

**DURBAN +20 : REPARATION, RECOGNITION, JUSTICE, DEVELOPMENT**

**A WEBINAR**

**ON THE WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION,  
XENOPHOBIA & RELATED INTOLERANCE**

**OPENING SESSION  
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2021**

It is a great pleasure for the P.J. Patterson Centre for Africa-Caribbean Advocacy, in partnership with the Centre for Reparation Research, to host this Webinar with the full support of our Ministers on Durban + 20 on Reparation Recognition Justice Development.

This privilege is enhanced by this opportunity to Open our discourse marking the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Since then and particularly over the past two years the world has been rocked by the unrelenting and devastating impact of the COVID – 19 pandemic. In a time of information flow, we have been gripped by the troubling stories of families, communities and countries being ravaged by the virus. Two years into this pandemic we remain constantly distressed by the ever-increasing numbers of lives lost and increasing infection rates.

What is even more troubling is the stark racial and social inequalities inhibiting access to healthcare. This pandemic has starkly revealed the interconnection between race, racism, economic inequality and health.

As our Centre predicted in its very first public release, the dynamics of global power have prevented equitable distribution of the vaccines between developed countries and vulnerable developing countries. This division and inequality throughout our global society has made the relevance of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) even more significant.

We who were Leaders in Durban have now become Elders who can engage in a critical reflection on the impact of this solemn declaration. What has Durban achieved in its stated objectives of addressing race and racial discrimination in the last 20 years? Specifically, we must assess whether the Declaration adequately addresses the impact of racism and racial

discrimination, as well as the legacies of slavery and colonialism which have entrenched the global inequalities that have become even more pronounced in today's global pandemic. There are those who occupy pivotal positions of Leadership in many developed nations and International Institutions, that deliberately seek to disregard any truthful answers and dare to treat any such conversation as impolite or otiose.

The present Leaders in Africa and the Caribbean, availing themselves of the scholarship, research, and skills in our Universities and the work of Centres and Institutes such as this, cannot be lulled into silence and inactivity.

That we will never forgive nor forget.

We of the developing nations must realise that our modern day identity and capacity to build and develop continue to be defined by the vestiges of our colonial past. Our identity remains linked to the injustices and violations experienced by our ancestors. We are a global diaspora that remains afflicted by the legacies of slavery and colonialism.

In a global *community* in which racism, racial discrimination, intolerance, and xenophobia remain ever present the concerns for minority communities, we must ask what more must be done to move our international community forward towards tolerance, equality, respect and racial justice?

With the adoption of the Declaration, we formally accepted a comprehensive set of strategies that directly targeted race, racial discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia. It encouraged states to implement anti-discrimination laws and called for the strengthening of legal protection for racial minority groups, refugees, and indigenous people against all forms of abuse and

discrimination (Petrova, 2009). It also called on states that adopted the declaration to create programmes and public education strategies that examined the causes of racism and racial discrimination in an effort to eliminate racism throughout our international society.

At the heart of the DDPA was the need to directly provide recourse to legal support for minorities affected by racial injustice and discrimination and to stymie the further proliferation of racism by educating the public and providing state intervention for tools. It sought to specifically highlight for nation states that instances of inequality, underdevelopment and lacking institutional capacity for growth are in fact directly related to pervasive elements of racism which have been interwoven into most, if not all, aspects of state and society. The discriminatory policing practices of some states that continuously target black and ethnic communities, the legacies of racism have been so intricately developed to continue the marginalisation and discrimination of minorities – thus further entrenching systems of oppression in these communities.

The Caribbean delegations posited that slavery and the slave trade were in fact crimes against humanity. (Beckles).

Our demand was denied.

We find that though its intended goal was to address the racism and racial discrimination, there has instead been a widening of the divide between the Global North and South. Discussions on finding a way to move forward in relations ultimately broke down due to an unwillingness to acknowledge and make appropriate amends for the role played by the North in establishing and employing these systems of racial discrimination and prejudice.

With 31 states refusing to return to the table, there is no universal consensus on how to adequately address racism and racial discrimination in our global community. Racially marginalised states are once again placed in a position of powerlessness and underrepresentation due to the deafness of more powerful players. Without global commitment and consensus, we lack the power to effect critical change and eradicate racism and racial discrimination for future generations.

In response to this, many of us have sought independent recourse for the atrocities of the past. There is CARICOM's 10-point Plan for Reparatory Justice which not only demands a formal apology from European governments for the atrocities of slavery and colonialism, but also insists that they take more responsibility in building capacity in countries that were ravaged by these systems.

Over the past 20 years the international community has experienced significant seismic shifts in the manner in which we operate as a collective of states; how we view each other as global neighbours; and how we respond to injustice and instances of inequality targeting the marginalised many.

For many black and afro-descendant communities plagued by the legacy of slavery and colonialism (such as social inequalities and continuous economic hardships) the idea of racial and social justice at times appears to be distant and unattainable goals. During the last five years we have seen a growing awareness of institutional forms of racism, prejudice and xenophobia. We have seen communities of the young across the world stand up and demand better from their governments, civil society, educational institutions and even from their peers who refuse to take proactive measures to eliminate these

forms of social and racial injustice. We have seen racial activism and social justice movements galvanize communities demanding change, and recognition of the past so that they can ensure an equitable future for the most marginalised.

