

White Paper

UN-SONG: Vision, Strategy and Operational Framework for Sustainable Diversity

Promoting equal inclusion, recognition and access for all persons in the United Nations system worldwide within the framework of General Assembly Resolutions 68/237 and 69/16 for the International Decade for People of African-Descent and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda

Introduction:

1. UN-SONG is the group working to promote equal access for all persons in the United Nations system worldwide, regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, *inter alia*, through the elimination of any barriers to the recognition, contribution and inclusion of persons of African-Descent in the United Nations system.

Six Governing Tenets of UN-SONG

2. UN-SONG is governed by the following tenets and motivations:

i. Creation of UN-SONG is foundationally motivated by Goals 10 and 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals; and by General Assembly Resolutions 68/237¹ and 69/16² that compel member states and international organisations to take action to promote equality and inclusion of persons of African-Descent and to directly engage with them for the purposes of doing so (paragraph 28 (i) of A/Res./69/16). People of African-Descent as the intended beneficiaries have a primary interest and matching responsibility to mobilize and direct United Nations efforts to fulfill the world's commitment to them particularly having noted the absence of any organizational movement to implement Paragraph 28 of A/Res./69/16 twenty (20) months into the establishment of the Decade. UN-SONG exists at the intersection of these two compelling sets of motivations.

ii. UN-SONG believes in the equality of all races and denies any notion of the intellectual, moral or physical superiority of any one race over the other and rejects any postulations that can be viewed as a tacit inference of the natural superiority of one race or ethnicity in the area of science, the arts,

¹ A/Res./68/237 of 7 February 2014 on the Proclamation of the International Decade for People of African-Descent declares 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African-Descent with the theme: "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development".

² A/Res./69/16 on the Programme of Activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African-Descent.

technology, sports, or other. Rather, all human beings regardless of their nationality, ethnic origin or cultural background if provided with the same opportunities at the national or international level, have the same potential for growth and can equally contribute intellectually, physically, morally and socially to the goals and purposes of the world and to global development.

iii. Due to the multicomponent nature of the human being who at all times in their existence displays a race, gender, age and sexual orientation, Equality and Diversity must be treated as indivisible and holistic concepts in appreciation of the fact that for any individual to enjoy true equality, all structural oppressions to the human being must be removed. Unless all persons and groups are equal, no one person or group would fully enjoy equal treatment.

iv. UN-SONG recognizes that while the conscience of the organization as evident through its many proclamations is committed to recognition, access and development for people of African-Descent, the reality of United Nations operations may show a racial disparity, particularly for women of African-Descent who have not benefited equally from the Gender balance hiring policies of the organization, and that while General Assembly Resolution 69/16 call upon international organisations to assign particular priority to the projects devoted to the collection of statistical data, such monitoring, reporting and data collection tools for tracking inclusion and equality are notably lacking in the United Nations system.

v. *The United Nations system of geographical representation as a system for recruitment falls severely short of Goals 10 and 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals and General Assembly Resolutions 68/237 and 69/16; and must be supplemented.* The system of desirable range of *Geographical Representation*, while imposing on the organisation a responsibility to assign specified quotas to nationalities does not compel the organisation to ensure inclusion and equality of representation in ranking, in staff categories, or in duty station classifications. To rely on it as a system that ensures fair and equitable inclusion and treatment is fundamentally flawed. To the contrary, it masks the need for a fair and equitable system. Its applicability is limited to regular budget posts which represent a fraction of the staffing structure of the United Nations, and regular vacancies.

vi. UN-SONG recognizes the need to activate the racial consciousness of the organization, synergize efforts in raising awareness of the status of persons of African-Descent, *inter alia*, through the platforms established by General Assembly Resolutions 68/237 and 69/16, for the development of operational tools that will assist the organisation in fulfilling the goals set forth therein and is firmly of the view that an

equally aggressive mandate by the organization (as it has for other diversity classifications/groups) will identify and eliminate gaps in access for people of African-Descent within the United Nations and promote interethnic and interracial respect.

UN-SONG Ideology on Racism

3. UN-SONG adopts the definition of “racial discrimination” in the ***International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*** to mean “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life”. The motivations for this distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference vary. It could be the erroneous belief in the superiority of one race over others or a different motivation. Regardless of its motive, *racism, which can be displayed by any racial group, defies the common sense of individual meritocracy*. Racism refutes or belittles the individuals’ capacity or known output. Instead, it is often generated by the exposure to ideas and facts from another context. *Racism is a form of oppression and is oppressive*. The impact of racism can be minimized by the promotion of positive images through sustained local and international efforts and by targeted efforts through systemic measures to foster the placement of persons of African-Descent in visible or important positions where they can excel and positively shift opinions. Failure to do so simply corroborates and reinforces racism.

