

~~★~~ INTERP. (★)

C.C.

**Item 9 Interactive Dialogue with Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent**

**Statement by the United States of America as Country Concerned**

**33<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council**

**September 26, 2016**

**Geneva, Switzerland**

The United States was pleased to invite, and to facilitate the visit of, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for a country visit from January 19-29, 2016. We welcome the three members of the Working Group, Mireille Fanon Mendes-France, Sabelo Gumede, and Ricardo Sunga III, here today.

The Working Group met with federal, state, and local government officials, judges and lawyers, members of Congress, police officers, academics, members of civil society, and hundreds of African Americans, in Washington, D.C.; Baltimore, Maryland; Jackson, Mississippi; Chicago, Illinois; and New York City.

The Working Group's visit addressed a comprehensive range of issues impacting African-Americans, and members of other minorities, within the United States, including issues related to the criminal justice system, barriers to political participation, disparities in access to education, health, housing and employment, and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

We were happy to arrange this visit and take note of the Working Group's conclusions and recommendations, which we will distribute to relevant stakeholders, including the state and local government officials who met with the Working Group, for appropriate consideration.

We would like to highlight some of the steps, among many, that the United States has been taking to address issues addressed by the Working Group in its report.

On Saturday, September 24, the United States was proud to open its newest addition to the Smithsonian Institution, The National Museum of African American History and Culture, in Washington, D.C. It is the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture. And further to the recommendation of the Working Group that "monuments, memorials and markers [...] be erected to facilitate public dialogue" we note that new projects are emerging around the country, such as a planned memorial to the victims of lynching to be built by the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, in 2017.

We appreciate the Working Group's recognition of the "My Brother's Keeper" (MBK) Task Force, a coordinated Federal effort to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. In response

to the President's call to action, nearly 250 communities in all 50 states have accepted the President's My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge; more than \$600 million in private sector and philanthropic grants and in-kind resources and \$1 billion in low-interest financing have been committed in alignment with MBK; and new federal policy initiatives, grant programs, and guidance are being implemented to ensure that every child has a clear pathway to success from cradle to college and career.

Earlier this year, in response to recommendations from the MBK initiative, the Department of Education released a new resource guide, "Beyond the Box: Increasing Access to Higher Education for Justice-Involved Individuals," urging colleges and universities to remove barriers that can prevent citizens with criminal records from pursuing higher education. And just a few weeks ago, the Departments of Education and Justice put out new tools on the appropriate use of school resource officers and law enforcement to improve school climates, help ensure safety, and support student achievement in our nation's schools.

We would encourage the Working Group to devote more attention to issues surrounding racism that are more prominent in public discourse, particularly police brutality and racial profiling, and in this regard we would highlight the work of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. In May 2015, the Task Force submitted to the President a final report of best practices and recommendations, based on expertise from stakeholders and input from the public. The task force recommendations provide meaningful solutions to help law enforcement agencies and communities strengthen trust and collaboration, while ushering the nation into the next phase of community-focused policing. The report was followed by an Implementation Guide, which outlines strategies to assist stakeholders with implementation. Thousands of agencies, associations, and related organizations across the country are now implementing various task force recommendations.

Furthermore, DOJ has opened numerous civil rights investigations into police departments that may have engaged in a pattern or practice of conduct that deprives persons of their rights. In addition, DOJ has obtained more than 250 criminal convictions against police officers in the past five years.

On issues of prison conditions, we would highlight that in January of this year, President Obama announced the adoption of recommendations by DOJ on the use of solitary confinement in the federal prison system, including the ending of solitary confinement for juveniles.

Finally, we reaffirm our commitment to promote racial and ethnic equality to mark the International Decade for People of African Descent. In doing so, we recognize the common challenges faced by persons of African descent in the United States and all over the world. The Decade is an opportunity for the United States to encourage positive domestic discourse on human rights at home, highlight over 50 years of progress under the U.S. Civil Rights Act, and work with international partners to promote nondiscrimination and equality.

The United States has made great progress toward countering racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related forms of intolerance, but we acknowledge much remains to be done. Although we may not agree with all of its factual or legal conclusions, we thank the Working Group for its findings from its constructive visit.

