We Belong Here: Framework for Human Rights and Equity for Australians of African Descent

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This publication is based on the African Australian Advocacy Centre's (AAAC) submission to the Australian Government in Response to the United Nations Working Group of Experts of Peoples of African Descent (UN WGEPAD) Recommendations final report in **November, 2023.**

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Acknowledgement of Country and Context

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands we now call Australia, where we live and conduct our business, and we pay our respects to their elders past and present. May we continue to honour Indigenous knowledges and build relationship with First Nations people in this country.

This submission takes place in a settler colonial context. For members of the African Australian Advocacy Centre (AAAC) who are persons of African descent (PoAD), we determine our own nuanced experiences of Blackness, Africaness and living in a settler-colonial context[i]. There has sometimes been alignment, but also distance between experiences of bla(c)k identity politics between First Nations struggles and Afrodiasporic struggles where issues of sovereignty for Indigenous Australians are centred in the Australian context (1). It is therefore important to acknowledge the different intersecting or distinctive contexts and historical stances for various communities.

Despite Africans being present on the First Fleet in Australia and the misrepresented historical record of Africans in Australia[ii], the recent wave in black African immigration is dominated by former refugees who have left war-torn countries[iii]. The arrival of a large intake of Africans in the post-World War II period marks the unprecedented arrival of large communities from Africa where 'increasing African immigration has been part of the post-war transformation of Australia from an overwhelmingly British-dominated population to a multicultural society' (Hugo 2009:17)[iv].The establishment of the White Australia policy introduced by the Australian government since 1901-1973:

> Effectively prevented the settlement of Africans and others of non- European origin in Australia. Accordingly, in 1947 there were only 75,506 Africa-born people in Australia and 78.3% of these were South African.

> Hence, in the period before World War Two, there were only small numbers of Africa-born persons and they were overwhelmingly the children of colonial functionaries and Anglo Saxons from Southern Africa. (AHRC 2010:16)[v]

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(1) Bla(c)k Referencing Australian First Nations people's identification with Blackness.
Blak – refers to First Nations identities in the lands we now call Australia who may identify as bla(c)k.

A recent visit in December, 2022 by the UN Working Group of Experts of People of African Descent (UN WGEPAD) claimed that people of African descent living in Australia are 'living under the siege of racism' (OHCHR 2022:1)[vi]. The UN WGEPAD experts reported the experiences of people of African descent continue to be

> impacted by the country's settler-colonial past, its White Australia immigration policy, which was dropped in 1973, and its legacy, still endured by the First Nations peoples, including Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders, and South Sea Islanders. "People of African descent experience a culture of denial of this racialised reality, and the legacies of this via pervasive 'Othering' in public spaces and entrenched disadvantage. (OHCHR 2022:1)[vii]

Despite acculturative and social resettlement stressors for some cohorts, the vast majority of peoples of African descent who have made Australia their home expressed gratitude for being provided the opportunity for a fresh start in a new country. In addition, they demonstrate that they are 'proud of their contributions to Australian society and their desire to contribute to changing narratives of what it means to be African in a country like Australia' (Gatwiri and Anderson 2022:139).[viii]

About African Australian Advocacy Centre (AAAC)

The African Australian Advocacy Centre (AAAC)[ix] formed as a result of ongoing consultation with African Australian communities in Australia to address issues and concerns to improve the wellbeing of African Australians, with a broader vision to:

1. see Australians of African descent recognised as an integral part of multicultural Australian society;
2. strengthen the social cohesion, equality, fairness, and opportunities for members of African Australian Communities; and
3. build inclusive communities, improve outcomes, and create sustainable opportunities for African Australian communities.

As the peak body representing Africans across Australia, AAAC's key focus is to inform policy outcomes for our community through Advocacy, Consultation, and Research. AAAC collaborate with universities, not-for-profit organisations, corporate entities, and stakeholders across all levels of government.

