

**High-Level Meeting to Commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the
Adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

OPENING REMARKS MADE BY

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ROUNDTABLE II (3-6 PM)

“VICTIMS OF RACISM: RECOGNITION, JUSTICE, DEVELOPMENT”

22nd September 2011

Distinonished Co-Chairs

Excellencies,

Madam High Commissioner,

Ladies and Gentlemen, residents of New York City (who I know are among the many still mourning the victims of 9/11) a very good afternoon to you all

I am honoured to have been asked to represent the Commission on the 10th Anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) at this high level forum; a ferum in which we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action which emanated from the historic World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and Programme of Action (DDPA), that crucial roadmap to our shared futures.

My Working Group is deeply disappointed that in the lead up to this commemoration, as to the 2007 Review Conference, so many have tried to undo what so many others had accomplished in Durban even in the midst of the opposition, the boycotts and walk-outs then. Indeed, my Working Group laments the harassment of this High Level Commemorative Event by many of those who need to work with victims to ensure that the perpetration of history is not repeated.

Even as we applaud those who are... 10th DDPA...
...for the victims.

These victims with whom we express solidarity today are closely identified in the discrimination on the basis of their ideology, religion, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation and skin color.

...racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance...
...preference/orientation and culture. We see these actions demonstrated in the persistence of discriminatory practices as well as finding ways to address them...

As we gather here today in this place, in this International Year for People of African Descent, it is an imperative that we commit ourselves anew to a future in which everyone has a rightful place and collectively seek to address the problems being faced by victims of racism, racial discrimination and enslavement and of the denial by history of many of their rights. Indeed, the Commission on the Status of Women offers a unique opportunity to redouble our efforts to promote the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that affect African people and their descendants in all regions of the globe. In trying to explain the roots of such attitudes the DDPA stated:

As the WGPAD's mandate is to assist the victims who are African/African-descended, I now turn to them specifically.

It is no secret that People of African Descent have for centuries been victims of racism, racial discrimination and enslavement and of the denial by history of many of their rights. Indeed, the Commission on the Status of Women offers a unique opportunity to redouble our efforts to promote the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that affect African people and their descendants in all regions of the globe. In trying to explain the roots of such attitudes the DDPA stated:

"We acknowledge that slavery and the slave trade, including the transatlantic slave trade, were appalling tragedies in the history of humanity".¹

We use this high-level meeting to call on states that sanctioned this crime against humanity to take immediate steps, first to apologize unreservedly and not resort to linguistic obfuscation that mimics apologies; and secondly to negotiate with the

Students of history will recall that in 1944, Trinidadian Eric Williams published *Capitalism and Slavery* and placed Caribbean slavery within the context of Atlantic modernity. Chattel slavery was an integral part of North Atlantic capitalist accumulation and subject to the forces of the market economy.

We call on Africans and people of African descent everywhere to lobby for support for the recommendation that there be a UN Permanent Forum for African and People of African Descent. We also restate the call for reparation. Reparation is a route to world peace and understanding. Some of us may scoff at the idea that world peace is even possible if we do not first seek toward it as an ideal. All that is needed is political will, which we are trying to mobilize today.

Part of that march to world peace, justice and equal rights involves righting the injustices of the past set out so clearly in the DDPA. The late Jamaican artiste Peter Tosh already told us that there will be no peace without equal rights and justice and Bob Marley using the philosophy of His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie the 1st long cautioned (and I paraphrase):

Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war. Until there no longer first class and second class citizens in any nation; until the color of a person's skin is of no more significance than the color of his/her eyes; until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race. ~~Disasters that will destroy~~ the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship and rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained.

I thank you.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ DDPA, article 13.

² Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944)