In the shadow of Durban, a dualistic response to race in the global community ignited a new era in race relations and racism. With proliferating white supremacy factions and anti-migrant and refugee rallies in many countries, there are as many counter-protests. The emergence of Black Lives Matter and movements protesting the abuses suffered by indigenous peoples in the global North highlight a critical move forward led by our youth, to address systems of institutional and systemic racism and racial discrimination in our international society.

The core objectives of the Durban remain relevant today. Its more lasting legacy is that it formally recognises racism, racial inequality, discrimination, intolerance, and xenophobia as facilitators of the social and economic issues affecting marginalised groups. The POA aligns strategically with the Sustainable Development Goals, in that, it recognises that racism and racial discrimination and inequalities do in fact foster socio-economic disparities in communities of African descent. With racism being entrenched in certain systems of governance, eradicating poverty, unequal access to healthcare and education as well as concerns related to gender is notably more difficult and more complex to disentangle from the state infrastructure. It is critical that states address these issues related to systemic racism and discrimination head on in order to eradicate poverty and improve access to healthcare.

As we grapple with racial and economic disparities emphasised by the global pandemic the POA highlights that it is imperative for nation states, through international cooperation, to increase investment in health-care systems,

public health, drinking water and environmental control in communities of African descent.

These are the communities that are left bereft of the adequate infrastructure to safeguard itself in times of health crises. There is need for more targeted support in these areas to facilitate their movement towards development and growth.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has moved into the stage of curtailing the virus through a global vaccination initiative, considering the racial undertones of access to the vaccine must be brought to the fore as we discuss the DDPA. The World Health Organization has rightly deplored the delay of wealthy states in the Global North to share their supplies of the vaccine with poorer nations, we are witnessing a “vaccine apartheid”.

As some Western states are now administering booster shots to their citizens, many African and Caribbean nations are still left trying to source suitable access to this life saving vaccine for their people (Aljazeera, 2021).

The DDPA is still supported by nation states who view the eradication of racism as a critical measure of moving our global community forward and addressing the wrongs of the past. Yet, more needs to be done. We need a global support on this initiative which includes reengaging the most powerful nations in this dialogue. It relies with us all to take responsibility and acknowledge our respective roles the propagation requires of this pandemic of racial hate and discrimination.

In order to secure even the modest gains we obtained in Durban twenty years ago, the nations of Africa and the Caribbean were forced to yield ground

once again to make any common declaration possible. But any objective assessment will reveal that our moderate tone has not impelled any meaningful step forward. Instead, instead of progress there has been a regression.

The structural inequality in which the majority of people within the African continent and its Diaspora exist still reflect the archaic configuration of global power and remain embedded in the existing ossified international arrangements.

It is a self-evident truth that Africa, the Caribbean and non-Aligned nations must renew our pledge to build a new international architecture.

But there are some hopeful signs.

Thanks to the advances of technology, the whole world was able to witness in real time, what hitherto would have concealed. In places distant like Australia and throughout the United States itself there was a spontaneous revulsion at the cruel and inhumane slaughter of George Floyd.

There is evidence in Bristol and the Bank of England boardroom as well as some enlightened universities in Scotland and the United States have begun to realise the obligation to repair the obligation to admit the indecency of slavery. The recent decision by Germany to pay in part for the atrocities in Namibia is another positive signal.



To recalibrate the case for reparative justice we cannot rely on prayers or expressions of piety. Unity of purpose and the execution of a single programme to eradicate the inequities and imbalances in every available forum and institution to which we belong is the only way.

From my vantage point there is another bright ray of light. For the very first time, the countries of Africa and the Caribbean have met in a historic summit.

Fully recognizing that in the wave of three global pandemics – health, racism and poverty – there is an urgency to engage in a constructive dialogue collaboration of the governments and people of Africa to collaborate in articulating and asserting a pragmatic agenda for recovery, resilience and sustainable development. The wide spheres of cooperation on which they agreed could be memorable steppingstones to lay a sound foundation for achieving a historic breakthrough.

The Summit outlined a clear roadmap towards the integration of continental Africa and the Caribbean into a single family network pursuing progressive goals which are beneficial to our communities and people.

To attain the goals which have emerged from the Summit will require a broad coalition of governments, regional institutions, policy research institutes and civil society organisations. The process will encompass much which is non-governmental, especially in culture, arts and sport which galvanise and consolidate the people-to-people connection.

It is precisely for such a noble purpose that the Patterson Centre for Africa-Caribbean Advocacy was conceived. In light of the accepted purposes we

stand ready to help to make the outcome of The Summit become a significant landmark and accomplish its goals as we focus together on matters of justice and resilience.

The Summit specifically mandated the National Delegations to the current meeting of the UN General Assembly to exercise its formidable weight as we commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Durban and use that high-level event to advance the claim for reparations within the processes of the United Nations.

It is full time for the entire international community to accept the needs to create a legally binding instrument on the promotion and full respect of the rights of the people of African descent wherever they live. A genuine global community cannot allow the denial of basic human rights or permit the spread of discrimination because of ethnic origin, race, colour or religion.

On behalf of the Centre I thank each of our distinguished Participants in this webinar and hope it will contribute in some measure to that time in our human existence, to that moment in our lifetime where the scourge of racism has been destroyed and we can live and work together on Mother Earth to provide education, adequate healthcare, jobs, technology and the requisite infrastructure as cornerstones for a world where justice, peace and prosperity prevail.

September 24, 2021