

# POLITICAL PLATFORM FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT



**First Summit of Afro  
descendant Women  
Leaders of the Americas  
June 26- 28, 2015**

**Afro descendants,  
Recognition, Justice  
and Development**

**NETWORK OF AFRO-DESCENDANT WOMEN OF LATIN AMERICA, THE CARIBBEAN AND THE DIASPORA**





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# PRESENTATION

The Network of Afro-descendant Women of Latin America, the Caribbean and the Diaspora (RMAAD) was created in 1992 to link the efforts in the continent to deal with racism and sexism, making visible the marginal situation in which millions of Afro-descendant women live due to discrimination for reasons of race and gender; combating the prejudices and stereotypes toward us that exist in society; promoting the participation of Afro-descendant women in all arenas of public life and decision-making; and demanding that the States promote public policies in our favor.

The International Decade for People of African Descent, proclaimed by Resolution 68/237 of the United Nations General Assembly, to be developed between 2015 and 2024, will be centered on the following specific objectives: (i) To promote respect, protection and the realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of Afro-descendant people as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; (ii) To promote greater knowledge of and respect for the diversity of the heritage and culture of Afro-descendants and their contribution to the development of societies; (iii) To approve and strengthen national, regional and international juridical frameworks in conformity with the Durban Declaration and Action Program and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and assure their full and effective application.

In this context, we in the Network of Afro-descendant Women have proposed to direct our struggle and expand our efforts to make the situation of Afro-descendant women visible and strengthen our actions to influence governments so as to achieve advances in the standard of living and greater opportunities for the Afro-descendant population of Latin America and the Caribbean.

To that end, we are promoting this Summit of Afro-descendant women leaders of Latin America, the Caribbean and the Diaspora and proposing this platform for it so it can serve as the basis of Afro-descendant women's actions in their struggle and demands to society and the States.

## WE MUST TRANSFORM OUR REALITY

The Afro-descendant population represents 30% of the population of Latin America, nearly 200 million people, submerged in disproportionate levels of poverty and social exclusion and facing severe discrimination in all orders.

### OUR AFRICAN HERITAGE, OUR STRUGGLE

Our ancestors were pulled out of Africa and brought to America by force. In these lands they were enslaved and their strength exploited until their death. But many men and women rebelled and survived, constructing an identity and a culture that endures to our days.

The history of miscegenation that has marked the creation of the Afro-American community is reflected in the current diversity of cultural features of Afro-descendants in America, which becomes particularly evident when considering their languages and religious customs. The languages spoken by the Afro-American communities are syncretic, in which lexical and grammatical aspects of African roots are recognizable together with aspects of the languages of the dominant societies of the different countries, be they French, English, Spanish Portuguese or Dutch. These languages emerged to permit communication among individuals of different origins.

The diversity of languages spoken by Afro-descendants, of which only some examples have been mentioned here, is the result of an absolutely extraordinary history of mixing of races and cultures and displacements within the continent. This same diversity can be read in the religious cults of the Afro-American communities; in this case as well, it often has to do with religiosities born of fusion, in which elements of Christianity mixed with others of clearly African origins and at the same time with beliefs and devotions born of the very experience of slavery and of the syncretism that occurred among



religions belonging to different African peoples who mixed once in America, giving life to cults that were not a mere copy of the original African ones.

Languages and religions are only some of the indicative elements of this great cultural diversity; to them would have to be added aspects such as cuisine, dance, music and art. Innumerable things have been born of the Afro-descendant communities in the Americas that not only contribute to the richness of the continent, but have also been exported in the world through migratory flows. Their permanence over time is an indicator of the resistance and cultural resilience by the African groups of the diaspora who, like indigenous groups, opposed the whitening imposed by the dominant societies. The recognition of this cultural diversity, its value and the need to preserve it is today one of the key points of the demands of the Afro-descendant movements all over America.

The existence today of what could be defined as Afro-American identity and cultures is the result of a long process of resistance and resilience by the Sub-Saharan races of the Afro-descendant universe in America. Over the course of the centuries that slavery lasted, this resistance showed itself in quite varied ways, from the Cimarron phenomenon of those who took refuge in remote places to live in self-managed communities, to the violent revolts, to the maintenance of rituals and customs in the confraternities and community councils.

The abolition of slavery was fundamental to the life of millions of Afro-descendants, but they still weren't recognized as persons with equal rights. The struggle thus continued then and today for our civil rights, to achieve the same rights and opportunities as other people.

Although slavery was abolished by the 20th Century and the principles of equal rights for the Afro-descendant population





were established, we are still facing racism and discrimination as Afro-descendants, in addition to gender discrimination as women.

## WE AFRO-DESCENDANT WOMEN ARE FACING RACISM

Contemporary racism is an ideology constructed on the basis of a liberal economic model rooted in the process of colonizing and conquering the African and American continents, whose beginnings were marked by the transatlantic trafficking of Africans sold into slavery for "development" and exploitation of the resources in America.

From its very beginnings then, racism is underpinned by the economic structure, with cultural and social justifications constructed ideologically to set the white race up as the prototype of what is human and hence superior to all other ethno-racial groups, particularly people from Africa, whom they defined as the black race (*El Impacto Económico del Racismo y Sexismo sobre las Mujeres Afrodescendientes de América Latina y El Caribe*, Epsy Campbell Barr).

