

*Check against delivery*



**STATEMENT BY PROFESSOR VERENE A. SHEPHERD  
CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL  
DISCRIMINATION**

**Delivered on the Occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial  
Discrimination**

United Nations General Assembly

New York, 21 March 2024

- **Your Excellency Mr. Denis Francis, President of the UN General Assembly**
- **Mr Courtney Rattray, Chef de Cabinet to the Secretary-General of the UN**
- **Distinguished Representatives of States**
- **Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights**
- **Ambassador June Soomer, President Designate of the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent,**
- **Dr. Uché Blackstock, Founder and CEO, Advancing Health Equity**
- **Representatives of Civil Society and NGOs**

**Greetings on behalf of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which I have the honour of chairing.**

**Mr. President, permit me to begin, in this Women's History Month, by paying tribute to the women who were killed in the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 that gave inspiration to the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, among them, Maria Molebatsi, Elisa Moletsi, Nora Mbele, Miriam Sekitla and Christina Motsepe. Prior waves of activism on this side of the Atlantic, of course, threw up rebel women like Maroon Queen Nana and Kitty Scarlet of Jamaica, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman of the USA and Cécile Fatiman and Marie-Jeanne Lamartinière of our beloved and beleaguered Ayiti. To speak the names of the ancestors is to make them live again and influence our actions today.**

**Mr. President, the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination provides an opportunity to take stock of the persistent gaps in the implementation of our shared commitment to protect hundreds of millions of people whose human rights continue to be violated due to racial discrimination.**

**It is also an opportunity to reaffirm our recommitment to fight all forms of racism everywhere; a commitment made in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), the Programme of Activities for the International Decade for People of African Descent (the drafting of which I led as then Chair of the WGEPAD) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; which is only one of a number of binding international legal instruments prohibiting racial discrimination. The General Recommendations of CERD show how it can be achieved, including notably, No. 34 (on Racial discrimination against people of African descent, 2011), No. 35 (on Combating racist hate speech, 2013) and No. 36 (on Preventing and combating racial profiling by law enforcement officials, 2020).**

**With a near universal level of ratification of 182 States parties we should be able to speak about the elimination of racial discrimination as a common goal of humanity. As my Committee monitors the implementation of the Convention by State Parties, we are regrettably observing racial discrimination, racist hate speech and racially motivated violence continuing to rear their ugly heads. Too many of us still refuse to believe in**

human rights and justice for all. Conflicts around the world and impunity for racial discrimination threaten to derail whatever gains we have made.

Indeed, if Jamaican reggae icon and our social conscience, Bob Marley were alive today, he would be resurrecting his song “war” because there is indeed war in the east, war in the west, war up north, war down south; and Peter Tosh would be wailing “Everyone is crying out for peace, yes; none is crying out for justice”.

We may take issue with Tosh because some of us ARE crying out for both peace and justice, especially in these days of escalating conflicts. CERD consistently calls for urgent and concerted action to address racist and dehumanising public discourses and racial discrimination, and for the perpetrators of racial discrimination to be brought to justice. Like Tosh, we want equal rights and justice - the second pillar of the theme of the International Decade for People of African Descent (IDPAD), without which there can be no lasting peace.

Mr President, as we continue to reflect on the theme “A Decade of Recognition, Justice, and Development: Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent,” we must recognize that not everyone has benefited in the ways promised by its aspirational theme, even as the IDPAD approaches its end. And I should emphasize that CERD supports the call for a second Decade.

The central aim of the IDPAD, restoring the dignity of victims of racial discrimination remains elusive, particularly the victims of the “untold suffering and evils inflicted on millions of men, women and children as a result of slavery, the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, genocide and past tragedies”. In this regard, the call for reparatory justice from countries which colonized and under-developed Africa and the Americas, including the Caribbean, extracting their wealth but not ensuring their development, remains largely unaddressed, although I am pleased to note that there is some momentum. Sir Ellis Clarke from Trinidad & Tobago was clear that:

*An administering power is not entitled to extract for centuries all that can be got out of a colony and when that has been done to relieve itself of its obligations.*

We call on States to respond to growing calls for reparatory justice and economic empowerment for people of African descent. It is important for States to commit anew to leaving no person of African descent behind in their efforts to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. Indeed, without a global commitment to justice, the other recommended activities of the IDPAD will not be realized.

As the iconic Rosa Parks said: *“the future of peace and prosperity that we seek for all the world’s peoples, needs a foundation of tolerance, security, equality and justice”.*

I thank you Mr. President.