

Reflections on the first decade: Black Canadian leadership at the UN Forum for People of African Descent

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February 2024





1. Overview

In 2023, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF) teamed up to facilitate attendance and participation of 24 Black Canadian civil society leaders at the Second Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent. This report summarizes the proceedings of this session and provides a report-back on the experiences and perspectives of the Black civil society leaders supported by CRRF and CCUNESCO to attend and participate in this global gathering. The aim of this report is to identify and share lessons and insights on a unique opportunity for Canada's leading national, provincial, territorial and local agencies to effectively strengthen and enhance the voice and participation of Black Canadian civil society in global efforts to promote, protect and fulfill the human rights of People of African Descent.

The sponsoring organizations of this report, CCUNESCO and CRRF, were pleased to support Canada's Black civil society leaders to attend the Permanent Forum as part of the agencies' broader commitments to observe and implement the commitments of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent. On January 30, 2018, the Government of Canada declared its official recognition and observance of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent, which spans from 2015 to 2024. Since then, the Government of Canada, its agencies and crown corporations, have engaged with this decade as an opportunity to highlight and celebrate the important contributions of People of African descent to Canadian society, and also have adopted this initiative as a framework for advancing the Decade's official theme of 'recognition, justice, and development' to address anti-Black racial discrimination, and the ongoing inequalities faced by Black people in Canada.

The UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (PFPAD) was established as an international platform to engage and influence policies and practices affecting people of African descent worldwide. The UN General Assembly voted to establish the PFPAD on Monday, August 02, 2021, by adopting a resolution that describes

the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent as "a consultative mechanism" for people of African descent and other relevant stakeholders¹. The Forum is a historic anti-racist initiative established within the United Nations and operates as a 10-member advisory body that actively supports the work of the Geneva-based Human Rights Council as one of the Council's advisory bodies. The PFPAD is a platform for enhancing the safety, quality of life, and livelihoods of People of African Descent.

To date, the PFPAD has held two official stakeholder consultative meetings, called 'Sessions,' with more already being planned in the future. The First Session was held from December 5 to 8, 2022, at the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. CCUNESCO played a leadership role in the first PFPAD, sponsoring nine Black civil society actors with expertise in various areas of human rights. This delegation was led by former CCUNESCO Secretary General, Madame Roda Muse.

The Second Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent occurred at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, United States of America, from May 30 to June 2, 2023. At this Session, the delegation representing Black Canadian civil society leaders was joined

¹ Throughout this document, where direct quotations are used, please refer to the source linked in the sentence.



by representatives from UN Member States, United Nations offices and experts, and almost 1,000 civil society representatives from 85 different countries. Also present were leading civil society stakeholders from across the globe. In addition to the formal programming and agenda of the PFPAD, to allow for deeper and more intimate discussion and organizing on the themes and issues highlighted by the Forum, there were more than 60 side-events. These were independently organized and facilitated events arranged or attended by participants of the Forum. The Government of Canada hosted some of these side events, including those hosted with the support of the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, who was then Canada's Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion and

now serves as Canada's Minister of International Development. CCUNESCO and the CRRF led and supported other Canadian side events². These side events were well-attended by members of the Black Canadian delegation to the Second Session.

The UN's formal report on these Forums can be found [here](#).

² For more information about events please see section 5.

2. Summary of Proceedings of the Second Session

The theme of the Second Session of the PFPAD was: "Realizing the Dream: A UN Declaration on the Promotion, Protection and Full Respect of the Human Rights of People of African Descent". This theme reflects one of the primary objectives of the PFPAD, namely fostering the elaboration of a United Nations declaration focused on advancing the human rights of People of African Descent. Still in its early stages of development, this Declaration on the Rights of People of African Descent would be a document that serves as a global framework of rights protection, promotion and fulfillment for Black people worldwide, including within Canada.

