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High-Level Meeting to Commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the
Adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

The United Nations, New York, USA
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ROUNDTABLE II (3-6 PM)

“VICTIMS OF RACISM: RECOGNITION, JUSTICE, DEVELOPMENT”

(Delivery Version)

Distinguished Co-Chairs, Excellencies, Delegates, Colleagues, Friends:

I am honoured to have been asked to represent the Chair and other Members of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGPAD) at this high level forum; a forum in which we mark the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action which emanated from the historic World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (the W-CAR) held in Durban, South Africa in 2001; a forum at which we reaffirm the Durban Declaration & Programme of Action (DDPA), that critical roadmap to our shared futures.

Of course, my Working Group is deeply disappointed that in the lead up to this Conference, as to the Review Conference in Geneva in 2009, so many have tried to undo what so many others had accomplished in Durban. Indeed, my Working Group laments the boycotting of this High Level Commemorative Event by many of those who need to work with victims to ensure that the travesties of history in which some of them participated are never repeated. I do not have to remind this audience of the names of the main perpetrators. You know them very well.

Co-chairs, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues and Friends, these victims with whom we express solidarity today are clearly identified in the DDPA. We could further include people like the Rastafarians who still suffer discrimination, and all those marginalized on the basis of religion, culture, class/caste; age; gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, physical disability and other areas that attract intolerance.

The plight of many of these victims demonstrates that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance remain stubborn features of the global landscape. We see these manifested in Afrophobia, Islamophobia, religious intolerance, anti-Semitism, xenophobia towards migrants, refugees, displaced persons and, asylum seekers; in the general abuse of human rights; in penal systems and in other discriminatory actions.

As we gather here today, in this place, in this International Year for People of African Descent, in this 10th anniversary year of the DDPA, just a few months after the ending of the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Dialogue amongst civilizations, it is imperative that we commit ourselves anew to a future in which everyone has a rightful place and collectively seek to address the problems being faced by victims, based on my mandate, especially the victims who are African/African-descended.

It is no secret that People of African Descent have for centuries been victims of racism, racial discrimination and enslavement and of the denial by history of many of their rights.¹ In trying to explain the roots of such discrimination, the DDPA stated:

We acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity...

We further add that slavery and the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans were crimes against humanity.

We use this high-level meeting to call on states that sanctioned this crime against humanity to take immediate steps, first to apologize unreservedly and not resort to linguistic obfuscation that mimics apologies; and secondly to negotiate with the representatives of victims, a respectful reparation package, based on their contribution to European development.

Students of history will recall that in 1944, Trinidadian Eric Williams published *Capitalism and Slavery* and placed Caribbean slavery within the context of Atlantic modernity.² Chattel slavery was an integral part of North Atlantic capitalist accumulation and subject to the forces of the market economy.

We call on Africans/peoples of African descent to unite around the issue of reparation and to support the recommendation that there be a UN Permanent Forum for Africans and people of African descent. Reparation is a route to world peace and understanding. Part of that march to world peace, justice and equal rights involves righting the injustices of the past set out so clearly in the DDPA. The late Jamaican artist Peter Tosh already told us that there will be no peace without equal rights and justice and the late Bob Marley, that revolutionary icon, using the philosophy of His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie the 1st long cautioned (and I paraphrase):

Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned; everywhere is war. Until there are no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation; until the colour of a person's skin is of no more significance than the colour of his/her eyes; until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all, without regard to race - Dis a war. That until that day, the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship and rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained.

Co-chairs, Excellencies, Delegates, Colleagues and Friends, we invite you to read our full paper which has been circulated for an elaboration of some of these ideas raised in this presentation. But we wish to urge Africans/people of African descent to stay the course and never give up the fight for respect, rights and restitution; the fight for recognition, justice and development. Our ancestors never did. In fact, had they not struggled for liberty and rights the way they did, we would still be in chains.

We end with Marcus Mosiah Garvey's charge to all Africans/people of African descent: "*Up you mighty race! You can accomplish what you will!*"

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ENDNOTES:

¹ For relevant articles on conquest, colonization and African enslavement, see Verene A. Shepherd & Hilary McD. Beckles, eds., *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 200)

² Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944)