Agenda towards transformative change

for racial justice and equality for Africans and people of African descent

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

#FIGHT*racism*

Why an Agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality?

The murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 in the United States and the ensuing mass protests worldwide marked a watershed in the fight against racism. Responding to this situation, the Human Rights Council met in an urgent debate and adopted resolution 43/1, asking the High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a comprehensive report on systemic racism, violations of international human rights law against Africans and people of African descent by law enforcement agencies, to contribute to accountability and redress for victims; and to examine government responses to anti-racism protests.

The High Commissioner presented a report in July 2021, grounded in the lived experiences of families of victims and people of African descent. Listening to those voices, the need for a global transformative agenda for racial justice and equality was clear.

What is the Agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality?

The four-point Agenda sets out key changes that are needed, which, if comprehensively implemented, would:

- Reverse the cultures of denial, dismantle systemic racism and accelerate the pace of action
- End impunity for human rights violations by law enforcement officials and close trust deficits
- Ensure that the voices of people of African descent and those who stand up against racism are heard and that their concerns are acted upon; and
- Confront legacies, including through accountability and redress

The international human rights framework

State obligations are contained in international human rights treaties, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; general comments and recommendations elaborated by UN treaty bodies; international human rights norms and standards, as well as political commitments, notably the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

What should States do?

States must show stronger political will to advance the equality and dignity of Africans and people of African descent, and to effectively tackle systemic racism.

STEP UP

Stop denying and start dismantling

Systemic racism needs a systemic response to rapidly reverse denial, and alter structures, institutions and behaviours leading to direct or indirect discrimination against Africans and people of African descent in every part of life.

- Adopt comprehensive "whole-of-government" and "whole-of-society" reforms and responses to dismantle systemic racism, elaborated in comprehensively and adequately resourced national and regional action plans.
- Make time-bound public commitments on implementation of national and regional strategies and action plans to end systemic racism, and empower independent institutions to monitor and report on how those commitments are met.
- Use data to drive and assess responses to systemic racism and collect and make public comprehensive data disaggregated by race or ethnic origin, gender, age, and other factors, with strict safeguards and in accordance with international human rights law, aiming at analysing the effect of laws and policies on Africans and people of African descent.
- Respond to racist behaviour, violence and hate crimes with the full force of law and the power of leadership, including by calling out and holding perpetrators accountable.
- Accelerate implementation of recommendations by UN and regional human rights mechanisms, national commissions and inquiries, national human rights institutions and equality bodies, and monitor and report on progress.

PURSUE JUSTICE

End impunity and build trust

Ensure accountability of law enforcement officials for human rights violations and crimes against Africans and persons of African descent, close trust deficits, and strengthen institutional oversight.

- Reimagine policing and the criminal justice system by supporting and implementing community-driven models for dignity and collective safety that protect and serve all members of communities without discrimination.
- Implement reforms to restrict use of force and prohibit racial profiling; consistently and effectively bring to justice law enforcement officials for violations against Africans and people of African descent; and provide redress for victims and their families.
- Regularly publish data, disaggregated by victims' race or ethnic origin, on deaths and serious injury by law enforcement officials and related prosecutions and convictions, as well as any disciplinary actions.
- Create and/or strengthen independent oversight and complaints procedures and mechanisms regarding action by law enforcement; institutionalize and standardize reporting and review of use of force leading to death or serious injury and stocktaking of lessons learned.
- Establish and resource independent mechanisms to support families and communities affected by law enforcement violations, including through funding for separate autopsies, victim compensation programmes, psycho-social and bereavement assistance, support to bury victims, and accessing justice.

LISTEN UP

People of African descent must be heard

Ensure that people of African descent and those who stand up against racism are protected and heard, and their concerns are acted on.

- Ensure effective participation and/or representation of people of African descent, in particular women and youth, at every level in State institutions, including law enforcement and the criminal justice system, and policy-making processes.
- Recognise past and current contributions by individuals and organisations that stand up to racism, and encourage and support solidarity across equality movements.
- Ensure full respect for the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and recognize the right to peaceful protest as a way of effecting change.
- Protect the safety and rights of organisers, participants, observers and journalists in protests with particular attention to members of groups that are or have been subjected to racial discrimination.
- Investigate effectively, impartially and in a timely manner, any allegation of human rights violations or abuses against individuals and organisations that stand up against racism.

REDRESS

Confront past legacies, take special measures and deliver reparatory justice

Recognise that behind contemporary forms of racism, dehumanisation and exclusion lies the failure to acknowledge the responsibilities for enslavement, the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans and colonialism, and to comprehensively repair the harms.

- Acknowledge that truth, justice and reparations with regard to enslavement, the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans and colonialism and their legacies contribute to non-recurrence and reconciliation and benefit all of society.
- Create, reinforce and fully fund national and other processes to construct a shared narrative on enslavement, the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans and colonialism and their lasting consequences for Africans and people of African descent.
- Ensure effective participation of people of African descent and their communities to guide the design and implementation of these processes including broad and inclusive consultations.
- Make amends for centuries of violence and discrimination through wide-ranging and meaningful initiatives, within and across States, including through formal acknowledgment and apologies, truth-telling processes, and reparations in various forms.
- Dismantle structures and systems designed and shaped by enslavement, colonialism and successive racially discriminatory policies and systems; re-envision public spaces, including by memorializing the contributions of and harms against people of African descent and ensuring that enslavement, the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans and colonialism are not glorified.

Work of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

OHCHR provides support to States and other stakeholders, particularly people of African descent and their organizations, to take further action globally towards transformative change for racial justice and equality. OHCHR also provides support to various UN anti-racism human rights mechanisms.

Normative standards and further reading

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, UN, 1965
- Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, UN, 2001
- OHCHR and racism & OHCHR work on racial justice and equality
- Agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality (annex to A/HRC/47/53, OHCHR, 2021)
- Reports on "Promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers through transformative change for racial justice and equality" (A/HRC/51/53, A/HRC/54/66, A/HRC/57/67, A/HCR/60/70, OHCHR, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025)
- Guidance note on 'How to effectively implement the right to participate in public affairs: A spotlight on people of African descent', OHCHR, 2023

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