The PFPAD featured five thematic panels:

➤ **Global Reparatory Justice**

This discussion focused on how reparatory justice can accelerate global transformations towards sustainable social and international peace by effectively recognizing, addressing, and correcting lasting consequences of past injustices and global crimes against People of African descent, including colonialism and the transatlantic trade of enslaved African people;

➤ **Pan-Africanism for Dignity, Justice, and Peace**

This thematic panel explored Pan-Africanism as a global movement for the liberation of Africans and People of African Descent from colonialism, enslavement, subjugation, and systemic and structural racism. It considered how the work of the Permanent Forum and the future UN Declaration on the Rights of

People of African Descent can contribute to Pan-African goals and aspirations;

➤ **Transnational Migration**

This thematic discussion featured a solution-oriented conversation on the increasing migration of People of African Descent across the world due to such issues as climate change and natural disasters, poverty, political instability, and armed conflicts and included calls for expanded, multi-dimensional, intersectional understandings of, and solutions to, migration. It also highlighted the crises of Haitian migration within the Americas, and migrations of African people in the deadly waterways of the Mediterranean.

➤ **Recognizing and Addressing Systemic and Structural Racism — A Data-Driven and Evidence-Based Approach**

This thematic panel focused on the need for and explored possible recommendations, projects and other initiatives at the United Nations level concerning advancing an evidence-based approach to recognizing and addressing systemic and structural racism against People of African Descent.

➤ **Health, Well-Being, and Intergenerational Trauma**

This thematic panel featured a conversation on how to promote the right to health and well-being of people of African descent and considered ways to integrate these subjects in a future Declaration on the Rights of People of African Descent, as well as the work of the Permanent Forum, the United Nations system, Member States, and communities of the African diaspora.

Each thematic discussion included a featured panelist, an expert member of the PFPAD. These members were joined by other experts of the African diaspora who have demonstrated distinguished leadership and excellence in policy, activism, research, and political action about the rights and well-being of People of African Descent.





3. The Canadian Delegation

Following CCUNESCO's role in supporting Canadian participation in the First Session of the Permanent Forum, it joined forces with the CRRF to elevate the involvement of Canada and Black Canadian civil society's participation in the Permanent Forum's Second Session.

CCUNESCO and CRRF identified and selected over 30 Black Canadians to attend, represent and advance the interests

of People of African Descent in Canada through the PFPAD. These distinguished Black Canadians represented various parts of the country as well as various individual and intersectional social locations, including age, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, language, religion, and nationality.

CCUNESCO and CRRF identified and selected 30 Black Canadians from across the country to champion the interests of People of African Descent in Canada at the PFPAD.

4. Active Participation of the Government of Canada at the Forum

Also in attendance at the Second Session of the PFPAD were several senior representatives of the Government of Canada, including:

- The Honourable Ahmed Hussen, who was then Canada's Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion and now serves as Canada's Minister of International Development
- Mr. Bob Rae, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York
- Mr. Andrew Brown, Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development
- Mr. Peter Flegel, Executive Director of the Government of Canada's Federal Anti-Racism Secretariat
- Mr. Mohammed Hashim, Executive Director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation

In addition, Ms Roda Muse, Secretary General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, was in attendance. The presence of these senior Canadian officials at the Second Session of the PFPAD was an expression of the Government of Canada's ongoing commitment to join global efforts to enhance the protection and promotion

of the rights of People of African Descent in Canada and across the globe.

At the Second Session of the PFPAD, the Government of Canada presented an official statement that reiterated Canada's commitment to combating anti-Black racism and advancing the human rights and economic prosperity of Black communities. The statement also announced that Canada would soon launch a new federal anti-racism strategy and its first-ever Action Plan on combating hate, particularly mentioning anti-Black racism and hate.

As a testament to its commitment to combating anti-Black racism in Canada, the Government of Canada announced the launch of a new federal anti-racism strategy and its first-ever Action Plan on combating hate, particularly anti-Black racism.

5. Canadian Events and Activities at the PFPAD

➤ May 29

Kick-off and Welcome Reception

CCUNESCO and CRRF arranged for its sponsored attendees to kick off their attendance at the Second Session of the PFPAD at a hotel near the UN Headquarters. This event permitted Black Canadian delegates and participants to discuss critical issues concerning the rights and well-being of people of African descent. The gathering was also an opportunity to network and establish connections, setting a positive tone for the upcoming discussions at the PFPAD.