The economic and social relations built on racism have as their objective to propel a type of Western development in America whose purpose is the accumulation of wealth and the promotion of the wellbeing first of white men and second of their women through exploitation of the natural wealth and the slave labor of millions of African men and women for over three centuries.

Although racism today is identified more as a social and cultural problem than an economic one, the economic structure of the countries is still based on a racist model with evident manifestations of economic exclusion of the Americas' more than 200 million Afro-descendants despite the countries' development, the abolition of racism over three hundred years



ago, recognition of the human rights of all people “without distinction” for more than half a century and the democratic processes underway.

Racism is built on another reality also economically, politically and culturally millenarian, which is sexism. In that reality power and resources are found in the hands of men, with women virtually their property.

Racism reaffirms sexism and incorporates within it the sexual differences and superiority of men over women as inherent and constituent characteristics of that ideology. In the same way, sexism incorporates racial differentiation as a stratification category, creating a pyramid marked not only by sexual differentiation but also by the racial distinction, which reaffirms whiteness as a prototype of what is human in contrast with black, which is always related with non-human or less human.

From this perspective, it is impossible at the present time to understand racism isolated from sexism. A correct understanding of the way sexism and racism interact on the living conditions of Afro-descendant women is only possible based on comprehending the economic implications of the implicitly and explicitly sexist and racist development model, which contains mechanisms

that have become more sophisticated over time to exclude black and indigenous majorities.

Making racism visible in the Latin American and Caribbean societies has been the arduous task the Afro-descendant women's organizations have had to assume. Due to the ideology of miscegenation, racism is associated with experiences linked to apartheid or segregationism such as existed in the United States and South Africa. It is assumed that the situation of marginalization and socioeconomic exclusion in



which Afro-descendant populations currently live is due more to their class situation than to racism itself, which the classist—more than racist—model installed to underpin the idea that if higher and better socioeconomic levels were reached there would be no barriers to social mobility and thus no victims of racism (Lovell: 1991). The ideology of racial democracy has been installed on this basis, making invisible the diverse ways in which racism is expressed underhandedly, but just as devastatingly.

Afro-descendant women have denounced the fact that the absence of racial segregation makes the situation of the Afro-descendant population, especially women, invisible in the official statistics offering data and information (Mateo, 2002). This limitation has forced them to create awareness of the existence of racism with few although no less valid examples backed by a rational perspective of knowledge and science, thus creating a critical discourse capable of demonstrating their existence.

Notwithstanding this situation, Afro-descendant women have demonstrated the effects of racism on women in public policies, in the racial nature of the violence toward women that ranges from demonstrating the stereotyped image of their bodies in the media where they appear hyper-eroticized or in sexualized roles as servants, to the daily violence in the public sphere by the police apparatuses.

In the health field they have noted the specific illnesses of the Afro-descendant population resulting from poverty; denounced forced sterilization by States and governments whose fundamental victims have been poor Afro-descendant and indigenous women; and emphasized the analysis of the racial and sexual division of labor that places them in lower paid and less valued spheres of work such as domestic service, free trade zones and informal labor, jobs that have been a continuation of slavery, today with a modernizing character but the same discriminatory logic as in the colonial period. They

have denounced the selection mechanisms in the labor market and the use of the criterion of "good presence" as a mechanism that maintains inequalities with both men and non-black women (Campbell and Carreaga, 2002).

Structural racial violence affects the great majority of the Afro-descendant population and is manifested in forced displacements, the criminalization of youths, genocide toward girls, kidnapping and trafficking of young women, negation of the right to legal registry and identity, violence against women and over-representation of youths in the penitentiary system. We Afro-descendant women charge that we are facing double discrimination, as women and as Afro-descendants.

## OUR DAILY STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

For a long time the Afro-descendant population of Latin America and the Caribbean has been left invisible with respect to information and quantitative and qualitative data, with repercussions in the absence of public policies that favor their interests.

The situation of women is still worse as the gender inequalities that characterize the patriarchal society have put women in a situation of subordination and discrimination, enlarging the population groups of the poor with little or no access to basic health and education services or access to productive resources, land, credit and housing. To that is added the fact of being black women, which generates still greater discrimination and puts them in conditions of even more vulnerability.

Afro-descendant women have been victims of the historical causes that have determined poverty as a condition growing out of the racism and socioeconomic inequality characterizing the Latin American and Caribbean region, with an in-



equitable distribution of wealth that reveals disrespect for the fundamental human rights of Afro-descendent populations in general and women in particular.

This situation is reflected not only in the material living conditions of these population groups but also in the lack of access to employment and quality health services, the difficulties they face to obtain an adequate education, their invisibility in the decision-making arenas and the obstacles they encounter in their efforts to have active and effective political participation. The exclusion of Afro-descendant men and women from participation in and access to opportunities is fundamental to understanding the material and non-material dimensions of inequity and poverty.

Data from some countries of the region show that the situation does not vary significantly among them. In Honduras, for example, inequality is a constant that is expressed in a higher open unemployment rate of 8.3% among women in contrast to 4.7% among men; in Cuba, the general unemployment rate is 1.6% but for women is 2% even though they represent 46.7% of the country's labor force in the State's civil sector and 23.1% of self-employed workers, showing that despite the particular conditions of this society, women are still in a situation of inequality with respect to their access to employment just as they are in the rest of the region.

