**Written contribution to the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent**

**The Urgency of Now: Systemic Racism and opportunities in 2021**

People of African descent have long decried abuse of their fundamental human rights. The issue gained additional global attention in 2020 when protests broke out across the United States, following the death of George Floyd, an unarmed African American man whose death while in police custody was captured on video.  The death of George Floyd at the hands of a white Minneapolis police officer sparked a worldwide reckoning with racial inequality.

Consequently, the worldwide reckoning in the past year has resulted in intensified efforts of countries, civil society organizations, advocates, and others to put an end to the discrimination against people of African descent. In Canada, the Black parliamentary caucus, backed by multiple cabinet ministers, outlined a series of recommendations for the government to address systemic barriers that foster discrimination against people of African descent, including access to financial aid of up to $250,000 for black owned businesses or entrepreneurs for startups or existing for-profit small businesses.[[1]](#footnote-1) This loan fund partnership will unlock huge potential and create economic prosperity particularly for Canadians of Africans descent who find it difficult to access financial aid for business. In another development, the Tunisian government passed the decree no. 2021-203 in April 2021 for the creation of the National Commission for the Fight against Racial Discrimination. As reported over the years, Tunisians of African Descent often pay the worst consequences of racial discrimination as a result of the bureaucratic barriers they face in getting their residency permits which places them in vulnerable situations leading to cases of economic and sexual exploitation that may result in human trafficking.[[2]](#footnote-2) Therefore, the National commission in cooperation with civil society, all other relevant national bodies will be responsible for recommending strategies and public policies to deal with the aforementioned issues related to structural discrimination of people of African descent; as well as coordinate with the different sectors such as media and education to spread a culture of human rights.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Furthermore, in April 2021 a Minnesota jury properly convicted former officer Derek Chauvin of second-degree murder for the killing of George Floyd in May 2020. Unlike in previous prominent cases where unarmed men of African descent were killed by police officers, including Terence Crutcher, Philando Castile, and Freddie Gray, the jury rejected the Chauvin’s defense team efforts to blame Floyd’s death on drugs, a weak heart, and even the exhaust from the police.[[4]](#footnote-4) Prosecutions of police officers are exceedingly rare; convictions even more so. This lack of criminal consequences for police violence had sent the message to officers that they can engage in abuses with impunity. It is rare that police officers in the US are charged, or even convicted, in cases relating to people of African descent.[[5]](#footnote-5) The conviction of Derek Chauvin is therefore a step in the right direction for accountability, justice and the fight against systemic racism.

However, despite the heightened visibility of these issues, public services remain sufficiently unresponsive to the needs of people of Africa descent. In the area of criminal justice and policing in the US, the brunt of police brutality is still directed disproportionately at people of African descent. In the first five months of 2021 alone, 89 people of African descent including teenager Ma’Khia Bryant, 20-year-old Daunte Wright and 42-year-old Andrew Brown Jr. were all killed by the police.[[6]](#footnote-6) According to Mapping Police Violence, Black people are three times more likely to be killed by the police than white people, more likely to be unarmed and less likely to be threatening someone when killed.[[7]](#footnote-7) Similarly, In France, a survey of the independent authority Defenseur des Droits (Defender of Rights) shows that young males of African descent are 20 times more likely to be stopped and searched than any other male group.[[8]](#footnote-8) In Australia, youths of African descent continue to suffer racist policing. It was reported in March 2021 that youths of African descent (particularly South Sudanese) comprise 19 percent of the young people in custody and remain targeted despite making up a minute portion of the youth population in the country.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In addition, persistent systemic institutional racism against migrants and the continued and widespread prevalence of discriminatory attitudes towards migrants remains one of the most significant areas of rights violation. Migrants of African descent in Mexico report the violence and abuse inflicted on them by immigration officials and the police. They also describe racism they experience within the context of other spheres of public service, including access to housing, employment and education.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The lack of systemic data also presents a major obstacle in the enjoyment of fundamental human rights by people African descent as it prevents evidence-based understanding of challenges faced by this group. Nevertheless, reports exist which point to several issues still affecting people of African descent. In Spain, people of African descent experienced the highest levels of discrimination in areas of access to adequate housing and education based on their physical features.[[11]](#footnote-11) In response to allegations of racism against people of African descendent and other minority groups, students of Pimlico academy in London staged a protest in March 2021. Tensions between the leadership of Pimlico Academy and Parents and students at the school began in August 2020 when a new uniform policy was imposed on the students. Among the new rules were a ban on afro haircuts which could block the views of other pupils in the class.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Furthermore, the short and long-term effects of the pandemic continue to affect people of African descent disproportionately. In March 2021, data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black families’ access to stable housing in the United States and, at the local level, in Newark, New Jersey showed that Black family house renters face challenges in securing and remaining in their housing accommodation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[[13]](#footnote-13) While national and local data suggest similar patterns, data from the South Ward, a predominantly Black community, provide a more nuanced picture of housing needs for Black families during the pandemic. These data suggest that federal, state, and local policies and programs to support renters are not always sufficient, even in New Jersey, which has more generous policies than other states. This results in extremely high rates of homelessness and housing instability for families and people of African descent. [[14]](#footnote-14)

Therefore, it is important that countries stop ignoring the hinderances faced by people of African descent in the full enjoyment of their fundamental rights and make stronger efforts to narrow the gaps between the promise of equality for all and the reality.

Against this background, **Elizka Relief Foundation** would like to reiterate that the collection of systemic data on race and ethnicity at the national level is highly essential to properly assess the situation of people of African descent and provide solid measures which will build on the existing legal obligations of countries under their national laws as well as international laws and instruments to address this fundamental problem. More efforts should also be directed at national and international levels towards addressing structural discrimination and discriminatory practices particularly in the area of law enforcement and policing, as well as effective access to justice for victims of discrimination. Laws and practices must also be strengthened to ensure equal access to basic services including education, employment, housing and health care.

1. <https://www.todayville.com/federal-government-launches-loan-program-for-black-owned-businesses/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://minorityrights.org/2021/04/16/tunisia/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/20/justice-served-george-floyd-us-police-reform-remains-urgent> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56270334> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/05/25/police-brutality-statistics-shootings-george-floyd-489803> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://time.com/6046645/police-killings-2021/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-europe-must-wake-up-to-racism-afrophobia/a-56927229> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-25/racial-profiling-concerns-african-australian-youth-imprisonment/13252594> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.openglobalrights.org/reckoning-with-racism-against-black-migrants-in-mexico/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/29866/report-discrimination-worsens-in-spain> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-56594570> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/racism-and-discrimination-contribute-to-housing-instability-for-black-families-during-the-pandemic> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)