4. Racism is a self-perpetuating evil. One act of racism leaves many victims in its wake. This is because each decision taken to exclude a person based on his or her race diminishes the world’s ability to see that individual’s true ability and thereby reinforces racist views, and worse diminishes the ability of the world to benefit from the capabilities of the victim. Consistent failure to recognize and value the individuals’ contributions ultimately denies their elevation and development and causes stagnation of members of the said racial group. This is why to avert racism; we must first acknowledge that the benefits of our efforts today will be mainly reaped by tomorrow’s children.

5. Race relationship is mired with a history of brutality and domination inflicted by one race over the other through the abject practices and long lasting legacy of colonization as a political system and the Transatlantic Slave Trade³. The negative impact of these practices is that responsibility and blame are viewed as likely incidents to the discussion and efforts to address race. While this may make it an uncomfortable conversation for some, the failure to address race disparity in the United Nations system

³ The Taubira law passed on 21 May 2001 by France has declared slavery a crime against humanity.

simply acts as a catalyst to embolden the problem. UN-SONG does not dispel the postulation that biases are sometimes unconsciously held and that racism is frequently perpetuated by a mindset that is not aware of its own biases, the systemic imbalances and inadequacies that fuel racism and inequalities notwithstanding. This understanding helps to shift the dialogue from one absorbed in blame, guilt, and victimhood to one with more understanding, less assigned *mala fide* motivations, common ground and corporate desire to mobilize corrective action.

Legislative Framework, Mission & Vision of UN-SONG

6. Even as the *United Nations Charter*⁴ states as one of its purposes “to eradicate inequality and to promote and encourage the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion” and while the “*Respect for Diversity*” is an established core value of the organization, there are no published guidelines to specifically guide the respective entities and the Administration of the Organization on what *Racial Diversity* means at an operational level nor is there any training specifically targeted at racial tolerance. This gap is even more noticeable as it is contrasting with the organization’s treatment of other Diversity classifications. Gender Equity is often encountered and promoted inside the Organisation in the form of a quota system for recruitment, in gender awareness training, as well as an aggressive agenda to promote gender equity through programmes in different countries - by UN-Women and other UN agencies. On sexual orientation, administrative action is targeted at awareness, de-stigmatization and introducing policies that will recognize marriage equality for same sex marriages, as well as an active global platform to recognize non-traditional relationships and promote marriage equality throughout the countries of the world. However, on the critical issue of the elimination of race inequality or Race Parity⁵, both in terms of its own internal administration and in its role as a global watchdog, the current leadership of United Nations has been notably less vocal. This silence has become increasingly untenable as tragic events in the Host Country States and other Member States show growing ethnic and racial tension and interracial struggles for recognition and access.

7. This state of affairs is not attributable to the lack of declared commitments by world leaders; nor is it attributable to a lack of legal instruments or imperatives enshrined in United Nations Rules and

⁴ Ratification of the United Nations Charter by the five permanent members of the Security Council and 51 member states on 24 November, 1945 established the United Nations.

⁵ *Race Parity* is a wording developed to refer to a state of complete racial equality in all areas of life including but not restricted to recognition for contributions, education, access to employment opportunities, promotions and income levels.

Regulations or other documents⁶. As early as 1948, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* proclaimed that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set out therein, without distinction of any kind, in particular as to race, colour or national origin. The *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* of 20 November 1963 (General Assembly resolution 1904 (XVIII)) solemnly affirms the necessity of speedily eliminating racial discrimination throughout the world in all its forms and manifestations and of securing understanding of and respect for the dignity of the human person. Recognized as the principal international instrument for the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, saw all States Parties condemning racial discrimination and undertaking to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races

8. Notwithstanding these overarching numbers of preceding commitments and declarations by Member States through resolutions and conventions, in its resolution 68/237 dated 7 February 2014 on the Proclamation of the International Decade for People of African-Descent with the theme “People of African-Descent: recognition, justice and development”, the General Assembly recognized that millions of human beings continue to be victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The General Assembly noted that this remains so despite efforts and initiatives undertaken by Member States to prohibit discrimination and segregation and to engender the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural as well as civil and political rights, for all human beings. The General Assembly further noted in its subsequent resolution A/RES/69/16 on the Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for people of African-Descent, that racism and racial discrimination, both direct and indirect, *de facto* and *de jure* constitute to manifest themselves in inequality and disadvantage. Paragraph 28 of General Assembly resolution 69/16 called on the international community, international and regional organizations, to take the following steps:

“The international community, international and regional organizations, in particular relevant United Nations programmes, funds, specialized agencies and other bodies, international financial and development institutions, and other international mechanisms within their areas of

⁶ Staff Regulation 1.2 (a) requires that “Staff shall uphold and respect the principles set out in the Charter, including faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women. Consequently, staff members shall exhibit respect for all cultures; they shall not discriminate against any individual or group of individuals or otherwise abuse the power and authority vested in them”. The Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service; ST/SGB/2008/5 on the Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, and abuse of authority; ST/IC/2003/17 on Our core values prohibit discrimination and harassment, prohibit discrimination.

competence should give high priority to programmes and projects specifically tailored for combating racism and racial discrimination against people of African-Descent, taking fully into account the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the political declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and should, inter alia:

- (a) Take measures to raise awareness about the International Decade, including through awareness-raising campaigns, and organizing and supporting other activities, bearing in mind the theme of the Decade;
- (b) Continue to disseminate widely the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference and the political declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;
- (c) Continue to raise awareness about the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
- (d) Assist States in the full and effective implementation of the obligations arising under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and in ratifying or acceding to the Convention, with a view to attaining its universal ratification;
- (e) Assist States in the full and effective implementation of their commitments under the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;
- (f) ***Incorporate human rights into development programmes, including in the areas of access to and enjoyment of the rights to education, employment, health, housing, land and labour;***
- (g) ***Assign particular priority to the projects devoted to the collection of statistical data;***
- (h) Support initiatives and projects aimed at honouring and preserving the historical memory of people of African-Descent;
- (i) ***Use the Decade as an opportunity to engage with people of African-Descent on appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of slavery, the slave trade and the transatlantic slave trade in captured African people and, to this end, ensure the participation of and consultation with non-governmental organizations, other stakeholders and civil society at large;***
- (j) ***In planning activities for the Decade, examine how existing programmes and resources might be utilized to benefit people of African-Descent more effectively;***

(k) Give due consideration to the goals and objectives aimed at the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance against people of African-Descent in the discussions held by the United Nations on the post-2015 development agenda.”

9. ***The requirement of the United Nations, its funds, offices and programmes to directly engage with persons of African-Descent is mandated by the General Assembly.*** Beyond this, amongst the key targets of Goal 10 of the ***Sustainable Development Goals***⁷ to reduce inequality within and among countries, is to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status; and to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard. Target 16.6 of Goal 16 to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies, is to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

10. Repeated declarations of high level commitments to the elimination of racism and the removal of barriers to the progression of persons of African-Descent over the past decades have unfortunately not translated into tangible results and lasting impact for people of African-Descent, as acknowledged by General Assembly Resolutions 68/237 and 69/16.

11. UN-SONG has been established as a direct response to promote action that will fill this gap, primarily as it relates to people of African-Descent inside the United Nations. In particular, ***noting that there are no dedicated mechanisms or systemic measures to look at issues of Diversity relating to persons of African-Descent inside the United Nations or to act as an internal watchdog on Racial Equality in contrast to other diversity groups,*** and noting the evident failure despite global efforts to eradicate racism as noted by the General Assembly in its resolution A/68/237, UN-SONG has been established as a non-political platform created to mobilize action within the United Nations system that will embed race in the diversity landscape in the Organisation and operationalize the concept of racial equality. UN-SONG will set out to transform decades of wording to action and outcomes. UN-SONG will also seek to ensure that people of African-descent contribute equally, constructively and effectively to the United Nations in all areas - in leadership positions, policy making and operations, noting that a significant amount of the work of the United Nations is targeted at the African continent and countries with a majority or large African-descent population and that the Organization’s failure to incorporate the knowledge and expertise of people of African-Descent can only be detrimental to the delivery of its programmes and frustrate the efforts of its Member States.

⁷ A/Res./70/1 on Transforming Our World – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

12. UN-SONG appreciates the importance of understanding a society's cultural context for any change to be successfully impacted and envisions a United Nations system that optimizes the intellectual capital of people of African-Descent to fully contribute to resolving global problems, but also a system that provides access for this expertise to be harnessed. Moreover and more significantly so, this is a requirement of the *Sustainable Development Goals which in Goal 10 calls for the adoption of policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, to progressively achieve greater equality, and ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions*. By largely excluding people of African-Descent from positions of leadership, policy making on matters directly impacting populations of African-Descent, the Organization denies itself of critical perspectives for addressing key issues it purports to tackle and combat.