The core forms of advocacy and research translation the AAAC is involved in are:

Forms of Research Translation

Written
- Submissions
- Policy briefs
- Guidelines
- Practice guides
- Tenders
- Research reports
- Newsletters
- Media articles

Media and Presentation
- Infographics
- Videos
- Research presentations
- Public talks
- Webinars
- Podcasts

Interactive or Applied
- Stakeholder meetings
- Collaborative workshops
- Consultative forums
- Advisory panels
- Demonstration or pilot projects
- On-site demonstrations
- Industry secondments
- Media interviews

Executive Summary

On 12-22nd December 2022, the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (UN WGEPAD) conducted a fact-finding visit to Australia to assess the human rights situation of Africans and those of African descent. Its *End of Mission Statement* highlights concerns regarding "the prevalence of racial discrimination and the human rights situation of Africans and persons of African descent in Australia".[x]

On 27th September, 2023 the UN WGEPAD released a final report:

A/HRC/54/67/Add.2: Visit to Australia - Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent - Advance unedited version | OHCHR

In the report, the Working Group provides an overview of the current legal, institutional and policy framework and measures taken to prevent racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance faced by people of African descent in Australia, underscoring positive developments as well as gaps in implementation. Under the umbrella of manifestations of racial discrimination, the Working Group describes several key areas to be addressed:

1. Covid-19 response measures;
2. Hate speech and negative racial stereotypes;
3. Law enforcement, racial profiling, and impunity;
4. Immigration and Resettlement Policy;
5. Asylum, Mandatory detention, and Indefinite detention;
6. Structural discrimination;
7. Employment;
8. Education;
9. Health;
10. Cultural Rights: Theatre, Music, Food and Sport;
11. Intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination;
12. Children of African Descent.

Concluding the report, the UN WGEPAD highlights good practices and the main challenges identified and makes 107 concrete recommendations. The Australian report presentation from the UN Human Rights Council was available to at 2:22 mins on UN Media in September 2023: https://media.un.org/en/asset/k13/k13m8m5s4e. The Australian Government response was captured in the first chapter of proceedings: https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1b/k1b41nt7sf. *These web links have been archived on UN web tv.* The overall findings reinforce the need, as highlighted in the recent AAAC submission to the Australian Multicultural Framework review, for a National Human Rights Act that protects everyone's rights, regardless of who they are and where they live.

Subsequent to the release of the Final Report, the UN WGEPAD hosted the Regional Meeting for Asia Pacific on the International Decade for People of African Descent on the 15-16th January, 2024:
https://www.africanaustralianadvocacy.org.au/regional-meeting-for-asia-pacific-on-the-international-decade-for-people-of-african-descent/.
The AAAC submitted aspects of this submission to the proceedings which:
-highlighted the need for ongoing collaborative work in the region whilst understanding localised nuances;
-supported recommendations to extend the decade for people of African descent due to limited awareness in some contexts;
-recognised the commitment of governments and civil society to continue to work towards fundamental transformative reform in the areas of equality and human rights whilst highlighting examples of ideal practices.
Strengthening collaboration and co-design is integral to the AAAC's local and global impact. Dr. Barbara Reynolds, the Chairperson of the UN WGEPAD, shared after the corresponding symposium (see appendix 3), that she is inspired and encouraged by the efforts of the AAAC and other collaborators post the release of the UN WGEPAD recommendations. She encourages responders such as Australian Government entities that:

'Rather than being overwhelmed by the magnitude of the recommendations and human rights concerns, there is a sense that Australia is in a unique position to use this as an opportunity to avoid what other countries are addressing!'

With a focus on policy change, the purpose of this submission is a preliminary report, published to stimulate discussion with the Australian government through national, state, and local government platforms responsible for governance, participation, lawmaking and implementation of legislation. This submission responds to the UN WGEPAD's *Final Report* which identified several key issues that require urgent national attention. It is our intention that this submission marks an important stage in the proposal of the Australian government commissioning a National White Paper/s and strengthening ongoing collaboration to respond to the UN WGEPAD recommendations facilitated by the AAAC.

Noël Zihabamwe, Chairperson of the AAAC, details AAAC's priority areas in response to the UN WGEPAD recommendations:

> *As we embark on this journey, we understand the importance of legislative alignment. We have started a comprehensive review of existing laws and policies to identify where aligning with the UN WGEPAD recommendations is needed. We will further our collaboration with legal experts, lawmakers, and human rights advocates to advocate to amend legislation, to promote equality and combat racism.*

The UN WGEPAD recommendations identified that people of African descent living in Australia have experienced significant inequity. They play a critical but often unrecognised and under-resourced role in society. There is limited but growing, sustainable research in this area, particularly from a lived experience perspective, resulting in significant policy and funding gaps and poorer outcomes for African diaspora communities and stakeholders supporting them. Increased recognition, representation, and resources for key African diaspora-led stakeholders, such as the AAAC, will lead to more robust and cohesive communities and more public awareness on societal issues such as systemic racism experienced by African diaspora communities.