➤ May 30

North American Partnership for Equity and Racial Justice and People of African Descent

This luncheon brought together government, business and civil society representatives from Canada, Mexico, the United States and UNESCO. It provided a forum for discussion, networking and collaboration to address anti-Black racism and ways to strengthen the rights and freedoms of People of African Descent through the North American Partnership for Equity and Racial Justice, which is a multilateral cooperation agreement between Canada, Mexico and the United States on collectively addressing racism and discrimination within and between their jurisdictions.

➤ May 30

Joint Permanent Missions Reception for the PFPAD

Hosted at the offices of Canada's Permanent Mission to the United Nations, the Permanent Missions of Brazil, Canada, Kenya and the United States collaborated to jointly hold a reception on the occasion of the Second Session of the Permanent Forum on the People of African Descent. This gathering provided an opportunity for diplomatic engagement and discussions among representatives of these nations and aimed to build international partnerships and solidarity to promote the rights and well-being of people of African Descent. Notable government officials that were present include Honourable Ahmed Hussen, H. E. Bob Rae, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York; and, H. E. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations in New York.

➤ **May 31**

“The Urgency of Now - Towards the Full Realization of Black Communities’ Human Rights”

Held at the historic Church Center of the United Nations, this side event was independently organized by the Black Canadians Civil Society Coalition (BCCSC)³, which is made up of Black Canadians and organizations that attended and participated in the First Session of the PFPAD in Geneva on December 5 to 8, 2022. The gathering enabled the BCCSC to present a progress report on its activities and initiatives focused on providing policy recommendations for achieving full human rights for people of African descent in Canada. It highlighted the pressing need to fully realize the human rights of Black people in Canada as an extension of supporting the lives and well-being of Black communities worldwide. It brought together experts, activists, and policymakers to discuss ongoing strategies and actions to address the urgent challenges People of African Descent face.

➤ **May 31**

Meet and Greet with Mr. Andrew Brown, Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development, Government of Canada

Hosted at the offices of the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN, this gathering offered a unique opportunity of a meet and greet with Mr. Brown. This event allowed participants to engage with a high-ranking Canadian government official, fostering dialogue on policies and initiatives to improve the social and economic well-being of people of African descent in Canada.



³ The Black Canadian Civil Society Coalition aims to promote and protect the critical objectives of the International Decade for People of African Descent (UNDPAD). This coalition exercises this function by: 1) calling on the Canadian government to live up to its promises and declared commitment when it recognized the International Decade for People of African Descent; 2) addressing the discriminatory conditions of Black people in Canada; 3) providing policy recommendations that directly remedy these human rights concerns.

➤ **June 1**

Impact of Racism on the Health of People of African Descent and Halifax Declaration

This event was organized by UNESCO and featured a dialogue on scientific studies underlining the detrimental effects of racism on both the physical and mental health of people of African descent, ultimately preventing them from achieving their full potential across the Americas. The discussion also highlighted the UNESCO healing initiative on overcoming the psychological trauma inherited from the history of enslavement. This event featured a panel that included Afro-Brazilian women, private sector representatives, UN agencies, and other PFPAD participants who came together to discuss the repercussions of institutional racism on health and the possibilities of setting up structural policy changes. In attendance for this event were UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Social and Human

Sciences, Ms. Gabriela Ramos, and high-level government and civil society representatives whose work has focused on changing mindsets to develop inclusive public health policies. Significant discussion centered around the impact of racism on the health of people of African descent.

The event also featured the PFPAD unveiling of the Halifax Declaration by former Governor General of Canada the Rt. Hon. Michaëlle Jean. The Halifax Declaration, created by Black Canadians and benefitting from the wisdom of young Black Canadians, expresses some of the key demands, claims and expectations of Black people everywhere, including in Africa. The Declaration emphasizes the importance of addressing racial disparities in all social, economic, political and cultural life and advocating for equitable access to services and institutions for all, including People of African Descent.





