



27th Session of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent: “The Urgency of Now: Systemic Racism and the Lessons of 2020”, Geneva November 30 – December 3.

Statement by Ms. Monica Ferro, Director of the Geneva Office.

I would like to reiterate UNFPA’s support of the mandate of this Working Group. In 2020, UNFPA has added its voice in support for People of African Descent and against racism in all its dimensions. Our Executive Director participated in the urgent debate convened by the Human Rights Council in June, in which she made clear UNFPA’s unwavering support and commitment to ensuring the human rights of people of African descent. At this year’s session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on Durban in October, my office continued to emphasize the importance of fighting all forms of discrimination and racism in all its dimensions, by reiterating the way it affects women and girls of African Descent. We acknowledge the important role of this Working Group, as a crucial part of the existing UN architecture against racism, and as the only venue so far dedicated solely to People of African Descent. We commend the Human Rights Council for having extended the mandate of the Working Group, and we are particularly pleased to see the space given to it to conduct one of its yearly meetings in other locations, in order to facilitate more direct access to People of African Descent.

UNFPA will continue to actively support your mandate in 2021, as the UN will commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action both in Geneva and in New York, and as we conduct the mid-term review of the International Decade on People of African Descent. These processes, in addition to the ongoing Member States discussions towards a possible forum on People of African Descent, testify to the global awakening taking place.

Eliminating racism, discrimination and marginalization is sine qua non for the achievement of the ICPD PoA and the agenda 2030. For all family planning needs to be met, for all maternal deaths to be prevented, for all gender-based violence and harmful practices to end, for all young people to achieve their full potential, structural barriers of prejudice and racism must be removed. This case was already brilliantly made on Monday by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, when she mentioned how Afro descendant women and girls have less access to modern contraceptives and maternal health interventions. We echo that concern and add that, they are also more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, early marriage, sexual exploitation, abduction and trafficking.

As we are all very much aware, data invisibility is one of the main drivers of the gaps in policy and response. This is of particular concern to UNFPA, as the Agency in charge of promoting and supporting census and other statistical support in our over 130 programmatic countries.

It is in this spirit that we are partnering with the OHCHR in the upcoming publication of a study on the effects of Covid-19 on People of African Descent in Latin America and the Caribbean – which we hope will reinforce the findings of the Working Group in its latest report; and we will also provide recommendations to the draft Operational Guidelines on the inclusion of People of African Descent in the 2030 agenda, which is in itself a fantastic output in the context of the International Decade. Our Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean is particularly committed to tailoring our programmatic offer in the region to respond to the particular needs and challenges faced by People of African Descent.

We are honoured to partner with this Working Group, Member States and Civil Society actors taking part at this session, to boost the second half of the International Decade towards concrete outcomes that empower People of African Descent.

Thank you.