United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture

CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO
COMMISSION CANADIENNE POUR L'UNESCO

April 30, 2020

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Care of WGEPAD Secretariat, Anti-Racial Discrimination Section
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais Wilson
52 rue des Pâquis
CH-1201 Geneva, Switzerland

Re: Midterm review of International Decade for People of African Descent (General Assembly resolution A/RES/74/137 and the Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/RES/42/29)

Dear High Commissioner,

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) is a proud supporter of the International Decade for People of African Descent and has been involved in many initiatives for the Decade that are related to the UNESCO mandate. We are pleased to have the opportunity to provide input on the impact of the Decade so far, and suggestions for the future.

We would like to be clear that this submission does not constitute an official assessment or feedback from the Government of Canada; rather, it represents the perspective of our arms-length Commission and is informed by the relationships we have with civil society partners and different governments across the country.

1. Examples of actions

As requested, this input is structured according to the themes of the Decade: Justice, Recognition, and Development. While our Commission was a partner in some of these activities, many were initiated and implemented by other organizations.

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Justice:

- In 2018, the Government of Canada officially recognized the Decade and committed to several initiatives, including special funding to local community supports for Black youth, and culturally focused mental health programming in Black communities. Moreover, in 2018, the Government conducted public consultations about racism in Canada, and to gather perspectives on approaches and policies that could address barriers arising from systemic racism. Following these consultations, the Government published a National Anti-Racism Strategy and Action Plan and tasked a new Anti-Racism Secretariat with implementation.
- In 2017, the province of Ontario officially recognized the Decade.
- In 2019 the province of Nova Scotia became the first government in the world to officially adopted an Action Plan for the Decade. This included a historic apology to African Nova Scotians.
- In 2019, the City of Toronto officially recognized the Decade.
- CCUNESCO has been collaborating with the UNESCO Chair in the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism at Concordia University, Vivek Venkatesh, on a tool for police services and communities to use to facilitate discussion on racial and social profiling – a significant concern for Black communities and activists.
- In 2019, CCUNESCO granted its patronage to LeaderPol, a non-partisan community-based organization that aims to address the under-representation of Black Canadians in politics.

Recognition:

- CCUNESCO mandated the Canadian Advisory Committee for Memory of the World to advance nominations relating to Black history and heritage. The Canadian Memory of the World Register showcases the most significant documents of our heritage and helps safeguard universal access to our artistic, cultural, economic, geographic, linguistic, political, scientific, spiritual and identity-based heritage.
- CCUNESCO is working with Canadian hip-hop artist and historian Webster and illustrator Dimani Mathieu Cassendo to produce a forthcoming online resource that will set out a short history of slavery in Canada – a subject that is unfortunately little known in this country.

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- CCUNESCO has provided patronage to several artistic events that mark the Decade, including:
    - an exhibition at the Quebec Museum of Fine Arts entitled *Fugitives*. The exhibition concluded in September 2019. It featured the work of comics illustrators who created representations of people escaping slavery in New France based on descriptions from period newspapers that were intended to help slaveowners in their searches.
    - A performance work and documentary series by choreographer Rhodnie Desir titled Bow't Trail, which traces the history of her ancestors across the Americas through various African-descent Diaspora expressions of dance.
- The Lord Dalhousie Scholarly Panel on Slavery and Race launched a groundbreaking report that explored history of Dalhousie University, located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with regard to race and slavery.
- Vancouver's African Descent Festival identifies itself with the Decade, and brings together artists who celebrate African descent through their work
- L'Association pour la promotion des héritages africains has launched several initiatives to mark the Decade, including coordinating the Canadian branch of the UNESCO Coalition of Artists for the General History of Africa publication project.
- The United Church of Canada and the United Church of Christ USA jointly recognized the Decade and committed to promoting recognition, justice, for people of African descent.

Development:

- CCUNESCO commissioned a two-part special edition of *Canadian Diversity* magazine, which was a forum for Black Canadian leaders, researchers, and thinkers to express the achievements, histories, concerns, and aspirations of people of African descent in Canada. Titled "Facing the Change", it was released during Black History Month (February) 2020.
- The CCUNESCO granted its patronage and partnered with the Michaëlle Jean Foundation and the Federation of Black Canadians to develop two National Black Canadians Summits (in 2017 and 2019) and a Strategic Action Plan. The 2020 summit was postponed due to COVID-19.

- The CCUNESCO has collaborated with the Canada's National Capital Commission, a crown agency responsible for federal lands, planning and renewal of public spaces, and conservation, with respect to its Urban Planning Laboratory. Two events were particularly relevant to the International Decade; one in November 2019 addressed the role of urban planning in reducing inequalities and creating inclusive neighbourhoods. The other, in February 2020, looked at the history and dynamics of racial segregation in urban areas (including ethnic neighbourhoods).
- Saskatchewan's African Canadian Resource Network hosted a conference in 2019, in the context of the Decade, under the patronage of the CCUNESCO, on the subject of "Advancing Human Rights" for people of African descent.
- In the context of the Decade, Statistics Canada, Canada's national statistics bureau, has been developing and publishing reports on the Black Canadian population, guided by a working group of experts, each of whom have great knowledge of the various issues and challenges faced by Black communities. These reports make use of disaggregated data, a practice that Black Canadians have advocated for. Publications include:
    - "Canada's Black population: Education, labour and resilience" (2020) provides a wide range of social and economic well-being indicators.
    - "Education and labour market integration of Black youth in Canada" (2020) focuses on the educational and labour market pathways of young Black people
    - An infographic and a booklet titled "Diversity of the Black Population in Canada: An Overview" were the released in 2019.

2. Challenges in the implementation of the International Decade and recommendations for action

Canada has undertaken important steps to give a greater visibility to the International Decade and to advance its spirit and objectives. That said, we are very conscious that the history and contributions of people of African descent in Canada are still too little known, and that systemic racism, various forms of discrimination and hate crimes continue to be major challenges for Black communities. Too few Canadians are aware of the International

Decade. From the CCUNESCO's standpoint, there remains much to be done in Canada and at the international level.

One particular area of concern that we would highlight is the relationship of Black communities with police services around racial and social profiling. This is a very challenging subject and a continued source of concern for people of African descent in Canada.

We also note that during this time of pandemic, and in its aftermath, states around the world will face immense challenges with respect to budgets. It is critical that commitments made by states with respect to the International Decade continue to be prioritized in this context. This is especially important given the rise in racism that has been seen in the context of the pandemic – and the disproportional impact of the virus on people of African descent. It is critical that the OHCHR continue its efforts to promote sustained action to promote respect for human rights, including the human rights of people of African descent.

We wish to highlight four major areas that the OHCHR should consider to further advance the objectives and spirit of the Decade:

1) To maintain the momentum of the International Decade for People of African Descent around the world. There is much to be gained through global efforts, and it is our understanding that few other member states have recognized the Decade. Wherever possible, governments and civil society should be encouraged to recognize the International Decade, even in the final years.
2) Consideration should be given to a subsequent International Decade. We are inspired in Canada by the impact of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which came after three UN international decades for Indigenous Peoples. It is clear that improving the situation of people of African descent around the world is a long-term endeavour that requires concerted action over many years.

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3) For states to continue their efforts to respect commitments to address racism, in the context of reduced financial resources and emerging new expressions of racism and discrimination.
4) That the United Nations and all its agencies continue to promote human rights for people of African descent

Thank you, High Commissioner, for your consideration of this submission.

Respectfully,

Sébastien Goupil
Secretary-General

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