

Towards a Declaration on the Rights of People of African Descent



Participants at the 29 October side event at UNHQ

There is a rich body of legally binding and non-binding international legal instruments through which various human rights are expressed and guaranteed. There are UN declarations on the rights of indigenous peoples and of persons belonging to minorities, for example, or UN conventions on the rights of the child and of persons with disabilities. But no such UN document exists with regard to the rights of people of African descent.

Given that people of African descent throughout the diaspora continue to suffer from multiple forms of discrimination and are often facing institutionalized racism and growing xenophobic attitudes, there is growing international support for the development of global standards on the respect of the rights of people of African descent.

The UN General Assembly, in its programme of activities for the implementation of the [International Decade for People of African Descent](#) (2015-2024), requested States to consider the elaboration of a draft UN declaration on the promotion and full respect of human rights of people of African descent.

Discussions on such a draft declaration have now started.

In March 2018, the UN [Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent](#) held discussions on a framework for a declaration on the rights of people of African descent. In September, the [Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#) also held discussions on the elaboration of such a draft declaration. And, most recently, UN human rights experts visiting Headquarters shared their thoughts on the importance of drafting a declaration.

The proposed declaration would build on the 2001 [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#), to set global standards specifically for the rights of people of African descent, including land rights, the right to reparations and reparative justice, equality before the law, protection against racial profiling and hate crimes, as well as the rights to health, housing, education and employment, among others. The declaration could deal with ongoing structural problems and address unresolved historical injustices. It would also provide a global platform for advocacy and a framework for dialogue and cooperation.

These were some of the thoughts shared by the speakers at the 29 October side event, which featured Michal Balcerzak, Chair of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent; Nouredine Amir, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; E. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and Craig Mokhiber, Director of the New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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