

AFRORESISTANCE

"The Urgency of Now: Systemic Racism and the Lessons of 2020"

Statement Delivered to the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent during the 27th Session of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.

December 1st, 2020.

Adhering to the framework of the 27th Session of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, entitled "The Urgency of Now: Systemic Racism and the Lessons of 2020", as a session to build on on WGEPAD work and reports, we, AfroResistance, an organization with the mission to *Educate and Organize for Racial Justice, Human Rights and Democracy in the Americas*, in the spirit of the International Decade of Afro-Descendants, request the attention of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent so that the proposals and recommendations presented be taken into account as they evaluate Member States and their current practices in upholding the rights of Black people in the Americas.

Haiti

January 12 of 2020 marked a decade since the magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck the island of Hispaniola, near Léogâne, around 25 kilometres from Haiti's capital Port au Prince. This tragic earthquake caused over 300,000 deaths and left half a million Haitian people without a home. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that 1.5 million people were affected.

Since the earthquake, around 10,000 people have died from treatable epidemics such as cholera and According to IOM's most recent estimate, 32,788 people remain in 22 displacement sites across the country.

There have also been ongoing protests against the corruption and bureaucracy of President Jovenel Moïse and his administration because poverty and social destabilization are worsening, and we know that when it comes to poverty and social injustices, women and children are disproportionately impacted, making them more vulnerable to violence.

Migration

In the Latin American region there is an increased number of Black Migrants. Many that get stuck between borders along the region. One example is in the border of Panama and Colombia, an area already plagued by violence due to the civil war in Colombia, that has left as

estimated 220,000 dead, 25,000 disappeared, and 5.7 million displaced over the last half century. Presently there are currently over 400 women, many with children, and many pregnant at the border at this moment. Most of the migrants currently are from Haiti, Brasil, Angola and the Democratif Republic of Congo.

In the current situation with Covid-19, many of these migrants have contracted the virus, which has made migration, especially on state borders such were Migrant camps have been set up without much access to tests, public health services, hospitals and proper care and insolation from everyone else, a even more dangerous journey.

Human Rights Defenders

Attacks against community leaders, human rights defenders, especially Black and indigenous women, have been exacerbating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the entire Pacific region of Colombia there is a grave crisis of human rights violations. This has to do with political and economic actors that want to gain access to the natural resources, including water, forests, gold and all other resources. I would like to mention here Clemencia Carabalí Rodallega and Francia Marquez Mina, two of many Black Colombian Human Rights defenders, who have survived both recent and multiple attacks. Black Women Human Rights defenders in Colombia describe the situation as part of a long history of genocide committed in the region that started more than 500 years ago.

In the field of reproductive justice, Black Women and Girls have been facing public attacks led by alliances between political parties, conservative civil society organisations and religious groups. Women advocating for access to reproductive health, to sexual education and for the rights of LGBTIQ persons have been targeted by campaigns on social media, and death threats. They have been called “feminazi terrorists”, “promoters of gender ideology”, and “people against God's”. The covid-19 situation has also been used by many governments to advance laws and policies that restrict access to reproductive justice services.

Violence against women and girls

As we are fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impact on women and girls, especially Black women and girls, a pandemic of femicide and gender-based violence is taking the lives of women and girls everywhere as well as in the Latin America region.

The season also sees the rising of another form of violence against women: the political femicide, term elaborated by Renata Souza, a Black Brazilian politician, after the assassination of Marielle Franco to define the intersecting form of violence suffer by Marielle as well as many Black women human rights defenders that challenge local power dynamics and run for goverment positions.

Violence Against Black Youths

I would like to mention João Alberto Silveira Freitas, who was beaten to death by private security guards outside Carrefour, a grocery store in Porto Alegre, sparking a series of protests around Brazil. For more than 500 years, we are saying Black Lives Matter.

Under Covid-19 there has been an increased killing of Black Youths, both at the hands of the state, as well as by other armed groups in the Americas.