In Costa Rica Afro-descendant women have been discriminated against in access to employment even though they present greater levels of academic preparation and are largely a bilingual population. They have a scant presence in executive and managerial posts in their work places and the zones where the Afro-descendant population is more concentrated have an overrepresentation of poverty relative to the areas more populated by other ethnic groups (with the exception of the indigenous population). Nonetheless, the black population has achieved better insertion in the economy's formal sector than the indigenous population and with it greater

access to social security, with only 9.9% of the women and 17.1% of the men who are employed lacking access to this right (INEC, 2002).

In the Dominican Republic, meanwhile, neither censuses nor official surveys include any ethnic-racial variable, so there is no information about this population group, and thus about Afro-descendant women. Nonetheless, if one assumes that 90% of the population is Afro-descendant and it is known that women represent 51.4% of the population, it can be extrapolated that the general data about women's poverty is applicable to Afro-descendant women. The general unemployment level is currently 14.9% while this variable for women is 24.8%, reflecting the inequality in which they find themselves. Women's participation in the labor market has been increasing in the Dominican Republic, reaching 49% in 2009, helping to close the gender gap in this sphere. Despite these advances, however, the market maintains an occupational segregation in which women are overrepresented in jobs such as secretarial services and in the services sector in general, maintaining the inequality gap in salaries (79%) and in access to the more competitive sectors of the economy.

A study done in recent years in Puerto Rico (Francisco Rivera Batiz, "Education and Economic Development in Puerto Rico," with H. Ladd in *The Puerto Rican Economy: Prospects for Growth*, edited by B. Bosworth and S. Collins, Brookings Institution 2005), shows that a university education increased white men's income by 89% compared to the average income of white workers who only completed intermediate school. For black men, however, a university degree only raised their income by 71% compared to the income of black men who only completed intermediate school. And a university degree increased the income of white women by 67% while only increasing that of black women by 60%.

Evidently, according to the authors, the factor explaining the higher salary gap between white and black workers is edu-





cation. While the variables of skills, years of work experience, differences between married and single individuals, the person's birthplace, time lived in Puerto Rico and employment in the public vs. private sector explain 52.7% of the salary gap between white and black men and 54.4% of the gap between white and black women, the rest of it cannot be explained. The author suggests that it is due to labor market discrimination.

In Uruguay, Afro-descendant women represent the highest values in the unemployment rate, with 14.3%, while the general rate has values close to 7%; among them, young women show the highest unemployment rate in the population, with 1 in 3 economically active women between 14 and 24 years old unable to access job posts. Uruguayan Afro-descendent workers of both sexes also continue to be under-represented in the more skilled occupational categories and over-represented in the less skilled ones, with unequal salaries completing this panorama. According to a 2010 study, the average salary gap is on the order of 35%; i.e. the hourly wage of Afro-descendant men is only 65% of that received by white men. But when the differences are compared over the entire distribution of salaries, the gap is approximately 22% among low and medium salaries, increasing to 82% among the high salaries.

In addition, the majority of women have to face another difficulty in the labor market related to their need to conciliate productive and reproductive labor, as they have no support programs from the State, putting them in less competitive conditions than men and greater vulnerability due to having to accept inadequate labor conditions, thus leaving them more prone to poverty.

Despite the double burden Afro-descendant women must bear, their contribution to the economy through unremunerated domestic and care-giver work sustaining family life has been totally invisible to policymakers and is not considered in the national accounts of the States.

States are still not addressing this situation, making Afro-descendant women the most absent in public development policies, of which decent employment; credit; medium, small and micro-businesses and access to land as a fundamental means of production in the rural areas are a part.

The absence of public policies favoring the situation of Afro-descendant women only helps worsen problems related to the incidence of poverty in ethnic groups all over the continent, such as lack of security over their lands; limited and deficient basic health, education, drinking water, sanitation, electricity and road services; the high rate of contagious and infectious illnesses; and the scant support for productive employment programs and defense of their cultural heritage.

With respect to female-headed households, it is well known that they are more prone to register significantly higher poverty rates than the rest of the households, reaching 20.1% in many countries of the region, while both male-headed mono-parental households and the rest of the households register far lower poverty rates, averaging 12.9%. This inequality is intimately linked to the continuing discrimination against women regarding access to economic resources in Latin American societies.

## WE ARE CONTRIBUTING TO A LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN FAVOR OF OUR RIGHTS

Thanks to the struggle of Afro-descendant men and women, we have gotten international and national authorities to establish binding juridical regulations in our favor.

### 1. THE UNITED NATIONS

In the system of international law, the first instruments considered relevant for the Afro-descendant population are:





- **Slavery Convention:** Approved by the League of Nations in 1926. Even though slavery had already been abolished by the end of the 19th century in all countries of America and international agreements existed declaring the intention to do away with the slave trade and slavery, this declaration represents the League of Nations' first treaty in this regard. In it, the member States pledge to prevent and punish slavery and the trade in slaves.

- **International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD):** Approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1965, this Convention is aimed at protecting racial rights and those of ethnic minorities, handing down measures by which the party States will act to eliminate discrimination and racial violence.

- **Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice:** Approved by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1978, this declaration rejects any doctrine based on racial superiority and affirms the importance of United Nations member States adopting measures to prevent and sanction practices and policies based on discrimination as well as different forms of apartheid or ethnic genocide.

