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INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF  
**AFRICAN DESCENT**

**The WGEPAD Public 27th Session:**

*Written Statement on The Urgency of Now- Systemic Racism and the Lessons of 2020*

**Item 6: Thematic Discussion: Session 2**

Systemic Racism, Global Protest and Police Violence

2020 will be remembered as a year of global protests. This follows empirical evidence that Black lives were disproportionately lost as a result of pervasive White supremacist structures and processes of neoliberalism during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. Outrage sparked by the brutal murder of George Floyd by law enforcement in the USA, gained momentum elsewhere fuelling protests in the capitals of neo-colonial European metropolises e.g. London in the United Kingdom and Paris in France. Other protests against systemic racism and police brutality were fuelled in (neo)colonial satellites of European capitalism, e.g. Dutch Curacao, the British Commonwealth country of Nigeria, and the former Portuguese colony of Brazil. What is notable about these and other solidarity protests in the USA, Europe and globally, is that beyond rejecting police brutality, protesters also demonstrated awareness that Afrophobia/Afriphobia results from institutional, structural, and systemic racism.

Bristol's Black Lives Protests illustrated awareness of Afrophobia in our daily lives, as a result of *institutional racism* by law enforcement, immigration, the legal system, housing, health etc. In 2016, the Ras Judah campaign was launched in Bristol, after an Elder was tasered in the face by a member of Avon and Somerset Constabulary, further contributing to breakdown in trust between the constabulary and our communities. Efforts have since been made by the Constabulary to rebuild links with our communities, e.g. through recruitment of Black officers and consultations with community organisations, e.g. African Voices Forum. Reports of *institutional racism* by British police constabularies had long been established, e.g. by the Lammy Review 2017 on racial bias in the criminal justice system, and MacPherson Report 1999 on the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Bristol is notorious for its history as a major cog in the Trans-Atlantic Trade of Enslaved Africans; temples to liberalism were built from the profits off Europeans capitalistic overexploitation of African labour that remain clearly evident in the city today. The removal of the Bristolian slave trader Colston's statue from civic prominence during the city's Black Lives Protest, marked a turning point between long-term local discourse and quick action to right the wrongs of its troubled past. Although Colston's statue and name have been removed from civic prominence, the urbanism still has neighbourhoods with names such as Black Boy Hill and White Ladies Road. The origins of those place names hark back to White supremacy scientific racial hierarchies which deemed us inferior intellectually, morally, and physically to our White peers. Black Bristolians therefore encounter a lived experience of structural racism within one of Britain's most unequal urbanisms. We are disproportionately represented in school to prison pipelines, poor and overcrowded housing, environmentally polluted and socioeconomically deprived neighbourhoods; with disproportionately high levels of incarceration in





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criminal justice and mental health institutions. This has contributed to high levels of COVID 19 infection and fatality rates in local African diaspora communities.

### Systemic Racism: Status Quo, Symbolic Commitments, Substantive Change

Historically, oppressive Slave Codes enacted by European colonisers legitimised enslavement of African labour in the Americas, and subsequently Black Codes enforced the dehumanisation of African Americans, e.g. in the USA's post-reconstruction antebellum South. That *status quo* has been critically analysed, evaluated and theorised, and momentum calls for social change. Black Lives Matter protests highlighted the oppressive hegemony of neoliberalism perpetuates systemic racism, wherein European colonial legislation enacted to oppress and exploit our African forebears, remain implanted and enforced in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Despite advances made through activism in neoliberal states, outstanding contemporary challenges remain including our marginalisation from equal, general, and global access to universal human rights, and equality before the law. *Symbolic commitments* therefore illustrate interest convergence that serve our oppressors needs, e.g. tokenism in recruitment and deployment of police officers, legal advocates and magistrates who "look like us," is not enough. In that regard, SDG 10 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development asserts UN state parties reduce inequality within and between countries including on the grounds of race, ethnicity or origin. *Substantive change* can therefore only be achieved where neoliberal institutions and structures confront their complicity with racial inequity and inequality, by embracing systemic justice that is inclusive of our interests, needs and aspirations.

### **Session 3: Time to address the root causes of Systemic Racism**

Decolonisation and deconstruction of neoliberalism's oppressive legal system of global dominion is therefore imperative and requires UN state parties eliminate oppressive discriminatory laws and policies in accordance with IDPAD's thematic objectives of recognition, justice and development. For example, SDG Target 10.2 aspires to empower and promote social, economic and political inclusion for all irrespective of race, ethnicity, origin, or other status by 2030. It is therefore encouraging that movements for reparatory justice and systemic justice have gathered momentum in 2020, increasing online knowledge exchange on the issue of Afrophobia. Collaborations have developed and strengthened seeking systemic justice, e.g. Harvard and Howard Law School's Justice Initiative Project champions critical race theory in educating the next generation of legal advocates.

### Remedies

I have previously advocated the normative frameworks of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 for implementation of IDPAD's thematic objectives of recognition, justice and development, to the WGEPAD and other stakeholders. Notably, SDG Target 10.3 (otherwise listed as SDG Target 16.b) of the 2030 Agenda asserts state parties implement anti-racism norms and policies. The International Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Racism (ICERD) 1965, and the Durban Declaration and





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Plan of Action (DDPA) 2001 can enable achievement of IDPAD's thematic objectives. However, empirical evidence highlights neoliberal economies fail to transpose anti-racism norms into national legislation, in a manner that is inclusive of people of African descent. For example, although the Equality Act 2010 transposes the EU Council Directive 2000/43/EC (otherwise known as the Race Equality Directive 2000) into British legislation, it is criticised by members of civil society for being a watered-down version of previous British anti-racism jurisprudence. I therefore advocate Afrocentric i.e. African centred theory, policies and pedagogy in response to the widespread negative portrayal of Black identity, e.g. the Black Atlantic Ideology.

### Reparations

Adopting a Pan Africanist approach to reparations can provide solutions to problems arising from historical and contemporary forms of Afrophobia, such as disproportionate health disparities affecting people our communities. With this in mind, I acknowledge the work of Pan African leaders and fellow activists who champion reparatory justice for the descendants of enslaved Africans and victims of colonial oppression.

### Accountability and Justice

To conclude, IDPAD's thematic objectives acknowledge the challenges of racial and social injustice faced by people of African descent globally. I argue the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes indicators for monitoring achievement and implementation of SDGs linked to IDPAD. For example, the Global Monitoring Indicator 10.3.1, monitors "*proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law.*" Moreover, SDGs can have a high level of interaction which must be at least be enabling; e.g. peace and good governance (SDG 16), is imperative for policy interventions to reduce inequality (SDG 10).