Justice for Miguel Otavio

Mirtes, a Black woman from Recife, Brazil, lives in one of the 4 Brazilian states that includes domestic workers becoming essential workers during the covid-19 pandemic. The states determined that domestic workers should work even during the city lockdown. "Its cruelty, because quarantine should not be a privilege, says Luiza Batista, the president of the national domestic workers union.

Mirtes has a brilliant and full of life 5 years-old boy, Miguel Otavio. Since there is a lockdown, schools are closed so Mirtes has no choice but to take Miguel to her work. They arrive at the rich part of the city, an hour's ride away by bus and Mirtes starts doing her activities, serving the rich white Brazilian elite. The boss asks Mirtes to take the dog for a walk, since she is having a manicure.

Mirtes had just returned from the walk, when she saw her five-year-old on the ground, dying.

What happened between those minutes?

Miguel started asking for his mother and tried to look for her. He goes to the elevator, where the boss hits the 9th floor button and walks away. Miguel fell from the 9th floor and is now dying in front of her mother.

"She killed my dreams,". "She ended my life." "The rest of my life without my son", "She did not have patience to take care of him" Mirtes said.

"I dedicated 6 years of my life to their children, she could not dedicate 10 minutes to my grandchild, Miguel" said Marta, Miguel's grandmother.

Tomorrow is the 6th month anniversary of Miguel's death. His mother Mirtes that could not be here speaking today, are currently preparing for the first audience of the case. So, today, I want to tell her: Mirtes, we also claim Justice for Miguel.

Miguel has a mother and her name is Mirtes Souza! Remember this name, history will be made by this Black woman.

This is a story of historical racism, inequality and the impacts of covid-19 on the lives of Black people.

In Brazil, there are more than 6 million domestic workers, 95% of them are women, 64% of them are Black women. Remnants of a never completed abolition process.

It's not a coincidence that the first fatal victim of covid-19 was a domestic worker in Brazil. Her

employers had just arrived from Italy, they did the test and they knew they probably got covid but they did not inform the worker.

Today, Brazil has more than 6 million cases and 170 thousand people died. However, state violence persists and actually increased during the covid-19 pandemic. The Black movement in Brazil had to go to the supreme court to demand the paralyzation of special police forces operations in the favelas.

To finalize, I would like to say the names of many children victims of police brutality and state terror:

Jenifer Cilene Gomes, 11 anos, Presente

Kauan Peixoto, 12 anos, Presente,

Kauã Rosario, 11 anos, Presente.

Kauê Ribeiro, 11 anos, Presente

Ágatha Vitória Sales Félix, 8 anos, Presente

Kethellen Umbelino de Oliveira Gomes, 5 anos, Presente

João Pedro Matos Pinto, 14 anos, Presente

Ítalo Augusto, 7 anos, Presente

AND

Miguel Otávio Santana da Silva, 5 anos, Presente!

Statement delivered by

Ana Paula Barreto

Program Director

AfroResistance

AFRORESISTANCE

Recommendations to the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

Afroresistance recommends that the Working Group and relevant stakeholders center policies and programs designed by Haitian women, where they can live in an environment with dignity, privacy, and the fulfillment of their human rights are respected and ensured.

AfroResistance recommends that this Working Group and relevant stakeholders examine the situation of Black Migrants in the region. Black migrants are plagued with racism and xenophobia at every point of their migration trajectory and this makes their trajectory even more vulnerable.

AfroResistance recommends that this Working Group and relevant stakeholders put pressure on all governments in the Americas to sign and ratify the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, and it follow past recommendations that impact all Migrants from the CERD Committee recommendations.

AfroResistance joins the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its causes and consequences, and recommends the Working Group and relevant stakeholders to take urgent steps to prevent femicide or gender related killings of women and girls, and gender-based violence against women and girls, through the establishment of multidisciplinary national and community-based prevention bodies or Femicide observatories on violence against women and girls. These bodies should: 1) train communities on femicide and gender-based violence against women and girls and its impacts to the community as a whole; 2) conduct an analysis and recommend measures for the prevention of such cases, and 3) ensure political femicide and femicide victims are not forgotten by their communities.