- Even recognizing the importance of these first declarations and conventions, it is normally believed that the most important milestone in the creation of a juridical and institutional structure inherent to the issue of racial discrimination was the **World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and All Related Intolerance**, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. Inasmuch as it has to do with the specific question of Afro-descendance, this conference, its preparatory process and its follow-up and continuation make up the principal international framework of protection of Afro-descendants' rights.

- **Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD):** It is the follow-up body created pursuant to the UN's

International Convention on the Elimination All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In CERD's 79th session, held in Geneva, Switzerland, between August 8 and September 2, 2011, it adopted General Recommendation No. 34 on "Racial Discrimination against People of African descent." Many consider that this document will become an important guide regarding Afro-descendants' internationally recognized protection standards.

**- Group of independent eminent experts on the Durban Declaration and Action Plan:** Following the Durban World Conference, the UN General Assembly's Resolution A/RES/56/266 established the creation of a group of five experts, one for each region, as a follow-up body for the decisions made in Durban. The objectives of this group are to oversee the application of the Durban action program's dispositions, collaborate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the preparation of its annual report, evaluate the existing international instruments to combat discrimination and racism and make recommendations for updating or improving it.

**- Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance:** The United Nations Commission on Human rights (UNCHR) designated a Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism and racial discrimination. This rapporteur presents reports on institutionalized situations or indirect forms of racism and racial discrimination that affect ethnic, racial, religious or other minorities, etc., with special attention to the new direct or indirect ways this phenomenon is manifesting itself in the contemporary world. In 2008 the Council on Human Rights reaffirmed the importance of this special rapporteur's mandate in its Resolution 7/34.

**- Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent:** This is another of the mechanisms developed following the Durban World Conference. It is made up of five independent



experts and its fundamental objective is to study the problems of racial discrimination suffered specifically by people of African descent who live in the diaspora. In general, its task is to design specific directives to eradicate racism and discrimination against Afro-descent people who are victims of it in the framework outlined by the Durban Conference.

## 2. ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) SYSTEM

- **Article 45 (a) of the OAS Charter** recognizes that all human beings, without distinction of race, sex, nationality, creed or social condition, have the right to material wellbeing and to their spiritual development in conditions of freedom, dignity, equal opportunity and economic security.

- **Santiago Declaration and Action Plan:** The region's preparation for the Durban World Conference culminated with the signing in September 2000 of a declaration and action plan by the Regional Conference of the Americas. This declaration is considered a milestone in the history of the rights of Afro-descendants in the American continent.

- **Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance and the Inter-American Convention against All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance:** In correspondence with the Durban Conference process, the OAS in its Forty-Third Ordinary Period of General Assembly Sessions held on June 5, 2013, in La Antigua, Guatemala, approved the text of both conventions, which are currently being ratified by the countries of the American continent.

In the framework of the International Year for People of African Descent (2011), various continental institutions implemented initiatives and held summits specifically dedicated to the issue of the rights of Afro-Americans. Among the most interesting initiatives, the following are highlighted:

- The publication of the book *Standards for the Protection of Afro-descendants in the Inter-American System* by the Organization of American States' Department of International Law (DIL/OAS), which even in the absence of a specific binding instrument at the continental level introduces the principal continental declarations and resolutions on protection of the rights of Afro-descendants and the elimination of racism against them.

- The OAS Department of International Law's web page includes a specific section on Afro-descendants where other relevant OAS initiatives and publications in this sphere are found.

- High level Ibero-American Summit (in Salvador de Bahía) to celebrate the International Year for People of African Descent in which heads of State and Government of the Ibero-American countries participated. The result of this summit was the signing of the Salvador Declaration, which reaffirmed the commitment to combat the racism affecting Afro-American populations and declared the will to act to improve the living conditions of Afro-descendants and value their culture and identity in their respective countries.

### 3. NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

In recent years Latin America has been making progress on issues of institutionality and legislation aimed at protecting the rights and improving the living conditions of its Afro-descendent populations and indigenous communities. Clearly the promulgation of laws or approval of government programs do not in and of themselves imply that these objectives will truly be reached, and in fact, in many cases the social movements appear discontented and often denounce these measures and policies which, beyond the declarations, do not appear to be reversing the status quo of exclusion and abuse of rights of these social groups.



The following are the most relevant cases<sup>1</sup>: - In Brazil, which is the country with the highest percentage of population of African origin, the problem of racial inequality and discrimination has been recognized as urgent for a long time. By the end of the 1980s, Law 7716/1989 was approved, which criminalized racism and racial prejudice. The Brazilian State has been implementing initiatives dedicated to Afro-descendant men and women, among them the creation in 1995 of the Inter-ministerial Working Group for Valuing the Black Population. With the opening of the Durban process, these initiatives intensified and racial inequality moved to the front burner of the governmental programs:

- The National Council of Struggle against Discrimination (CNCD) was created.
- The first affirmative action programs got underway.
- The Brazilian States most outstanding initiative toward Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples was the creation of the Special Secretariat of Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPIR) in 2003, with the objective of implementing and coordinating initiatives against racial inequalities in the country, with a special focus on the black population.
- In Colombia, which is the Latin American country with the second highest percentage of population of African descent, Law 70, on Black Communities, approved in 1993, is mentioned as a pioneer landmark in public policies favoring Afro-descendant people.