➤ June 1

Lunch Hour Dialogue with Members of the PFPAD (Dr. June Soomer, Ms. Gaynel Curry, and Mr. Justin Hansford)

This was an informal and independently organized gathering of some members of the PFPAD with Black Canadian civil society representatives. It allowed for in-depth conversations, exchanging insights and perspectives on how Black Canadians can most strategically advance the aims of the PFPAD in Canada. The attendees also gained a unique opportunity to learn about the specific challenges, barriers and opportunities that members of the PFPAD felt Black Canadians were most poised to advance on behalf of African diaspora populations seeking great recognition and protection of the rights of People of African Descent.

➤ June 2

Closing Reception at Permanent Mission of Canada

With the support of Government of Canada officials, Black Canadian attendees concluded their participation at the Second Session of the PFPAD with a closing reception hosted at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN. This event served as a platform to reflect on the discussions held at the PFPAD, forge lasting connections, and celebrate the progress made during the Forum. The gathering also allowed participants to begin planning actions to advance the outcomes of the Forum. This reception marked the end of a productive and collaborative gathering that was the PFPAD.

6. Summary of Session Outcomes

The Second Session of the PFPAD culminated with a closing plenary gathering that featured the Members' presentation and adoption of the Session's preliminary conclusions and recommendations that covered critical areas of focus that animated the Session's agenda, events, debates and discussions. While not all these conclusions and recommendations directly implicate the Government of Canada and Black Canadian civil society, they can help improve the aims, interests and objectives of the Permanent Forum through activities, engagements and commitments of Canada's federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

Below are excerpts from the Permanent Forum's Second Session conclusions and recommendations. They have been edited for brevity and clarity.⁴ To support Canada's ongoing commitment to supporting United Nations-led initiatives to advance the promotion and protection of the rights of people of African Descent, the conclusions and recommendations below should be reviewed closely by Canadian officials with an aim to develop a program of action to drive and guide Canada's participation in seeing to their implementation.

Future UN Declaration on the Rights of People of African Descent

The Members of the PFPAD concluded the Session by reaffirming their commitment to contributing to the elaboration of a UN Declaration on the promotion, protection and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent to ensure that this declaration fills gaps in, advances, and reinforces already existing human rights instruments about People of African Descent.

The Permanent Forum acknowledged the feedback from the African diaspora's civil society organizations, which insisted that any forthcoming Declaration include, among other things:

- cultural and linguistic rights such as rights to preserve cultural heritage, native languages and ancestral knowledge;
- the right to self-determination;
- collective rights of peoples and communities of African descent;
- the right of peoples of African descent to their lands, territories and resources;

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/forums/forum-african-descent/sessions/session2/Preliminary-Conclusions-and-Recommendations-of-2nd-Session-en.pdf>

- rights of Indigenous peoples of African descent to free, prior and informed consent concerning decisions that affect their rights and territories;
- the right to family integrity for families of African descent;
- the right to justice and reparations.

Ultimately, the Permanent Forum called on Member States to support organizing regional consultations with civil society and other relevant stakeholders to contribute to further elaborating the UN mentioned above Declaration.

A Second UN Decade for People of African Descent

In recognition that the current UN International Decade for People of African Descent is due to close at the end of December 2024, the Permanent Forum urged the UN General Assembly to proclaim a second International Decade of People of African Descent. This call was made in the interest of furthering actions to secure the full recognition, justice and development of people of African descent. Additionally, the Permanent Forum recommended that the Second International Decade for People of African Descent have reparatory justice, recognition, equity, and addressing of systemic and structural racial discrimination at the local, national, regional, and global levels as its focus.

The Members of the PFPAD reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring that the elaboration of a UN Declaration on the promotion and protection of the human rights of people of African descent fills gaps in and reinforces already existing human rights instruments about People of African Descent.

Global Reparatory Justice

The Permanent Forum also recognized that there exists no adequate legal mechanism for treating the long-standing issue of reparations claims for the transatlantic trade in enslaved African peoples, colonialism, hundreds of years of African enslavement, and related injuries and damages to Africans and people of African descent in the various countries of the world. In light of this, the Permanent Forum reiterated its recommendation to have the International Court of Justice issue an advisory opinion on the legal question of reparatory justice for the histories and legacies of colonialism and enslavement. The Permanent Forum also encouraged Member States to seek views from other authoritative legal bodies, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights.

