

## **Statement for the WGEPAD 27th session- December, 2<sup>nd</sup>,2020**

I am Evanne Souchette and I'm a 2020 people of African descent fellow. Originally from Martinique, French Overseas Territories are mostly populated by people of African descent.

France is usually presented as the "human rights nation". However the French history is also inseparable of the history of the world colonization : in 1789, according to the Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen, "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights", this same year we have to remember and acknowledge that slavery was not over on French Overseas Territories.

But because black people were not considered as humans yet, history books keep telling the story without mentioning any contradiction.

Obviously, the colonization has left a mark on Martinique's cultural and historical background. I would like to raise some issues preventing the enjoyment of black people's rights particularly in French Overseas Territories because these issues express themselves in a different way.

### **Situation in France**

In 2010, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was already "concerned at the increasing difficulties faced by some inhabitants of overseas territories in gaining access without discrimination to education, employment, housing and public health."

We cannot quote them all but the mains issues relative to people of African descent in France are:

- The lack of ethnics data on the composition of the population, it is extremely hard to address and treat discriminations issues as a system instead of as an individual isolated behavior.
- Increasing police violence and profiling: "Blunders" are more and more broadcast by medias (Theo Luhaka, Adama Traoré, Keziah Nussier, Michel Zecler...). Despite that, State and police headquarters refuse to acknowledge the existence of systemic racism and discriminations in police. Usually, police officers concerned are not even punished. The fact that a law (The proposed law on global security, adopted on November, 24,2020) was recently created to prevent the recording of police officers (for their protection), and among other articles, allow them to use their firearms even when they're not in service is really concerning for black people.
- Racist, xenophobic comments and hate speech made by politicians, using the freedom of speech as an excuse. (for example, the ex- justice minister, Christiane Taubira was insulted many times, sometimes by other politicians and each times the sanction was negligible in comparison to what is prescribed in the penal code.)
- Discriminations to employment, housing and public health (extremely hard to prove because of the lack of data...)

## French Overseas Territories

### Health issues

- In addition to these issues, in French Overseas Territories, our lands, waters and cultivated fruits and vegetables are poisoned by a toxic non-biodegradable pesticide forbidden in France since 1990 but used in Martinique and Guadeloupe until 1993: the Chlordecone.

This pesticide known as carcinogenic may be responsible of the extreme high rates of cancers (highest rates of prostate cancers in the world for Martinique and Guadeloupe.) we can also mention that Guadeloupe hospital (the only one) is the worst of France since the fire of 2017.

### Reparation

- The denial of the history in education.  
Even if since 2001 slavery and transatlantic trade were recognized as crimes against humanity, no changes has been made in the history books. Black people (from African countries and Caribbean islands) has fought for France and deserved to be mentioned as full contributors of the history of France. Monuments and statues have to be questioned in regard of the History and by respect of people of African descent.
- France was one of the most “prolific” colonizer countries but nothing has ever been discussed in terms of reparations. (French politicians keep talking about the “benefits of colonization”

I respectfully request this Working Group to urge France to take necessary steps to promote the decade and the Durban declaration, to acknowledge the existence of racial discriminations, to collect data, to improve racial equality in housing, employment, to prevent and punish police violence and to guarantee reparation in French Overseas Territories.

Thank you for your attention.

Evanne Souchette, project manager in inclusion and equity and 2020 people of African descent fellow.