The 1991 Constitution itself recognized the State's pluri-ethnic and multicultural identity. In conformity with these principles, Law 70 recognizes the right to collective ownership of the land by black communities settled in the river areas of the Pacific basin, inhabitants of the old palenques (autonomous com-

<sup>1</sup> Shown here are the most relevant cases of countries with an important Afro-descendant population that have taken steps to recognize their rights.



munities founded by runaway slaves beyond the control of Spanish colonists and/or local governments), and establishes mechanisms for protection of their ethnic identity recognizing their right to maintain their traditional systems of organization and production and granting the status of official language to the languages spoken in those territories.

Furthermore, May 21 was established by law as Afro-Colombian Day and in 1995 the General Department for Black, Ethnic Minority and Cultural Communities was created as a responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior.

- In conformity with the pluri-national character established by the new Political Constitution of the Republic, the Congress of Ecuador approved in 2006 the law of the collective rights of black and Afro-Ecuadoran peoples, whose declared objectives are to guarantee the exercise of the collective rights of black or Afro-Ecuadoran peoples recognized by the Constitution; incorporate the full recognition of Afro-Ecuadorans to achieve equal rights and opportunities in the context of economic, social, cultural and political development; recognize the rights of black or Afro-Ecuadoran peoples over their ancestral lands, traditional health practices, production and collective intellectual property; incorporate representatives of black or Afro-Ecuadoran peoples in the official state bodies and institutions; and establish mechanisms to protect their cultural identity and biodiversity and their rights as peoples.

- In Honduras, a communication entity—the Program of Support to Indigenous and Black Peoples (PAPIN)—was created in 2003 among the federations that represent indigenous and black peoples to take charge of following up on and evaluating all projects having to do with indigenous and black populations. Its Consultative Board is made up of two officials of the Secretariat of Governance and Justice, the coordinator of the PAPIN Technical Unit, a representative of the office of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in



Honduras as an observer and a representative from each federation of indigenous and black peoples.

- In Uruguay the creation of the Department of Afro-descendant Women under the governmental Women's Institute stands out. Its declared objective is to ensure the exercise of Afro-descendant women's rights and their access to goods and services through the adjusting of public administration to equal opportunities and nondiscrimination for reasons of gender and race, the organizational strengthening of Afro-Uruguayan women and international and regional cooperation in the sphere of Afro-descendant women's rights.

- In Nicaragua the multiethnic nature of the Nicaraguan people was proclaimed for the first time in 1986 and an autonomy law was even approved, thus advancing to the Constitutional Reform of 2014 which incorporated recognition of Afro-descendant people as one of the principles of the nation.

In line with the 1987 constitutional mandate, Law No. 28, "Autonomy Statutes of the Atlantic Coast Regions" was approved for the preservation, development and promotion of their languages, religions, art and culture; having, using and enjoying the communal waters, forests and lands; and the development of the right to self-government in accord with their own forms of traditional, political, cultural, social and economic organization, their education model taught in their maternal language and their ancestral health model.

- Through the judicial branch in Nicaragua, mechanisms are being created that guarantee access to justice for Afro-descendant women without discrimination, recognizing and respecting their traditional form of administering common law justice in harmony with statutory law. The National Assembly has a Commission of Affairs of Original Peoples, Afro-descendants and Autonomous Regimes; the Executive Branch created the Council of Development of the Caribbean Coast, the area of the country where the Afro-descendant population main-



ly lives, and the National Commission of Struggle against Racism, Xenophobia and All Related Forms of Intolerance was created.

- In Peru, the Parliament created the Commission of Amazonian, Indigenous and Afro-Peruvian Affairs in 2002.

- In Venezuela progress stands out with respect to policies favoring Afro-descendants, such as the creation of specialized institutions to combat discrimination, among them the Presidential Commission to Combat All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Other Distinctions in the country's Educational System.

## **THE NETWORK OF AFRO-DESCENDANT WOMEN'S POLITICAL PLATFORM FOR THE LATIN AMERICAN SUMMIT OF WOMEN AFRO-DESCENDANT LEADERS**

To transform the reality in which we live, the Network of Afro-Descendant Women from Latin America, the Caribbean and the Diaspora is presenting this platform of demands to advance in fulfilling our rights in the framework of the International Decade of People of African Descent. To that end, before the States and Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean,

### **WE DEMAND:**

#### **I. COMBATING RACISM IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY.**

1. That the States combat racism and all forms of racial discrimination, consequent with the Declaration and Action Plan of the III World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and All Related Intolerance and binding international instruments, adopting the affirmative action and reparation measures necessary to abolish this scourge of humanity, guaranteeing Afro-descendant men and women the full enjoyment of their human rights, and adopting



positive measures to reverse or change existing discriminatory situations in their societies that harm certain groups of individuals. This implies the special duty of protection that the State must exercise with respect to actions and practices of third parties that create, maintain or favor discriminatory situations with the State's tolerance or acceptance.

2. That they design, approve and apply national legislation to penalize racism and racial discrimination and promote the establishment of institutions of racial equality and national plans to eradicate racial discrimination, xenophobia and all forms of intolerance.

3. That they guarantee public policies and programs to combat racism and discrimination and promote gender and generational equity with respect to nationality, disability and sexual orientation.

4. That full access to justice be guaranteed to victims of racism and racial discrimination and that persons who violate our human and collective rights be punished.

