

26th Session of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

Regional Meetings with civil society

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Statement from the NGO PAWA

Thank you, Chairperson Dominique Day, members of the Working Group of People African Decedents, and the United Nations for providing this platform to enable us to contribute to the midterm review of the international decade for people of African descent and the 20th anniversary of the DDPA stock taking of the progress made and decisions on further necessary actions.

A. What has been happening?

I will be speaking from a national perspective, that of the African Descents in Switzerland. In Switzerland, we are dealing with a child that refuses to grow up in fear of being forced to face up to its atrocities, fear of having to decolonize. We have a culture of denying our involvement in colonialism thus denying the existence of racism. That said I can not speak to you about what has been happening in the last 20 years, or 10 years. I can only go as far as 5 years back when the push back from the Black community became stronger on issues of racism.

The new Aliens Act in Switzerland provides that a B residence permit and even a C permanent residence permit can be withdrawn solely because of social welfare dependency. Due to the Corona pandemic, more and more of us, BIPOC are losing their jobs, since we occupy most of the temporary jobs or self-employed and job cut backs have affect us the most leading to the dependency on social welfare. This in turn spiked the threats of deportation and isolation of Black people.

Criminals are identified by their nationality and this is printed by the media. We requested the government to abort this since it stigmatises and reenforces the pre-existing criminal stereotypes. Should the practice continue, then the police and the media should identify and publish, not only the foreigners, but also the Swiss citizens identities.

The global wave of the Black Lives Movement came at an opportune time and also gained massive support in Switzerland in form a series of demonstrations in different Cantons of Switzerland in March. More than 10,000 people of diverse ethnic backgrounds took to the streets in support of the movement. This enhanced the pressure on the government to acknowledge and speak openly about the countries existing racism.

In the National Parliament, there is a new tendency that Members of Parliament have to declare their diverse nationalities – because of the underlining question of national loyalty: Are these MPs fully committed to Swiss issues?

B. What works?

What we have found that, combing our efforts with intra-national organisations, like the WGEPAD, the United Nations and civil societies work to increase the pressure on the governmental actors to find solutions to racism on Switzerland. In conjunction with the UN, the WGEPAD and other local

activists, the NGO PAWA was able to launch the International Decade of African Descendants on 2020-09-26 in a cultural event at the Swiss National Museum in Zurich. Similar launches are planned in Basel, Berne, St. Gallen and Geneva in 2021 in order to spread the word and share the knowledge about the Decade and its mechanisms.

Issues we want to prioritise for the next five years (declared by members of the African Civil Societies in Switzerland on 2020-11-22):

1. Stop Racial Profiling - Black people, People of Colour, Sinti, Jenisch, refugees and migrants should no longer be checked by the police solely on the basis of their appearance or skin colour.
2. We strongly recommend the creation of an independent complaints office in the event of police, governmental authorities and domestic violence.
3. BIPOC must occupy decision-making positions at anti-racism institutions at the federal government, cantons and cities.
4. Switzerland should officially take responsibility for its own involvement in colonialism and apartheid and integrate this knowledge into the curriculum and teaching material in schools.
5. Removal of all statues and renaming of all streets, mountains and places that have a reference to racist / colonial figures.
6. Stop the racist, inhumane and criminalizing deportation and isolation policy in Switzerland and at the borders of Europe.
7. Stop the daily structural and institutional discrimination of BIPOC people: when looking for work, looking for accommodation, in schools and kindergarten, at work, in health care.

Thank you for giving me the floor.