

28th Session of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent
Theme: Environmental Justice, the Climate Crisis and People of African Descent
March 24, 2021 (14:00-16:00 CET)

Madame Chair,

- The United States thanks the Working Group and the panelists for this week's insightful discussion.
- Since this is our first time taking the floor in this forum since our reengagement with the Human Rights Council, I want to take a moment at the outset to underscore that there is no issue more central to the goals and policies of the Biden Administration than addressing systemic racism – forthrightly, honestly, and powerfully – and the legacy of discrimination in our country.
- Over the past year, the senseless killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many other Black Americans has sparked a real reckoning with racial justice, a movement that has spread across the world.
- As protesters marched to demand justice, we were reminded, once again that Black Lives Matter. That systemic racism and white supremacy are ugly poisons that have long plagued the United States. And that aggressive action is required to address structures, policies, and practices that contribute to the wealth gap, to health disparities, and to inequalities in educational access, that disproportionately affect people of color. We must, and will, do more. The U.S.-led Joint Statement on Racism that garnered more than 155 co-signatories in the HRC is but the beginning.
- We thank the Working Group for its leadership in pressing us all to do more toward the elimination of racial discrimination, wherever and by whomever.

Madame Chair,

- This week we turn our focus to the nexus between environmental justice, the climate crisis, and People of African Descent.
- Intensifying our efforts to address environmental challenges, including climate change, is a core priority for the United States. This is why, on his first day in office, President Biden rejoined the Paris Agreement and appointed former Secretary John Kerry as the nation's first presidential envoy for climate. We are working hard to accelerate global efforts and commitments to tackle this critical issue.
- Part of this commitment is advancing environmental justice and "holding polluters accountable, including those who disproportionately harm communities of color and low-income communities." The Biden Administration aims to bring opportunity to communities that have suffered as a result of economic shifts and communities that have suffered the most from persistent pollution.
- From Flint, Michigan, to St. James Parish Council, Louisiana, we've heard calls from across our country to do more to advance environmental justice.
- On his first day in office, President Biden issued an Executive Order that makes environmental justice a part of the mission of every agency by directing federal agencies to develop programs, policies, and activities to address the disproportionate health, environmental, economic, and climate impacts on disadvantaged communities. The order established two new White House environmental justice councils to ensure a whole-of-government approach to address current and historical environmental injustices, including strengthening monitoring and enforcement by Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Justice, and Department of Health and Human Services.
- The order also creates the government-wide Justice40 Initiative with the goal of delivering 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments to disadvantaged communities. What's more, we've created an Environmental Justice Scorecard to track our performance.

Madame Chair,

- This is just the beginning. There will be much more. We look forward to listening and engaging in this week's session and thank the Working Group and all of today's participants for your expertise and inputs.