13. UN-SONG foresees itself as also operating within the spirit of United Nations Staff Regulation 8.1 which provides for the establishment of staff representation bodies and for the Secretary-General to be continually engaged with staff on matters to ensure the effective participation of the staff in identifying, examining and resolving issues relating to staff welfare, including conditions of work, general conditions of life and other human resources policies. UN-SONG will mobilize the organization regarding conditions relating to staff of African-Descent and for the proper recognition of the contribution of people of African-Descent in the work of the United Nations, within the spirit of Resolution 68/237 aimed at all people of African-Descent, without exclusion. *In addition to their status as United Nations staff members, United Nations personnel of African-Descent are also part of their respective civil societies and countries and to whom their respectable member states are also independently accountable for the fulfilment of the goals outlined in A/Res./68/237 and A/Res./69/16.*

14. UN-SONG envisions a United Nations system that does not break up Diversity into divisible areas for individual treatment like Gender, Sexual Orientation and others but that treats Equality, including Racial Equality, as an indivisible concept. To that end, UN-SONG will promote an enhanced global indivisible concept of Equality and a comprehensive approach to Inclusiveness, which recognizes that for a person to enjoy equality, all barriers, for whatever reason, to their recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, must be removed. A female of African-descent does not benefit from Gender Balance policies insofar as the barriers to racial discrimination are not also removed.⁸ Diversity must be treated

⁸ Member States may wish to be just as vigilant in promoting racial parity as they do gender equality and other diversity classification for the platform of equality could be easily viewed as being used to export one ideology over

holistically to allow for a more cohesive and inclusive world. These robust efforts require more than administrative instructions and instruments: they call for a political vision supported by the effective commitment and decision-making processes throughout the Organization to implement the General Assembly mandate voted on the International Decade for People of African-Descent. Tangible benchmarks and measurable tools must be put in place to evaluate the situation and means to redress system-wide organizational irregularities.

15. UN-SONG envisions a world order where people of African-Descent have equal participation in addressing global issues and can interject their views and knowledge into the global dialogue as called for by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Summary of Operational Framework

16. Seeking out strategic partners like the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights; the Department of Public Information; the Department of Management, its' Office of Human Resources Management and equivalent offices in United Nations Funds, Programs, Agencies and Offices, their respective member states, as well as other offices and institutions that have shown commitment to the fulfillment of the goals laid out in Resolutions 68/237 and 69/16, UN-SONG and its members will engage in the following areas of activities:

Leadership Engagement

- i. Work closely with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the ASG/OHRM to develop an action oriented strategy and actionable plan that will value a holistic approach to diversity and promote awareness about racism, systemic and unconscious biases; mobilize action within the Organisation to create a direction and internal benchmarks for the fulfillment of Goals 10 and 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals and General Assembly Resolutions 68/237 and 69/16 as well as a dedicated mechanism to oversee interagency collaboration in this regard; and mobilize support for the allocation of the necessary budgetary and human resources for the fulfillment of General Assembly Resolution 69/16 and 68/237 pursuant to paragraph 3 of the latter resolution;

another. Member States can no longer speak about gender empowerment in West Africa and fail to address racial tensions in the United States, without being viewed as abrogating the concept of equality.

Human Resources Policies

- ii. Develop organizational processes and systems that will remove the impediments of career mobility and advancement for people of African-Descent, including to the D1 and D2 level, if needed, through affirmative action, quota systems or targeted recruitment exercises; assist the organisation in the development of a Racial Gap Index, and other internal classifications and data that will enable the organization to track the rate of career progression of persons of African-Descent in the UN vis-à-vis others; develop policies that will ensure racial balance in recruitment at all levels; develop benchmarks for the Secretary-General's compacts and performance appraisal for assessing racial diversity; act as a consultative body in the development of a Diversity and Inclusion strategy⁹; promote *Diversity Mainstreaming*¹⁰, that will ensure that consideration for all group classifications are taken into account when policies are being established;

Reporting Activities

- iii. Conduct surveys to measure respect for racial diversity and assist OHRM, as required, in developing periodic reports on underrepresented communities in the United Nations;

Awareness Raising & Training

- iv. Identify activities of racism in the Organisation and ensure that these are treated swiftly and appropriately in a safe and serious manner; assist in the development and promotion of internal UN training pursuant to Para. 4 of ST/SGB/2008/05 on the Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, Including Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Authority, and

Act as a consultative guide on issues of Race in the Organization.

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⁹ Other UN System entities like the IMF, WB and the IADB have introduced a Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

¹⁰ *Diversity mainstreaming* is a concept developed by UN-SONG; a proposed holistic organizational approach to Diversity, that will factor all diversity classifications in the formulation of policies - Gender, Race, Sexual Orientation, Disability, Religion and others, including future, emerging classifications, for Sustainable Diversity.