

27th session of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

30 November to 3 December 2020

Item 7: DDPA+20 and the Mid-term review of the International Decade for people of African Descent

Statement by Sri Lanka

Madam Chair,

Sri Lanka is pleased to address this session as we stand at the threshold of the twentieth year of the historic Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), which, among other things, led to the establishment of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent with a specific mandate to study and make proposals on the important issue of racial discrimination against people of African descent.

We take this opportunity to commend the work that the Working Group has undertaken since 2002, and we take note of its report of this year, which has drawn attention to some crucial issues faced by people of African descent across the globe particularly in the context of the pandemic situation that continues to pervade the year 2020.

As a country that survived over 300 years of colonialism, as a co-sponsor of the historic 1955 Bandung Conference which brought Asian and African leaders together in their call for “equality among all races and among all nations, both large and small”, and as a nation that consistently supported UN initiatives at combating apartheid, Sri Lanka stands in solidarity with fellow African nations and relevant mandates of the UN in calling for more vigorous and collective efforts by all stakeholders to address the root causes as well as the effects of discrimination against persons of African descent.

It is in this same spirit that Sri Lanka cosponsored the resolution titled “Commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action” at the 45th session of the Human Rights Council whereby the international community was, inter alia, called to reaffirm its commitment to the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the DDPA.

We also reaffirm the position expressed by the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at its 18th Heads of States’ Summit in October 2019, condemning all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including the platforms and activities related thereto, which constitute serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, while impeding equal opportunity. *[Language from the Baku outcome document]*

Madam Chair,

Sri Lanka agrees with the Working Group that the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare disparities and discrimination that persist in our world for many vulnerable groups, including people of African descent. These disparities range from exposure/susceptibility to the virus and access to

health care, to disproportionate impacts on livelihood and other basic human rights of these populations whose vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic.

Therefore, we believe that addressing racial discrimination as set out in the DDPA has assumed an even greater and all-encompassing role and relevance today, particularly in the context of our journey towards achieving the 2030 agenda on sustainable development wherein all UN member states have committed to “to leave no one behind”.

In this regard, Sri Lanka notes with concern that the pandemic continues to reverse many hard-earned gains secured by countries in delivering on the 2030 agenda, which in turn may aggravate inequalities for certain segments of their respective populations.

The United Nations system has a pivotal role in addressing these inequalities and in ensuring that no one is actually left behind in global efforts to overcome the numerous challenges associated with the COVID-19 crisis. Sri Lanka believes that genuine dialogue and cooperation among the international community is important to achieve this objective and we stand ready to work in solidarity with fellow nations towards this end.

It is through such concerted and collective action that we could turn the 20th anniversary of the DDPA and the International Decade for People of African Descent into a sincere and meaningful effort at ensuring recognition, justice and development for people of African descent and other vulnerable populations.

Thank you.