Pan-Africanism for Dignity, Justice & Peace

The Permanent Forum recommended that Member States of the UN establish an informal Pan-African Group of States to foster greater solidarity between Africa and the African diaspora. This Group was also proposed to support, consult and discuss with the Permanent Forum on key Pan-African issues, including reparatory justice, sustainable development, education, cultural exchanges and racial discrimination.

Transnational Migration

The Permanent Forum called on UN Member States to end arbitrary detention, deportations and pushbacks, to separate civil migration systems from criminal legal systems, and to ensure that migration processes are purely administrative per international human rights standards and laws.

In consultation with UN Member States, the Permanent Forum also recommended that the International Organization for Migration collect and report disaggregated data on racial disparities in national and international migration regimes, primarily as they affect Africans and People of African Descent. Specifically, it was recommended that this information be published in a periodic review along with policy recommendations informed by the data collected.

An Evidence-Based Approach to Addressing Systemic and Structural Racism

The Permanent Forum considered interventions and feedback it received on artificial intelligence, technology transfer, and the need to take urgent action to prevent the deepening of inequalities and algorithmic bias. In light of this, it encouraged Member States, specialized UN entities, and other relevant stakeholders to promote equitable access to technology and its ongoing innovations for people of African descent.

The Permanent Forum further called for the UN Statistics Division to take the lead on coordinating disaggregated data collection on people of African descent across UN agencies, funds, and programmes and create an online interactive dashboard with this data.

Additionally, the Permanent Forum recommended that at the international level, the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council pursue short and long-term initiatives that focus on monitoring, recognizing, and effectively addressing systemic and structural racial discrimination against Africans and people of African descent worldwide. These initiatives should factor in the histories and legacies of colonialism and enslavement and be responsive to how these catastrophic global forces have shaped the international order, including the global economy and relationships of power at the UN and other institutions of global governance.



The Permanent Forum further encouraged the inclusion of indicators and data on racial disparities, primarily as they affect people of African descent and their often multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, in the monitoring and implementation of the United Nations' sustainable development goals.

Health Well-Being and Intergenerational Trauma

The Permanent Forum further recommended that Member States consider taking the following actions:

- Adopting programmes and policies for people of African descent that are accountable for ensuring universal health coverage, including mental health services.
- Supporting the development of 'culturally safe' structures and processes within national systems and private organizations surrounding healthcare, including, inter alia, safe and culturally appropriate midwifery practices.
- Promoting research, education, and policymaking to address health disparities and intergenerational trauma caused by histories and legacies of systemic and structural racial discrimination, including establishing health infrastructures for People of African Descent as an act of reparation.



Additionally, the Permanent Forum recommended that the World Health Organization establish a task force on racial disparity in health and intergenerational trauma with the participation of Member States, civil society, and other UN mechanisms. It was also recommended that the World Health Organization (WHO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and other relevant stakeholders produce a report on the health status of people of African descent, including the impact of racism and racial discrimination. The Permanent Forum also recommended that the WHO include race and ethnicity in its work and recognize it as a fourth cross-cutting theme along with equity, gender and human rights.

Finally, the Permanent Forum recommended that the commemoration of the International Day for People of African Descent on August 31, 2023, focus on the health of people of African descent and encourage Member States, UN entities, civil society, and other stakeholders to undertake activities in this regard.

7. Insights from the Members of the UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

Following the Forum, five members of the PFPAD (representing 5 different UN Member States) were interviewed for the preparation of this report: Dr. June Soomer (Saint Lucia), Dr. Michael McEachrane (Sweden), Ms. Gaynel Curry (The Bahamas), Ms. Mona Omar (Egypt), and Mr. Hongjiang Huang (People's Republic of China). Their biographies can be found here. Each shared a wealth of knowledge and provided their perspectives on how Black Canadian civil society can best engage with both global civil society of African descent and collectively influence and support relevant racial justice initiatives of the United Nations.

