequal human rights situation of women and girls are the result of historical patriarchal political, legal, socioeconomic, and cultural structures and practices that ignore their specific experiences. These structures and practices remain across cultures, in both the private and public sectors, limiting women and girls' access to opportunities, leadership, decision-making and power positions and resulting in gender inequalities, sex-based discrimination and violence. For women of African descent, the situation is exacerbated by the existence of racism, racial discrimination and related structures and practices inherited from colonialism and enslavement, The compounded effects of racism and sexism result in multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women of African descent (misogynoir[1]) and impedes the full enjoyment of their human rights. This further renders them distinct from men of African descent and from other women who hold similar positions of leadership and power.

Today, the human rights of women of African descent are further impacted by the lack of economic opportunities and autonomy, encompassing credit, land ownership and inheritance, among other issues. In some regions, many women and girls of African descent lack access to quality education, face discrimination in education and in the labour market and are concentrated in undervalued, low-wage and care economy jobs. Systemic racism in health remains a concern for women of African descent as they continue to be at higher risk of death from pregnancy-related causes, face poor health due to chronic diseases and are disproportionately affected by violence at all levels of society, including sexual violence. For women of African descent in political and power spaces, violence, intimidation, harassment, bullying and abuse are real and evident, including in the media. The effect of such intersectional racial violence threatens to eliminate the gains (in education, employment and leadership) made by women of African descent, exclude them from and limit their influence in decision-making and power positions. Political violence against women of African descent reinforces sexual and

[1] A term coined by Dr. Moya Bailey to acknowledge the ways Black women are uniquely discriminated against because of their gender and race.

racial discrimination and hierarchies in politics and further entrenches patriarchy with one privileged group disproportionately influencing politics, economics and culture.

Notwithstanding the broad range of challenges faced by women of African descent in various segments of society, this panel will focus on intersectional racial political violence and its impact on the human rights of Afro-descendant women keeping in mind the global agendas for justice, including reparatory, socio-economic, and digital justice.

Panel #3: Policymaking and systemic racism: a human rights-based approach

The panel will take place on Wednesday 16 April from 10:00 to 13:00.

From a human rights perspective, developing social systems and structures that allow for the full enjoyment of all human rights, equality and non-discrimination ought to be the primary purpose of policymaking. This purpose is today as urgent and daunting as ever. Rather than increased equality within and among countries—as Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development calls for - currently we are witnessing growing inequalities. Moreover, rather than increasing their efforts to realize basic principles of human rights and justice of the inherent and equal moral worth of the human person without distinction, such principles are increasingly being denounced and ignored by policymakers across the world. A future policymaking firmly based on promoting human dignity, rights, equality and non-discrimination will need to recognize, monitor and address the collective human rights disparities faced by people of African descent within and among countries. This includes, for example, the recognition and addressing of inequalities in the enjoyment of human rights and the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, and their roots in colonialism, neocolonialism, enslavement, genocide, apartheid, racial and ethnic nationalism.

This panel will reflect on human rights-based approaches to eradicating systemic racism within and among countries. Including, the development of creative new ways of holding States, the United Nations and policymaking accountable to the purpose of promoting human dignity, equality, non-discrimination and environmental sustainability, while recognizing and addressing systemic and structural inequalities. It will be an opportunity to reflect on the recognition of collective human rights as critical to addressing systemic racism, and to discuss good practices and new measures for the inclusion of racial justice and people of African descent in policymaking.

Panel #4: Artificial intelligence and digital justice for people of African descent

The panel will take place on Wednesday 16 April from 15:00 to 18:00.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping critical aspects of modern life, including surveillance, employment, education, law enforcement, healthcare, data collection and analysis. Despite its potential to promote human dignity, AI often inherits biases from the data it processes, leading to discriminatory outcomes. For people of African descent, this presents a

significant challenge, as they are frequently underrepresented or misrepresented in the datasets that inform AI systems. This results in the perpetuation of stereotypes and the deepening of racial disparities. Black women have long highlighted the dangers of digital misogynoir, an intersectional form of bias that combines racism and sexism, targeting Black women specifically. This underscores the need for a more inclusive and representative approach to AI development.

AI also offers the potential for positive change, particularly in the collection and analysis of disaggregated data, which could be instrumental in monitoring and addressing racial disparities. However, ensuring this data is used ethically and effectively requires the establishment of robust ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks. UN human rights mechanisms have provided guidance in this regard – for example, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's General Recommendation 36 emphasizes the importance of preventing racial discrimination in AI applications and highlights the need for transparency, accountability, and human rights due diligence to mitigate the adverse impacts of algorithmic bias.

This panel will explore the dual role of AI as both a tool for advancing digital justice and a technology that can perpetuate and even deepen racial inequalities. It will examine the challenges, opportunities, and necessary actions to ensure AI contributes to a more equitable future for people of African descent.

Closing event: Haiti's Independence Debt: 200 years later

The closing event will take place on Thursday 17 April from 15:00 to 16:30, before the reading of the conclusions and recommendations of the session.

The year 2025 marks the bicentennial of a pivotal moment in global history: France's imposition of an "independence debt" on Haiti, the world's first Black republic. Haiti has a unique role in human history of anti-colonialism, anti-racism, the abolition of enslavement and the Pan-African and other movements for the human dignity, rights and self-determination of Africans and people of African descent across the world. Haiti's rich cultural legacy—strongly rooted in African traditions—has long served as both a symbol of resilience and a framework for collective identity. But today, Haiti is in the midst of an unabated security, political, humanitarian and human rights crises where armed men and women perpetuate violence and human rights violations and abuses with impunity, resulting in fear, insecurity, instability, and a record 1.04 million internally displaced in January 2025.

The current crisis in Haiti is not a historically and geographically isolated event. Haiti's history is deeply intertwined with the profound impact and legacy of French colonization and the institution of enslavement in the Caribbean. In 1791, the enslaved people of Haiti rose up in rebellion against French colonial rule and established the independent Republic of Haiti in 1804. For this courageous, unprecedented act, the country was severely punished. In 1825 (two hundred years ago this year), Haiti was forced into an agreement to pay 150 million gold francs

to France to compensate French planters for "lost property" (land and enslaved people) - an amount that was well in excess of the planters' actual financial losses. By 1898, half of Haiti's government budget went to paying France and the French banks. By 1914, that proportion climbed to 80 percent. The newly independent Haiti became financially dependent on foreign loans for its payments to France and for its very survival, resulting in mounting debt and insufficient investment in development institutions and processes for well over 100 years. The crushing debt load from interest payments created a devastating cycle of debt and entrenched poverty, alongside economic and political isolation enforced primarily by pro-enslavement supporters, trade embargoes and non-recognition, impeding its progress and stability. The invasion and occupation of Haiti by the USA between 1915 and 1934 placed a further burden on the country, leading to increased political unrest and had a profound impact on Haiti's development. The treaty signed between Haiti and the United States in 1915 regarding the finances, economic development, and tranquillity of Haiti, served as a mechanism through which foreign powers continued to exert control over Haiti's economic destiny, impeding the nation's path to economic self-determination and sufficiency.

This event will be the opportunity to discuss the roots of Haiti's current crisis, raise awareness on Haiti's deep historical connections to the struggles of people of African descent, present the various Haiti advocacy efforts and coordinate their inclusion in the Second International Decade for People of African Descent.

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