



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE
CO-OPERATIVE
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**



**STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY
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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA**

on behalf of the African Group and the Caribbean Community (AfCAR)

**at the commemorative event of the International Day of Remembrance of the
Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**

**United Nations Headquarters
New York**

25 March 2021

Mr. President,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the sixty-eight (68) Member States of the African Group and the Caribbean Community, AfCAR. The horror of slavery separated 12 million Africans from the motherland and created a diaspora in the Caribbean. Separated from our families, now we are standing here reunited with one voice. Given this historic reality and linkage, it is indeed fitting that AfCAR's first statement within the United Nations should come as we commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which is being held under the theme, ***“Ending Slavery’s Legacy of Racism: A Global Imperative for Justice”***.

This annual meeting provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the progress made in our collective endeavor to eliminate all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance, which gave rise to one of the most horrific enterprises in human history. This year it comes at a time when racial discrimination all over the world is prompting the plaintive cry, “Black Lives Matter.” Irrespective of the country in which they reside, the children of Africa deserve to live, and to do so with dignity, and the social and economic structures that prevent this, must be dismantled.

In 2015, the beginning of the International Decade for Persons of African Descent, Member States stood in solidarity as we erected the *Ark of Return*, a Permanent Memorial to not only honour and remember the victims, but to also pay tribute to those who fought to secure fundamental human rights and freedoms for their descendants. The memorial stands as a reminder that we should never cease to denounce all vestiges of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance, as well as modern day slavery, while promoting the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On this day, the memorial and other related activities have particular resonance in the hearts and minds of the millions of Africans and people of African descent we represent. But a memorial must be more than a symbol of remembrance of history; it must be a call to action for the creation

of a meaningful and sustainable future and the prevention of the repetition of the events we now call to memory.

Mr. President,

We commend the ongoing efforts of Member States and the continued support of the Secretary-General, the Department of Global Communications, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and other international agencies and urge them to further raise awareness about the impact and legacy of slavery. We also advocate for a broadening of the discussion in ways in which the international community can tackle these complex historical, socio-cultural and economic issues.

We note from the Secretary-General's last report, issued in June 2018, that activities related to the UN's Remember Slavery Programme have increased, both in number and quality. There has also been an increased use of social media platforms and strengthened partnerships with Member States and civil society to raise awareness of the *Ark of Return* and the issues covered by the programme of educational outreach on the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

Mr. President,

It is a travesty, however, that decades since the abolition of the odious and nefarious enterprise that was the transatlantic slave trade, people of African descent still continue to confront systemic and structural forms of hatred built upon deeply entrenched mindsets and attitudes, which denies them their human rights and dignity. The events of 2020, sparked by the death of George Floyd in the US, together with the birth and growth of the Black Lives Matter Movement, brought into sharp focus the need for greater attention to be given to addressing the legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

This legacy can be seen today in entrenched and systemic racism which causes people of colour to be discriminated against all over the world, to be more likely to be unemployed, to have less access to jobs, opportunities, housing, education and in fact, to be criminalised, to suffer inequity and injustice in all aspects of social and economic activity. This reality has been tragically borne out in the COVID-19 pandemic, which has revealed deep disparities in the care and outcomes of

persons of African descent, as well as other minorities, who are disproportionately impacted by and die from the virus.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) noted recently that since afro-descendants have worse indicators of well-being than their non-Afro-descendent peers, they represent one of the groups most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of both infection and mortality. These disparities are attributed to multiple factors relating to marginalisation, discrimination, limited access to health, bias in the provision of care, economic inequality, as well as overcrowded housing, and environmental risks. Urgent action by governments is needed to address issues, which result in social exclusion, the perpetuation of racism, prejudice and discrimination.

Mr. President,

Despite the inclusion of SDG10, which focuses on the “*reduction of inequality within and among countries*”, none of the SDGs explicitly calls for the eradication of systemic racism and racial discrimination; this has implications for the overall delivery of the promise to “*Leave no one behind*”. We, therefore, welcome the historic debate on “*Racially inspired human rights violations, systemic racism, police brutality and violence against peaceful protest*” convened during the 43rd Session of the Human Rights Council in June 2020, and the subsequent unanimous adoption of resolution 43/1, which mandated the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, together with UN experts, to prepare a global report on systemic racism and excessive use of force against people of African descent by law enforcement. This is a step in the right direction, at a time when issues of systemic racism and police violence around the world are coming under increased international scrutiny.

We also look forward to the debate on the midterm review of the International Decade for People of African Descent that will be held later this year. This will provide an important opportunity to deepen our analysis and review of existing mechanisms to identify gaps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will also offer an opportunity for all relevant stakeholders to exchange views on the broad range of recommendations emanating from several

agencies and institutions, including the Pan American Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

More importantly, the review will enable discussions on how the global community can tackle the pandemic, while emphasizing the importance of implementing participatory policies that are culturally relevant, free from racism and that promote equality and rights for all persons of African descent. This is an opportunity for us to move beyond discussion, to taking tangible steps to ensure the post-COVID world is one in which racism is finally eliminated. In that regard, the issue of reparations is pivotal to restorative justice and to creating opportunity and equity for those whose limbs and lives were used without mercy or remuneration to build societies and strong economies.

Mr. President,

There is much work to be done! We must continue to act decisively and take concrete steps to eliminate the scourge of racism, and act decisively to safeguard the human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. We encourage all to support ongoing public educational outreach to ensure that the legacies of slavery are dismantled once and for all.

Slavery was inflicted on us. We continue to carry its heavy and residual burden, but the multilateral system can ensure that the stain of slavery is finally lifted from the lives of people of African descent.

In this fight, please be assured of the unstinting commitment of the Member States of the African Group and the Caribbean Community.

I thank you.