

International decade of people of African Descent

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As a representative of Pan-African Support Group (PASG), I would take this time to thank Sen. Myron Jackson, Legislative Secretary and Chairman of the Committee on Culture, Historic Preservation, Youth, and Recreation, for giving us the opportunity to testify on the 2014 UN Resolution proclaiming “International Decade for People of African Descent” (IDPAD) and the draft legislation urging Government House and the V.I. Legislature to support , initiate, and implement activities and programs for the International Decade. We urge both executive and legislative branches to support and pursue the goals and objectives of IDPAD.

Theme

According to the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, the theme is “People of African Descent: recognition, justice, and development”.

African Personality and Identity

On the concept of the African Personality, Edward Wilmot Blyden wrote:

“You need to be told constantly that you are Africans, not Europeans, black men, not white men; that you were created with the physical qualities which distinguish you for the glory of the Creator, and for the happiness and perfection of humanity; and that in your endeavors to make yourselves something else, you are not only spoiling your nature and turning aside from your destiny, but you are robbing humanity of the part you ought to contribute to its complete development and welfare, and you became salt which has lost its savor—good for nothing—but to be trodden down by others.” (1890s)

In his book *Class Struggle in Africa* (1970), Kwame Nkrumah wrote:

“All peoples of African descent, whether they live in North or South America, the Caribbean, or in any other part of the world are Africans and belong to the African nation.”

The Objectives of the International Decade

The main objectives of the international Decade can be fully attained when we have achieved the goals of African liberation and unity. In his book *Groundings With my Brothers* (1969), Walter Rodney wrote:

“Black Power in the West Indies means three closely related things: (1) the break with imperialism which is historically white racist; (ii) the assumption of power by the black masses in the islands; (iii) the cultural reconstruction of the society in the image of the blacks.”

We must eradicate old and new manifestations of colonialism that hinders the enjoyment and benefits of our human rights-economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights, including the rights of self-determination and to development. With the implementation of the Durban

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Declaration and Programme of Action, these following objectives should be pursued and attained:

- To ensure the full benefits of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for African people abroad and their full and equal participation in all aspects of society through national, regional, and international action and cooperation.
- To promote knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture, and contribution of African people to the development of societies.
- To adopt and implement national, regional, and international legal frameworks based on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Durban documents.

To know our basic human rights, every African should read the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and the 2014 UN Programme of Activities for the Implementation of the International Decade for People of African descent.

Recognition

Besides striving for the four ideas of Recognition, we must understand and acknowledge that slavery, the slave trade, and colonialism violated our basic rights as a people and human beings. These rights include liberation, self-determination, human dignity, equality, life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

Equal Rights & the Right of Self-determination for all

According to the UN Declaration on the Granting of Independence for Colonial Countries and Peoples (General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) 1960), the United Nations recognized “that the peoples of the world ardently desire the end of colonialism in all its manifestations”. In

addition, the United Nations declared: “All peoples have the right to self-determination by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.” The General Assembly recognized “the passionate yearning for freedom in all dependent peoples and the decisive role of such peoples in the attainment of their independence.” The internationally acceptable political status of self-determination, full self-government, and political equality are as follows: a sovereign, independent state, free association with an independent state, and integration with an independent state. Consequently, the UN would assist national liberation movements for self-determination in Trust and Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs). The US federal government should take immediate steps to transfer all powers to the peoples of the U.S. territories, without any conditions, reservation, and distinction, to freely pursue political, economic, social and cultural

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development. The federal government and local government , with the participation and consultation of civil society, should plan, adopt, and implement international, national, and local legal frameworks, action-oriented policies, programs, and projects to remove all obstacles violating African rights and preventing the sustainable development of African people in the Virgin Islands and elsewhere. In other words, both national and local government should have action plans to achieve cultural diversity, economic equality, social justice, equal opportunity, and participatory democracy. Based on the theme, the UN Programme of Activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent (General Assembly Resolution, 18 November 2014) has recommended progressive activities that the states or governments can conduct to advance African people.

Let me cite specific ideas related to Recognition, Justice, and Development.

Recognition

For example, this local government should introduce, integrate and include African studies in American/Western education from the primary level to the secondary level and at the university level. You cannot tell any other histories without beginning that story in precolonial Africa. African studies cover interrelated subject matters such as history, heritage, culture, politics, economics, sociology, literature, spirituality, science, arts, and philosophy of precolonial Africa. In addition, our children, youth, and young people should receive quality public education that provides historical knowledge of selves, offers nation- and community-building skills, and conveys the values, principles, and ways of the African cultural heritage.

Justice

On the local, regional, national, and international levels, we need to address the question of reparation. The sufferance, evils, and wrongs were inflicted on our African ancestors and their descendants during the periods of slavery and colonialism. Western state that were involved in slavery and colonialism and the ruling elite who reaped ill-gotten gains from the enslavement and exploitation of African people should make apologies and pay just and adequate reparation and other remedies to right the wrongs and repair the victims of past racial injustice, social disparity, economic exploitation, and foreign rule.

