

Regular meeting of the Permanent Council

August 22, 2024

*Remarks by IACHR President, Commissioner **Roberta Clarke**, delivered by **Paul Spencer**,
Senior Advisor of the IACHR Executive Secretariat*

Good morning, everyone. I would like to express thanks for the invitation to this regular meeting of the permanent council. I extend cordial greetings to Chair of the Permanent Council of the OAS, Ambassador Tarlie Francis, Permanent Representative of Grenada, and all the States' high authorities, speakers, and attendees.

Today we observe the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition (celebrated last March 25th) and the International Day for People of African Descent (the upcoming August 31st).

Remembrance is vital as we honor those against whom egregious violations were perpetrated, we commit to speaking the truth about the causes and consequences of the slave trade and enslavement in the Caribbean and the Americas and we acknowledge the historical debt to Africans and afro-descendants, including by taking far-reaching and proportionate reparative actions.

As a result of enslavement and its long and persisting shadow, Afro-descendants in the Americas are amongst the poorest and most marginalized, with inadequate access to quality education, health care, housing, decent work and justice. This is what we understand to be the workings of structural discrimination.

Just this year, in March, the Commission called¹ on States to continue adopting measures to encourage institutions of higher education to consolidate their efforts to combat racial discrimination and disseminate the legacy of Afro-descendant persons and peoples and observe the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

¹ Press release, [IACHR and REDESCA call to guarantee the efforts of higher education institutions to preserve Afro-descendant memory \(oas.org\)](https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/press/202408/05724), March 22, 2024, No. 057/24

And so as we recall the ruinous injustice and violence perpetuated against Africans captured, kidnapped and transported to the Americas and the Caribbean for enforced labour that gave Europeans and Euro-descendants across our region the capital they required for industrialization, so too we must reflect on and repair the continuing legacy of these violations.

Lasting challenges include police violence and disproportionate criminalization and incarceration of people of African descent; their limited access to quality education, health care, including reproductive health care and other social services; and infringements by States and private actors on the collective property rights of Afro-descendant tribal peoples.

The Commission recognizes calls from individuals, civil society, and some States, particularly those of the CARICOM Reparations Commission², for multidimensional reparations. Comprehensive reparations³ are not solely monetary. Comprehensive reparations should ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation through legal, political, and socio-economic mechanisms.

We reiterate⁴ that States are required to implement policies and affirmative and reparative actions, such as mechanisms that promote equal opportunity, for people and tribal communities of African descent and engage in actions that address and end ethno-racial stereotypes and racism.

The Commission commends the efforts of some States which have commenced research and implemented relevant legislative and political measures toward the achievement of reparatory justice.

But reparative actions are required not only within our states but also by those nations whose economies and societies benefitted from centuries of extractive domination.

We also encourage States to ratify and implement the Inter-American Convention against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance as part of this effort⁵.

² Caricom Reparations Commission (CRC), [official website](#)

³ IACHR, [The Right to Truth in the America](#), OEA/Ser.L/V/II.152, Doc. 2, 13 August 2014

⁴ IAHCR, [Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights of Persons of African Descent](#), OEA/Ser.L/V/II., Doc. 109, 16 March 2021

⁵ OAS, [INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION](#) AGAINST RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND RELATED FORMS OF INTOLERANCE, Adopted in 2013, Entry into Force 2017

In closing, let us also recall, with appreciation, the resistance which Afro-descendants have and continue to demonstrate to injustice. Let us acknowledge, for example, in the Caribbean, that so much of the progress that has been made in social development has come about in the post-independence period as Caribbean peoples insisted on equality and justice after centuries of violence and under-development as a result of colonial domination.

Let us learn the lessons of history, and remember like Martin Luther King, that the arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice. But it will only so bend, if we all work together to end the racism in our cultures, ensure accountability and equal opportunities for all.