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**Complete Statement to the 26th Session of the
Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent
Regional meeting with civil society
November 23, 2020**

As President of the Balanta B'urassa History & Genealogy Society in America, I submit this statement on behalf of the Lineage Restoration Movement and as a member of the UNESCO Inclusive Policy Lab Public E-Team for People of African Descent and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The criminal Trans-Atlantic Trafficking of People with African Lineage and Heritage consisted of a minimum of 36,000 voyages that are documented in Davis Eltis' *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*.¹ At least 12.5 million people from the African continent were trafficked to the Americas and they and their descendants were dehumanized through a *slave manufacturing process* that resulted in the crime against humanity known as *ethnocide*.

As stated by the Dignity Rights Initiative of the American Bar Association, "the transatlantic slave trade intentionally worked to destroy the culture of African people but keep the people. European colonizers prevented African people from speaking their languages and practicing their religions, and they systematically severed African communal and familial bonds. The chattel slavery system of the Americas and its modern-day derivatives are a continuation of ethnocide."² James W. Nickel adds, "Ethnocide is like genocide in being a means of getting rid of a group. Genocide involves the physical elimination of the group, whereas ethnocide could, in principle, leave all of the members of the group alive."³

The ethnocide of the various peoples brought from the African continent to the North American colonies was state-sanctioned through laws such as the Negro Law of South Carolina (1740)⁴, which legislated, among other things, that slaves were to be punished with up to twenty lashes on the bare back for gathering together with other slaves, buying, selling, dealing, bartering, or exchanging any goods, wares, provisions, grain or commodities, possessing a boat, canoe, horse, cattle, sheep, or hogs, beating drums, blowing horns or using any other loud instruments, having or wearing any sort of apparel "finer" or of greater value than Negro cloth, or reading or writing. Worse penalties, including death, were sanctioned for escaping from the

¹ <https://www.slavevoyages.org/>

² https://www.americanbar.org/groups/human_rights/dignity-rights-initiative/ethnocide-project/what-is-ethnocide-/#:~:text=Ethnocide%20is%20the%20destruction%20of,Nazi%20Party%20rose%20to%20power.

³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9833.1994.tb00350.x>

⁴ <https://digital.scetv.org/teachingAmerhistory/pdfs/Transcriptionof1740SlaveCodes.pdf>

plantation and or defending oneself from attack against a white man or woman. After the American revolution, federal laws continued this dehumanization and ethnocide.

While the economic damage to and condition of the victims of the criminal Trans-Atlantic Trafficking of people with African Lineage and Heritage has been well studied, identified, and calculated, less studied and understood is the damage to the identity resulting from ethnocide.

Identity locates an individual as a part of a family, a community, a region, a culture, and a historical period. On the African continent identity was and still is formed by the knowledge and preservation of one's maternal lineage, transmitted from mother to daughter and paternal lineage, transmitted from father to son. Depending on each family's village tradition, identity, and all that it included – language, culture, spirituality, land, and one's place in the world and universe (history), was determined either by maternal or paternal lineage. Health and well-being, therefore, required the preservation of one's lineage. If you did not preserve your lineage, you lost your location or place in the world.

In the same way that the criminal Trans-Atlantic Trafficking of people with African Lineage and Heritage caused severe and devastating economic damage, it also created severe and devastating LINEAGE DAMAGE. The ethnocide has resulted in an identity crisis for black people in America. In addition to the identity crisis, we are now beginning to understand the genetic damage that was done.

Scientific study has definitively proven that biopsychosocial adversity affects gene structure and function through biochemical actions on the epigene and lead to pathologic function of the specialized cells of the body creating The Transgenerational Epigenetic Effect (TTEE). Kenneth S. Nave, MD states, "Science has proven that environmental conditions shape the structure and function of highly specialized cells in key areas of the body. These changes occur in an extension or appendage to the gene known as the Epigene. The Epigene is an extension of the gene that responds to biochemical signals emanating from the environment. These signals cause changes to the gene. These epigenetic changes to the gene influence and change the cellular genetics of the cell. . . . Under certain environmental conditions, the epigenome programs or 'reprograms' the genetics of the cells of the limbic system which, **in its most fundamental definition, is the center of all human thought, emotion, behavior, learning and, when present, psychosocial pathology.** . . This environmental shaping is usually pathologic leading to physical disease, social dysfunction, and mental illness. Most significantly to the plight and social conditions of the descendants of former slaves is the scientifically proven fact that the changes to the epigene created by environmental pathology is passed down to the descendants of those initially impacted by environmental gene shaping. . . . As it relates to the cells of the brain, this cellular shaping can lead to problems with learning, memory, and mental health. As it relates to cells of the heart and cardiovascular system, these changes can lead to heart attacks, strokes,

and kidney failure. Endocrine cells genetic shaping can lead to diabetes and metabolic syndrome. . . . This environmental shaping of the gene is well confirmed and is also recognized to be transmissible at least to the fourth generation of one's descendants and beyond. That means that any environmental hardship experienced by your ancestors and causing this genetic environmental shaping could possibly, and is probably, transferred down to you, their descendant, and likewise your progeny, for generations. This is The Transgenerational Epigenetic Effect."⁵

Until recently, reversing the dehumanization process that resulted in ethnocide, and resolving the identity crisis of the victims of the criminal Trans-Atlantic Trafficking of people with African Lineage and Heritage was thought impossible. However, due to the advent of genetic testing through the company African Ancestry, it is possible to restore the ancestral lineages of the victims. More than 750,000 tests have already identified maternal and paternal lineages, creating the new Lineage Restoration Movement.⁶ With restored identities, groups of people on both sides of the Atlantic who share the same ancestry are now reconnecting and returning to their ancestral homelands. They are creating a new model of development and Diaspora relations on the African continent that prioritizes human repair and development over economic investment. This was most evident in 2019 when Foday Conteh led a contingent of Temne and Mende descendants back to Sierra Leone where they gained citizenship⁷, and in January 2020 when I myself became the first of my family, after two hundred and fifty years, to return to my ancestral homeland in Guinea Bissau and helped launch that country's "Decade of Return Initiative".⁸

One important implication of restoring the ancestral lineage is that it allows the victims to better utilize the Universal Human Rights Instruments, and in particular, those pertaining to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities. The dehumanizing slave manufacturing process took place in controlled environments that used violence and terrorism over the course of four hundred years. To reverse engineer The Transgenerational Epigenetic Effects, it is going to require controlled environments of the opposite kind: peace, security, and most importantly, autonomy, self-determination and liberty. This can be achieved through the exercise of minority rights and self-determination under a framework of democratic pluralism in the Americas.

⁵ Nave, Kenneth S., Competent Proof: The Legal Standing African Americans Have in the Battle for Slavery Reparations. June 2020. www.drkennave.com

⁶ <https://www.balanta.org/news/lineage-restoration-movement>

⁷ <https://youtu.be/eqjt9FODYOs>

⁸ <https://www.balanta.org/news/report-of-the-president-of-the-balanta-burassa-history-amp-genealogy-society-in-america-mission-to-guinea-bissau>

I invite the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent to review the document, Agenda for Black America's Restoration and Self Determination⁹, to see a vision and proposal for what this looks like in the United States.

Thank you,

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⁹ <http://www.siphiwebaleka.com/blog/2020/10/22/agenda-for-black-american-restoration-and-self-determination>