Development

Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. told us that economic inequality, poverty, militarism, and/or racism are the triplets of social misery for workers, farmers, poor people, women, children, and peoples of colors. According to Kwame Nkrumah, Eric Williams, and other radical African

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writers, racism, inequality, and poverty are the natural outcomes slavery, the master-servant relationship, capitalist development and cheap labor.

We have a right to development. We the people should be involved in the decision-making and development-implementing processes in the construction of a humanist, egalitarian, collectivist, and democratic society. With power and organization, we can achieve qualitative political, economic, and social changes in our islands. A Non-Capitalistic Way, including a mixed economy, is a viable economic alternative to distribute the wealth, income, resources, and power on an equitable basis. A progressive leadership would embrace and promote an inside-out philosophy and policy of development that value people over profit. This policy considers quality public education, full employment, universal health and affordable housing-all human rights, as top priorities to expand "paradise" for in our islands. The government should offer programs to support and fund the development of cooperatives, small businesses, and workers-owned companies for the empowerment of African people and for shared wealth.

Education on equality and awareness-raising

Provision (e) urges the states to support Non-Government Organizations that promote awareness through information and education and that strive to restore the dignity of people of African descent.

Accomplishments of the Pan-African Support Groups

For over three (30) decades, the Pan-African Support Group (PASG) has played an important role in raising the race and class consciousness of African people in the Virgin Islands. The here objectives of PASG programs and activities are

1. Raise the African and political consciousness of black masses.
2. Form and Build progressive, mass based organizations and movements.
3. Empower the people and activists to change the conditions and circumstances of African people.

Here are the following accomplishments of the PASG:

1. The formation of the PASG as a progressive, Pan-Africanist, working-class, and nationalist organization.
2. The development of study circles and a political education program that offer political science, leadership, ideological, and organizational trainings.
3. The sponsorship of annual tribute and reflection of great Africans such Edward Blyden, Malcolm X, Martin King Jr., Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley, Kwame Nkrumah, and Kwame Ture.
4. The annual observance and reflection of our heritages such as 1333 VI Freedom Fighters Day/ African Slave Revolution, Emancipation Day of 1848, Black History Month, Women History Month, African Heritage Week/African Liberation Day (1963), and Kwanzaa (1966).
5. Initiation of campaign against Columbus commemoration.
6. Contribution of guest-editorials and articles to the Daily News, St. Croix Avis, and the Daily News Black History Supplement.
7. The production of PASG booklets related to African Liberation Day and Kwanzaa.
8. The presentation of PASG views, positions and activities as speakers on WSTA and Radio One.
9. Support and solidarity with the antiapartheid national liberation and Black Consciousness movements in South Africa/Azania.
10. Sponsorship of many radio programs that provide analysis, research, and commentary on the history, heritage, culture, experience and freedom struggle of African on the motherland and in the diaspora.
11. Sponsorship of program featuring militant speakers and representatives of progressive organizations and movements from Eritrea, Puerto Rico, Grenada, Haiti, Brazil, St. Lucia, Barbados, Antigua, South Africa/Azania, Guinea, and California.
12. The invitation and sponsorship of dynamic speakers: Kwame Ture, Mutabaruka, Hillary Beckles, S.E.M. Pheko, Terry Marryshow, Judge Bruce Wright, Rev. Lawrence Lucas, Marcus Garvey, Jr., James Turner, David Hines, Don Rojas, Pambeli Mzuri, and Alaine Brown, just to name a few.
13. The cooperation and coordination with the following African organizations: the Edward Blyden Society, Nation of Islam, We Grow Food, Inc., Nyabinghi Order of Rastafari,

Ethiopian World Federation, Rastafari Improvement Association, All-African People's revolutionary Party (US), Kwanzaa 365, Per Ankh, Inc. and Environmental Rangers.

14. The formation and/or participation in African centered organizations; the Imbokodo Society of Africa, Committee for Self-Determination, Edward Wilmot Blyden Society, Inc., Emancipation Day Coalition, Kwanzaa Committee, African Appraisal Workshop, and African Slave Revolution Commemoration and Pilgrimage Committee.
15. The coordination with UVI Student Government association and African Heritage Committee in providing awareness-raising educational and cultural programs and activities for African students in particular and the community in general.

Last month, the PASG, UVI Black Heritage Committee, and Kwanzaa 365 sponsored three African awareness-raising documentaries at Chase Auditorium in the observance of Black History Month. The documentaries were "Motherland", "500 Years Later", and "Hidden Colors One". "Motherland" tell us the story of the past/present history, culture, and politics of Africa.

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"Motherland" offers a Pan-African vision for powerful and united Africa. "500 Years Later" tells a story of the global problems faced by Africans in the Diaspora, consequences of slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy and the struggle for the right of self-determination. "Hidden Color On" tells a global story of the African presence and contribution to world civilization and culture.

In closing, we support a draft legislation that is in accordance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of racial discrimination, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the UN Declaration for the Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples. The aims of this legislation should be (1) to protect and meet the human rights of African people in the Virgin Islands, (2) promote the sustainable development of African people, and (3) empower African people in all areas of this Caribbean society.