5. That the States that have not yet done so ratify both the UN and OAS international conventions related to the struggle against racism, racial discrimination and intolerance, and sign and ratify the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance approved in the OAS General Assembly in June 2013.

## II. WE WANT A DECENT LIFE WITHOUT POVERTY.

1. That the States include in their poverty eradication programs strategies and actions to reduce the impact of poverty on Afro-descendant women and promote equality and non-discrimination.

2. That they urgently formulate affirmative action policies, mea-

asures and programs as a way to reduce the racial and gender gap we Afro-descendant women of Latin America and the Caribbean are dealing with in the economic sphere.

3. That measures be adopted to guarantee access to decent and quality employment in equitable conditions, eliminating the ethno-racial barriers we Afro-descendant women face in the labor market.

4. That policies and actions include the creation and functioning of a fund that permits access to economic resources for Afro-descendant women, the fostering of productive businesses and implementation of broader scope economic projects, accompanied by policies of technical and entrepreneurial assistance.

5. That measures be taken to end discrimination against Afro-descendant women in the labor conditions and requirements, including employment standards and practices that could have discriminatory purposes or effects.

6. That intergovernmental organizations, including the international financing institutions, must consider the economic and social condition of Afro-descendant women in the development or aid projects they support.

### III. WE WANT TO DECIDE OUR FUTURE.

1. That the States adopt all measures to promote access by Afro-descendant women to the decision-making bodies and increase their participation in elective posts and in the entities of both local and national public power.

2. That the laws of quotas for women's increased political participation assure the inclusion of Afro-descendant women.



3. That the political parties include the demands of Afro-descendant women and strategies for their implementation in their campaign platforms and programs.

#### IV. OUR CIVIL RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS.

1. That the States promote sensitization campaigns to: a) promote awareness of Afro-descendants about their own rights; b) promote self-identification of Afro-descendants; c) make visible the continuity of racial discrimination patterns, especially regarding Afro-descendant women; d) promote the modification of discriminatory socio-cultural patterns against Afro-descendants; and e) build awareness in and train state officials, especially state security agents and justice system judges and operators.

2. That the States establish political parity and representative-ness for Afro-descendant women in the arenas of power and decision-making as well as mechanisms of participation in civil society arenas.

3. That the States eliminate all obstacles that impede Afro-descendant women's enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights, especially in the spheres of education, housing, employment and health.

4. That the States take measures to guarantee Afro-descendant women the right to participate, vote and be candidates in elections and be duly represented in all government bodies. We also demand that sensitization of the members of Afro-descendant communities regarding the importance of their active participation in public and political life be promoted and the obstacles to this participation be eliminated.

## V. QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL.

1. That the States eliminate the existing barriers and promote specific actions for access by Afro-descendant women to all levels of education. We demand special attention to the education of children and youths, especially taking measures to reduce the school dropout rate of Afro-descendant children.

2. That the teaching and educational personnel who work with Afro-descendant students be provided adequate inter-cultural training through the study of a curriculum that stresses the history of Afro-descendants, their contribution to society, their validity as the legitimate identity of people considered as such and that equality, non-racism and gender equity be promoted.

3. That the States expand the coverage of the educational system in areas (especially rural) where the Afro-descendant population lives, creating more educational centers and providing the necessary teaching personnel. We demand improved physical infrastructure of the educational centers, providing them resources for a quality education with cultural relevance.

4. That the States develop actions that support the Afro-descendant people's cultural and intellectual production, that they have the same possibilities as other producers of culture and that their development be promoted as a cultural industry without folklorism and fetishes.

5. That the States promote processes to modify the school curriculum so that it teaches the contribution of the Afro-descendant population, provides an inclusive education and eradicates racial prejudices. These programs must form part of the educational system from the primary and secondary to the technical and university levels.



6. That the States revise the terminology of the textbooks that contain stereotyped or denigrating images, references, names or opinions regarding Afro-descendants—particularly women—by replacing them with images, references, names and opinions that transmit the message of dignity and equality inherent to all human beings.

## VI. WE NEED COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE.

1. That the States develop programs to comprehensively protect the sexual and reproductive health care of Afro-descendant women as well as fostering respect for both their sexual and reproductive rights.

2. That the States improve the health coverage and access to it by all Afro-descendant women through quality comprehensive services as well as the guarantee of ethnic, racial and gender criteria in the health plans. We demand respect for the practices and knowledge of traditional Afro-descendant medicine, their incorporation into the national health system and access to them by the people who request it.

3. That the Ministries of Health and the Health Surveys generate statistics disaggregated by ethnicity-race as an instrument for assessing the situation of Afro-descendant populations, especially women.

4. That the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), together with the States, contribute to the implementation of methodologies for generating health statistics with ethnic-racial criteria to make Afro-descendant women's health situation and conditions visible.

5. That the States implement an equitable social security system that guarantees the rights of female Afro-descendant



workers without ethnic-racial and gender discrimination and assures that employers meet their obligations.

## **VII. NO MORE VIOLENCE TOWARD AFRO-DESCENDANT WOMEN.**

1. That the States guarantee protection of Afro-descendant women's security and integrity with no discrimination whatever, adopting measures to prevent racially or gender motivated acts of violence against them; guarantee rapid intervention by the police, attorneys and judicial branch to investigate and punish such acts and assure that their authors, whether or not they are public officials, do not enjoy impunity.