Role of Canada within the PFPAD and the United Nations

The PFPAD Members expressed their appreciation for CRRF, CCUNESCO, and Black Canadian civil society's significant leadership in supporting the Forum. The PFPAD members pointed out that Canada is one of the most resourced UN Member States and that there is, therefore, greater opportunity for both the Government of Canada and Black Canadian civil society to effectively engage with the Forum towards achieving social and political impact for People of African Descent.

The PFPAD members also reiterated that the United Nations is a Member State-driven international forum, meaning nation-states and the governments that represent them are, by default, given priority in all United Nations forums and gatherings. As such, civil society representatives with less experience at the UN might feel marginalized or alienated by how United Nations meetings, conferences, proceedings and initiatives are conducted. However, the PFPAD Members emphasized that the Forum is still a valid and valuable opportunity for Black civil society to engage with Member States to discuss international human rights policy and policy-making, both at the UN and the national levels. As such, the PFPAD Members encouraged Black Canadian civil society to utilize the mechanism of the UN to advance the human rights of People of African Descent. Moreover, all five members reaffirmed that the Forum is a unique and international entity for People of African Descent from Africa and across the African diaspora to come together and collaborate and make a fundamental social and political impact.

The PFPAD Members sought to remind Black Canadian civil society that one of the objectives of the PFPAD is to give advice and recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), and work alongside other UN bodies. In light of this, they stressed that civil society engagement with the Forum requires knowledge of the UN system, the workings of the HRC and the General Assembly, and an understanding of how civil society organizations of the African diaspora can use the UN system to have a real political impact on the lives of People of African Descent. They emphasized that this would require a lot of capacity by Black Canadian civil society. To this end, PFPAD Members encouraged civil society (especially Black Canadian civil society) to reach out to UN bodies, set up educational workshops and explore ongoing fundraising activities to support this important work.

Lastly, the PFPAD Members emphasized that the Forum is not intended to be a space for speeches but rather a

forum for generating and facilitating an international movement built around reparatory and decolonial justice for People of African Descent at the global and national levels. The Members used this point to emphasize a need for more written submissions offering concrete and actionable recommendations that reflect a good understanding of the different and interconnected roles and relationships of the Forum, the United Nations and its Member States. An example shared by the Members was that more than 1,000 recommendations came out of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and that only some of these have been implemented within the United Nations or the nations of Member States. The PFPAD Members want to avoid this scenario being the case for the PFPAD. It can be avoided, they shared, by ensuring that tangible, well-researched and appropriately directed policy recommendations are submitted to the Forum to support its aims to truly advance the human rights and well-being of People of African Descent.

As one of the most resourced UN Member States, Canada has a much greater opportunity, through both the federal government and Black Canadian civil society, to engage with the Forum and achieve social and political impact for People of African Descent.

Making the PFPAD Relevant at the Grassroots Level

According to the PFPAD Members that were interviewed, the Forum serves three essential functions:

- First, it is the global platform for People of African Descent that is unique and a force of its time - one pan-African forbearers have dreamed of having a similar platform at the UN level;
- Secondly, it hosts a significant global conference each year in Geneva and New York, respectively, which civil society should fully understand and engage with actively;
- Thirdly, the Forum is an opportunity to bring diverse and rich voices and the work of global communities of African descent to host side events in parallel to the Forum sessions.

Considering the above, the PFPAD Members expressed the importance of taking the work of the Forum to People of African Descent to the grassroots level. According to some Forum members, the PFPAD does not have complete legitimacy among many within the African diaspora because it is unknown to them. Given this, the PFPAD Members insisted that directly engaging with Black communities at the regional, national, local and even neighbourhood levels will be significant for allowing the PFPAD to serve the three functions listed above effectively. They encouraged Black Canadian civil

society and the Government of Canada to invite PFPAD Members to visit Canada to facilitate their efforts to consult with communities and enhance the work being done at the UN level to make sure it is having meaningful and material impacts on their day to day lives. This kind of direct engagement between the Forum and grassroots Black communities (facilitated by Black civil society leaders) was said to be essential for the elaboration of a strong UN Declaration on the Human Rights of People of African Descent. The PFPAD Members also noted that such engagement could potentially even complement the work of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and move anti-discrimination work forward at the United Nations level. In sum, the PFPAD Members stressed that community and grassroots engagement is critical to help build an institutionally robust Forum that empowers the African diaspora and its civil society organizations worldwide.

