

Launching of the International Year for People of African Descent 10 December 2010

Elements for an opening statement by the Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon

I am particularly pleased to address you on Human Rights Day and to launch the International Year for People of African Descent.

The General Assembly recently adopted its resolution 64/169 proclaiming the year 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent. This year will help to draw world attention to the promotion of greater knowledge and respect for the diverse heritage and culture of people of African descent. The International Year will also provide momentum for further political commitment to the eradication of racism and discrimination against people of African descent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Time has come to pay tribute to the contributions made by people of African descent to the human family, to the advancement of the political, economic, social and cultural development of our societies.

We have to acknowledge that people of African descent are among those most affected by the scourge of racism. Too often, they face denial of basic rights such as access to quality health services and education. They are also affected by more subtle manifestations of discriminatory practices such as demographic overrepresentation in detention centres.

In recognition of the continued discrimination faced by Afro descendants, the Durban 2001 World Conference against Racism took an honest look at the burden and wrongs of the past. It admitted that the transatlantic Slave trade was an appalling tragedy in the history of humanity not only because of its abhorrent barbarism but also in terms of its

magnitude, organized nature and especially its negation of the essential humanity of the victims. Africans and people of African descent continue to suffer the consequences of these acts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action calls upon governments and other stake-holders to take urgent actions to ensure the full integration of people of African descent into social, economic and political life with a view to facilitating their full participation at all levels in the decision-making process.

The international community can no longer accept that whole communities are marginalized because of the colour of their skin. If we are to do justice to the uncompromising assertion contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, then we must eradicate racism once and for all.

We must ensure that all people of African descent can fully enjoy all of their rights. It is no small task that we have before us but I am heartened by the commitment that your presence here today demonstrates.

Let us redouble our efforts to make the discrimination suffered by people of African descent a phenomenon of the past.

We will take one more step towards this goal this year.