2. That the States take measures to combat all incitement to discrimination or violence against Afro-descendant women through any communication media.

3. That the States adopt measures to sensitize media professionals regarding the nature and incidence of discrimination against Afro-descendant women, helping them to see their responsibility in the non-perpetuation of prejudice.

4. That the States promote policies to halt gender violence against Afro-descendent women, as well as the kidnapping and trafficking of people for commercial sexual exploitation purposes and the use of women's image as a sexual object.

## **VIII. BECOMING VISIBLE IN NATIONAL CENSUSES AND STATISTICS**

1. That the States promote national censuses with social and economic indicators disaggregated by ethnicity-race, sex and age to permit knowledge of the Afro-descendant population's situation by gender, race and ethnicity as an obligatory input for the design and implementation of pu-





blic policies designed to combat racism and discrimination and favor Afro-descendant women in access to employment, housing, education and the public health system.

2. That the governments have specialized personnel and financial resources as well as guaranteeing participation channels for civil society to enable the construction of categories used in self-identification questions. Questions about self-identification must be included among the first ones on the basic questionnaires.

## IX. PROTECTION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS<sup>2</sup>

1. That the States strengthen and expand the coverage by the institutions that guarantee the protection of children so they meet the regulations and codes that promote the rights of Afro- descendant boys and girls.

2. That the Ministries of Education include sexuality as a right and education on sexual violence and violence prevention in their curricula, and that the contents be prepared with cultural relevance to Afro-descendant children. In turn, we demand that the educators who teach these contents be instructed and provided with pedagogical and methodological tools that contribute to their educational work.

3. That the States promote the training of local leaders in the Afro-descendant communities on how to detect and treat psychological, physical and sexual violence in children and youth so they can act correspondingly when a given situation or condition is identified.

4. That the States prepare national plans to combat structural and racial violence against youths, particularly violence

2 The Network of Afro-descendant Women incorporates in this text the definition established by the United Nations System: (i) boys and girls: persons aged up to 18 years old; (ii) Youths: persons of both sexes aged up to 29 years old.

against Afro-descendent girls and female adolescents. We also demand inclusion of the age range perspective in their respective public policy and development program agendas and processes.

5. That the States assure participation by Afro-descendant organizations and youths as well as mainstreaming of the Afro-descendant agenda in Forums, Summits and all International Meetings, especially the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Río + 20, the Summit of the Americas, the Revision of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, Durban and others.

6. That the States promote equal opportunities for decent and dignified employment for young Afro-descendant women, guaranteeing their protection against any type of discrimination and violence in the work environment.

7. That the States increase the continued strategic investment in young Afro-descendant men and women, designing training programs, education and national economic undertakings respecting and ensuring Afro-descendant women's cultural identity.

8. That the States facilitate access to the new communication and information technologies and close the digital gap between Afro-descendant youth, especially females, and the rest of the youth.

## **X. WE URGE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.**

1. That the States promote public policies on protected area administration that assure elimination of the poverty gap and improve the population's quality of life, at the same time respecting the Afro-descendant communities' management of their territories.



2. That the States and governments reconsider the laws that halt and destabilize the Afro-descendant communities' self-development and are superimposed over the exercise of their ancestral rights.

3. That the States promote in the Afro-descendant communities and territories alternative economic options that have an identity-based business focus compatible with their cultural identity and environmental sustainability (life plans).

4. We propose to advise the States regarding the non-privatization of the water resources, combatting of bio-piracy, non-promotion of transgenic seeds, patenting of biological and genetic resources and other initiatives within the territories of the Afro-descendant communities by presenting comprehensive alternatives based on their own tradition and thinking.

5. That the States involve the Afro-descendant population in deciding on investments that will have a major impact on their communities in the framework of complying with the mandates of the national and international conventions on the rights of Afro-descendant communities.

## **XI. ACCESS TO NATURAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES.**

1. That the States develop actions to strengthen the economic autonomy of Afro-descendant women—particularly those from the rural sector—based on the formulation of public policies that help them access resources and economic goods. We particularly demand that land and productive resource titles be in the name of Afro-descendant women.

2. That the States promote the creation of and access to programs on business undertakings for the incorporation of Afro-descendant women into the economy; these programs must be geared to the strengthening their economic initiatives and the creation of business networks, associative businesses

and other organizational forms based on efficient commercialization.

3. That the States strengthen the capacity for action of rural Afro-descendant women, furthering access to land, technical and/or business assistance and information about market trends as well as their participation in the commercialization processes.

4. That the States promote Afro-descendant women's traditional knowledge about the productive process, promoting its publicizing and adoption. We also demand that the development of productive projects involve the use of this traditional knowledge in conjunction with new technologies and productive techniques that could be incorporated by the Afro-descendant women.

## **XII. WE WANT FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY.**

1. That the States promote culturally relevant food security and sovereignty programs based on the agro-ecological characteristics of the areas in which Afro-descendant women live.

2. That the States prioritize production for domestic consumption, especially the production of basic grains. We also reject the introduction and use of transgenic seeds that endanger health and destroy local varieties through open pollination, permitting transnational corporations to appropriate the food chain.

3. That the States comply with the right of all peoples to basic and healthy food, access to the natural goods, water as an unrestricted human right, forests, native seeds, small agriculture based on ancestral customs and rejection of the use of agro-toxins.