Reparatory justice is central to the PFPAD

As reflected in the preliminary conclusions and recommendations of the Second Session, the PFPAD Members re-emphasized that reparatory justice is central within the Forum approach to

decolonial racial justice. To this end, the PFPAD Members called on civil society to build an intersectional movement that includes allies within the UN space and beyond. The Members did not want to forget that People of African Descent have been at the forefront of anti-colonial and decolonial struggles. In light of this, they stressed that building a global movement with other civil societies is necessary to strengthen the work towards reparatory justice. The PFPAD members also spoke about how the UN Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) cannot be addressed globally without incorporating reparatory justice to address the wealth gap based on socio-economic disparities in countries such as Canada.

An Urgent Call to Action for the Government of Canada: Launching the Announced National Institute for People of African Descent The rich and dynamic participation of Black Canadian civil society leaders and organizations in the Second Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent highlighted the importance of continued dialogue and collaboration after this historic gathering. It is clear that an enduring mechanism for continued dialogue, exchange, knowledge-production and mobilization are needed to sustain the leadership of Black Canadian civil society in the global advancement of the rights of People of African Descent. To this end, it is recommended that the Government



of Canada move with all deliberate speed to ensure the launch of the previously announced National Institute for People of African Descent.

In August 2021, the Government of Canada, through then Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Ahmed Hussen, announced the launch of a call for proposals to form a national institute for people of African descent. This included a four-year investment of up to \$7.25 million to support the establishment of the institute. Canada’s commitment to establish this institute was in response to civil society research, study and mobilization. Specifically, calling for the establishment of this institute was

included in the recommendations outlined in the Feasibility Report produced by two Black community civil society collectives, namely, the Caribbean African Canadian Social Services and the Ushauri Council. Despite the above-mentioned call for proposals closing in October 2021, the institute has not been launched. Further, the Government of Canada has not since disclosed when it plans to announce the successful applicant organization to lead the establishment of the institute, nor has the Government announced when it aims to see the institute established.

The stated mandate of the Institute, as noted on the Government of Canada website, is to work on issues that affect Black communities. Its objectives include the following: a) Informing and influencing policy and the creation of programs of all orders of government from a Black-centric perspective; b) Undertaking applied research, collecting and analysing knowledge, information sharing, engaging with communities and building networks and connections, and; c) Serving to improve overall outcomes for Canada's people of African descent, and their communities. In light of this important mandate, the establishment of the considerably overdue National Institute for People of African Descent would significantly contribute to advancing the agenda, aims, and interests of the PFPAD and other UN initiatives. Importantly, this institute could serve as a national body to

continually advocate, monitor and support the implementation of commitments and recommendations flowing from Government of Canada commitments to the PFPAD, the International Decade for People of African Descent, and even the recommendations emanating from this current report. The establishment and operationalizing of this institute would strengthen Canada's commitment to international cooperation and solidarity, as well as global human rights leadership. By actively supporting the UN's efforts to advance the rights, interests and well-being of Canada's population of People of African Descent, the launch of the Institute would serve to allow Canadian entities to demonstrate a proactive engagement in addressing systemic issues related to anti-Black racism and discrimination. As such, the launch of the institute could serve as a model for other UN Member States, promoting the exchange of best practices and creating a global network dedicated to advancing the rights and well-being of people of African descent.

To support the establishment and operation of the institute, CCUNESCO and the CRRF should convene and collaborate with experts on People of African descent in order to engage with and advance matters that the PFPAD and other UN bodies are considering. The group would also serve to inform and strategies, exchange knowledge, and adapt best practices to the specific context of Canada.



