

Background Note

1. Introduction

In the context of the International Year for People of African Descent *I*, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination will hold a day of thematic discussion on racial discrimination against people of African descent during its seventy-eighth session, to be held from 14 February to 11 March 2011.

2. Focus and objectives:

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has identified this thematic debate as an initiative to contribute to the celebrations of the International Year for People of African Descent. The Year “aims at strengthening national actions and regional and international cooperation for the benefit of people of African descent in relation to their full enjoyment of economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights, their participation and integration in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society, and the promotion of a greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage and culture.”²

The thematic debate aims to enhance understanding of the causes and consequences of racial discrimination against people of African descent through an exchange of relevant information and an examination of the advances, challenges and lessons learned in this regard. The definition of racial discrimination as per Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination “shall 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.”³

3. Date and Venue:

The thematic discussion will take place in a plenary meeting at the United Nations Office at Geneva, Palais des Nations, room XVIII, Geneva, on 7 March 2011, from 10:00 to 13:00 and from 15:00 to 18:00 hours.

4. Participation:

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination invites States parties, United Nations bodies and specialised agencies, United Nations human rights mechanisms, national human rights institutions, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and other relevant organizations and individuals to participate in the thematic discussion, be present at the meeting, share their experience and express their views. Written contributions specifically related to the themes under discussion are welcome. Participants wishing to make a 3-minute oral intervention during the meeting should inform the Secretariat of the Committee and, in order to facilitate

simultaneous translation during the event, provide an outline of their statement in advance.

Written contributions and statements may be submitted in English, French or Spanish. They should be sent to the Secretariat in electronic form to: ghabtom@ohchr.org (copied to: hfuentes@ohchr.org) by **4 March 2011**.

5. Methodology:

The format of the thematic discussion will consist of an inter-active dialogue following a 15-minute presentations by invited panelists on specific themes: **People of African descent and the international human rights mechanisms: challenges & accomplishments; History and effects of the transatlantic slave trade on people of African descent; Current socioeconomic situations and issues of social inclusion relating to people of African descent; Women of African descent and People of African descent of more recent migration from Africa.** In addition to their oral presentation, and in order to facilitate simultaneous translation during the event, the panelists are requested to submit a written paper in advance (summary and written submission). Following presentations made by the panelists, the floor will be opened for an inter-active dialogue with participants. The format of the discussion day is meant to allow participants to exchange views in a frank and open dialogue. The Committee therefore asks participants to avoid reading out formal statements during the discussion day.

6. Outcome

The panel debate will serve to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of discrimination against people of African descent; to promote the visibility of the diverse heritage and culture of people of African descent; and to collect lessons learned in this regard.

The Committee, in a subsequent session, will systematize and study the information obtained, proceed to debate and decide further actions, including issuing recommendations in relation to the elimination of racial discrimination against people of African descent when examining reports of States parties, make proposals on the implementation of article 1 of the Convention, and the possibility of initiating the preparation of a General Recommendation on the subject in the context of the Convention.

Information presented during the day of thematic discussion, including the submissions of the panelists, statements made during the debate as well as relevant existing statements by other UN bodies will be collected and made available on the OHCHR website, together with an informal summary of the debate.

7. Accreditation:

Please fill out the conference registration form and send it to the Secretariat by email: aquist@ohchr.org and copy to crosniansky@ohchr.org, or by Fax: +41 (022) 917 9008 by **4 March 2011**.

For further information on the thematic discussion, please contact the Secretariat of the Committee hfuentes@ohchr.org.