### XIII. MIGRANTS NEED TO BE PROTECTED.

1. That the States create entities and links with the authorities and civil society to deal with the migration of Afro-descendant women as refugees or voluntary immigrants, and that their right to health and education be guaranteed, respecting their customs and culture.

2. That the States establish regulatory frameworks, public policies, judicial or administrative practices and protocols that effectively guarantee protection of the rights of Afro-descendant migrant women. The States must guarantee the elimination of detention as well as all other forms of deprivation of freedom for migratory reasons and the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of nationality; counteracting the militarization and penalization of the migrant population with special attention to Afro-descendants migrants.

3. That the States provide a lasting solution to migrants, especially Afro-descendant women. We demand that the issuing of nondiscriminatory documentation in the proper time and form be prioritized and encouraged from the outset of the proceeding to determine their condition as refugees. This documentation must ensure full exercise of their rights. Refugees must have access to permanent residence in the country of asylum, so as to encourage complete integration.

### XIV. THE RESCUE AND RECOGNITION OF OUR HERITAGE.

1. That the States promote the knowledge, recognition, rescue, conservation, restoration, revitalization and dissemination of the Afro-descendant communities' values, manifestations, practices and cultural heritage. We also demand the fostering of an adequate relationship between the cultural heritage of the Afro-descendant communities and the socioeconomic development potential of each country.



2. That the States strengthen the exercise of and full respect for the cultural rights of the Afro-descendant communities, among them their right to maintain and develop their cosmovision and holistic vision, and that their values and customs be valued together with maintenance of their cultural traditions and forms of expression, their freedom of beliefs and cultural practices, and their freedom of intellectual, artistic, technical and scientific creation.

3. That the States incorporate scientific and technical research as well as knowledge of the ancestral practices of the Afro-descendant communities in the economic, social and cultural spheres as a substantial part of their cultural development, with emphasis on the study, practices, knowledge and forms of innovation of the communities' own material and cultural surroundings.

## **XV. THE MEDIA MUST PROJECT POSITIVE IMAGES OF AFRO-DESCENDANT WOMEN.**

1. That the States organize educational and media campaigns to create public awareness of the Afro-descendant population's history and culture and the importance of constructing an integrating society, at the same time respecting the human rights and identity of all individuals.

2. That the States promote the design and application of self-control methods in the media through professional codes of ethics for the media organizations to put an end to the use of racially discriminatory or tendentious terms against the Afro-descendant population, especially women, including measures to eliminate the use of stereotyped images of Afro-descendant men and women in the media and Internet.

3. That media spaces be created that transform the stereotyped images that reproduce the labeling of Afro-descendant people as inferior, especially given their impact on the





construction of self-esteem and their capacity to produce racist and discriminatory thinking, particularly toward Afro-descendant women, by presenting them only as a sexual product to promote tourism and other forms of publicity. We demand resources to create community proposals that help strengthen pride in identity and promote the right to social participation and equity in the context of the human rights to information, communication and representation.

4. That the States develop training and sensitization campaigns, both of a general scope and specifically for state officials, to eradicate patterns of exclusion and discriminatory practices and help promote awareness-building about the rights of Afro-descendant individuals, especially women.

## **XVI. WE WANT ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

1. That the States urgently adopt measures to guarantee access to justice for the Afro-descendant population, especially women, as a fundamental mechanism of protection of their human rights. In particular, we demand that the States promote juridical and programmatic measures that remove the obstacles Afro-descendant women face when attempting to present charges of racial discrimination.

2. That the States establish expeditious actions for cases of racial discrimination and conduct promotion campaigns to inform the Afro-descendant population, particularly women, of their rights and of actions and mechanisms that can be activated for their defense. We also demand that the States guarantee material conditions for achieving justice with respect to access to courts, provision of free legal assistance and the cost and complexity of the judicial proceedings.

3. That the States implement measures to remove or modify standards and practices that lead to the persistence of a racial bias in the actions of the criminal justice system. In particular, the States must promote efforts to gather information



about the judicial activity and about Afro-descendant women deprived of their freedom, whether they are in preventive prison, sentenced or interned in psychiatric institutions. Additionally, the States must adopt and publicize adequate mechanisms so that Afro-descendant girls, teenagers and women can denounce physical and sexual violence, including sexual harassment and rape.

## **XVII. THEY MUST GUARANTEE OUR CITIZEN SECURITY**

1. That the States review their citizen security policies and legislation to identify and eradicate the use of racial profiling as a mechanism for detaining and investigating individuals. In particular we demand that the States draw up action protocols that punish racial discrimination as an institutionalized pattern of action and implement adequate follow-up and control mechanisms for the effective implementation of these guides by the security agents.

2. That the States establish mechanisms for sanctioning security agents who use racial profiles to conduct their work and/or employ a disproportionate or unjustified lethal force toward the Afro-descendant population, including women.

3. That the States instruct the members of the Armed Forces (Police and Army) about the contribution of the Afro-descendant population in order to create an inclusive mentality and eradicate the racial prejudices of these bodies. We demand the education of military and police officers with an intercultural focus to reduce the racist abuses and stereotypes that currently permeate their actions.

Given in the city of Managua, Nicaragua, 27 June 2015.

Network of Afro-descendant Women of Latin America, the Caribbean and the Diaspora "Constructing our history in our own voice"



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