Domestic and international collaborative solidarity is the driving force for meaningful change. The challenges Black communities face are multifaceted, and addressing them requires collective efforts. The establishment of this institute would allow for the pooling of resources, expertise, and advocacy power. It would amplify the voices of Black people in Canada on the global stage and ensure that their concerns remain visible, compelling decision-makers to take action in Canada and wherever there are People of African Descent.

Moreover, continuous engagement fostered through this institute would nurture resilience in the justice struggles of Black communities in Canada. This is needed because the journey towards racial justice is often met with obstacles and setbacks. An institute would offer a space for ongoing dialogue and collaboration, and provide a support network where Black leaders and organizations can draw strength and inspiration from one another, pushing forward in the face of adversity.

Recognizing the historical leadership of People of African Descent in anti-colonial struggles, PFPAD Members emphasized the importance of global collaboration to advance reparatory justice efforts and called on civil society to build an intersectional movement, engaging allies within and beyond the UN.

Concluding Reflections

The Second Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent held significant promise and impact for Black Canadians and the civil society organizations participating in this momentous event. It offered a platform to address long-standing issues and galvanize the pursuit of equity, justice, and human rights for Black communities in Canada.

The Forum also provided a global stage for Black Canadians to share their experiences, challenges, and aspirations. It was an opportunity to amplify their voices, shedding light on the systemic anti-Black racism and discrimination, racial disparities, and social inequalities that persist within Canadian society. By participating in discussions that resonated with the broader diaspora of people of African descent, Black Canadians could contextualize their struggles within a global framework, underscoring the universality of their quest for justice.

Furthermore, the forum facilitated vital networking and collaboration opportunities. Black Canadian civil society organizations could connect with international counterparts, sharing best practices, strategies, and resources for advancing the rights of Black communities. These connections fostered a sense of

solidarity and reinforced that the fight for racial equality is a collective global effort.

The event gave delegates the opportunity to hold the Canadian government accountable. As delegates engaged in critical dialogues on racial disparities in housing, healthcare, employment, education, policing and prisons, immigration and child welfare, etc, they were positioned to challenge the Canadian government to take meaningful action. Minister Ahmed Hussen and Mr. Andrew Brown, the Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development, provided a direct avenue for dialogue between civil society and government, encouraging constructive engagement which will need to be built upon by Canada's representatives of Black civil society to ensure ongoing transparency and accountability of the Government of Canada.

In addition to discussions, the unveiling of the Halifax Declaration by the Rt. Hon. Michaëlle Jean underscored the importance of addressing systemic racism in Canada's various aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life. This declaration was powerfully recognized at the Second Session as a tool to advocate for change and equitable access, human rights and equality for Black Canadians.

It is important to note that the deep and enthusiastic engagement and participation of Canada's Black civil society leaders at the Second Session of PFPAD is reflective of the significant support and consensus among Black Canadian civil society organizations of the value, importance, and effectiveness of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent. Throughout Canada, different large and small organizations serving Black communities have leveraged the International Decade to raise awareness and successfully push for greater action to secure and advance the rights and well-being of Black people in Canada. Established in part to support the advancement of the International Decade during and after its formal timeframe, the PFPAD stands out as a pivotal platform, providing Black Canadian civil society organizations with a unique opportunity to engage at an international level for generations to come. This engagement

is recognized as one of the enduring strengths and accomplishments of the Decade, fostering a collective sense of empowerment and impact within the broader framework of advancing the rights and well-being of people of African descent in Canada and globally.

While the challenges remain immense, the Second Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent offered hope and inspiration. It demonstrated that Black people in Canada and their allies are not alone in pursuing justice and equality. It showcased the resilience and determination of Black Canadian civil society organizations to effect change at both the national and international levels. The PFPAD served as a generative space for continued advocacy and action, and its significance reverberates through the ongoing struggle for a more just and equitable Canada for Black communities across Canada.

To sustain Black Canadian civil society's leadership in advancing the rights of People of African Descent globally, enduring mechanisms for dialogue, exchange, knowledge production, and mobilization are imperative. Members urged the federal government to promptly establish the National Institute for People of African Descent.