By articulating the gap in knowledge for African Australian experiences with Australian racialising discourses, this submission aids in the narration of the complexity of Australian Africans' individual and community experiences as it pertains to their experiences in multicultural Australia.

Findings

AAAC analysts have summarised the recommendations in the *UN WGEPAD Final Report* into the following themes in order to target strategic action:

	Ten key findings of the Working group encompass issues related to discrimination, integration, detention, policing, education, and health that affect people of African descent in Australia.	
1		**Racial hierarchy and exclusion:** People of African descent in Australia experience racial hierarchy in policy and practice; and Australian national identity narratives does not fully recognise PoAD as 'fully Australian'.
2		**Limitations and conditions of resettlement:** Australian resettlement policies have severe limits and conditions that affect people of African descent, including high fees for language tests and re-training.
3		**Integration challenges:** Integration is seen as a one-way process, and there are financial pressures and obstacles for former refugees from Africa to reunite with their families.
4		**Human rights violations in police, immigration, and prison custody including suspicious deaths and custodial violence:** People of African descent in Immigration detention facilities experience human rights violations, including excessive force, deaths in custody, and physical violence which raise questions about accountability.
5		**Targeted surveillance and racial profiling:** Black bodies have historically been subject to surveillance, and people of African descent in Australia face racial profiling, over-policing, and abuse of authority.
6		**Indefinite detention concerns:** Australia's use of indefinite detention, including against humanitarian refugees, raises human rights concerns, particularly when individuals are unaware of immigration consequences after criminal convictions.

7	**Failures of due process:** Systematic failures of notice, due process, and recognition of contributions lead to unjust outcomes in Immigration proceedings and hinder legal access for detainees.
8	**Disproportionate impact of COVID-19:** People of African descent face specific risks and barriers during the COVID-19 pandemic, with limited access to care, culturally competent interventions, and translated materials.
9	**Educational challenges and discrimination:** Children and young people of African descent face racism, bullying, and disparities in educational experiences, with little representation and positive cultural content in curricula.
10	**Issues relating to mental health and trauma treatment:** Issues were raised relating to people of African descents access to service providers in particular through the health sector. Cultural sensitivity, understanding of services and delivery location were raised.

In response, Noël Zihabamwe (Chairperson of the AAAC) stated:

> *You may be surprised or even shocked by results of the UN WGEPAD findings. However, we are not surprised or shocked by the recommendations, these demonstate lived experiences for many people we come across at the AAAC and we're glad to share these stories.*

The following sections of the submission detail specific issues, and then point out possible courses of action in terms of policy, legislation and strengths-based better practice frameworks.

Recommendations moving forward

The AAAC's priority areas, underscored during engagement and submission to the *Multicultural Framework Review Panel, Department of Home Affairs*, focus on pivotal aspects crucial to the experiences of equity for African Australian communities in order to meet Australia's International Human Rights obligations. These encompass the Australian Government working with the AAAC to implement targeted responses to our identified priority areas:

1	Advocating for cultural awareness through Intercultural frameworks (see below) of racial and cultural dignity within government services to ensure a more inclusive experience for all, as well as the imperative of tackling racial discrimination head-on.
2	Equally critical is bridging the gap in education and employment opportunities, enabling African Australians to contribute effectively to society. African Australians have a human right to live with dignity and to navigate all Australian systems in a dignified way that is free from the micro-practices of racial aggression, cultural stereotyping and insensitivity.
3	We emphasise the necessity of community representation in policy decisions, the provision of accessible mental health support, and fostering the potential of our youth through tailored integration programs (through an Intercultural framework). This comprehensive approach reflects the resonance between our priorities, international principles like the United Nations' stance, our local Senate, parliamentary and Human rights submissions, and the insights of academics shared during our recent symposium (see Appendix 3). Our commitment stands united in crafting a more equitable and inclusive Australia where the unique needs and voices of African Australians are valued and supported.
4	We recommend the implementation of demographic-centric targeted programs such as third space arts projects[xi]; sports engagement;[xii] tailored co-design for mental health services and culturally-centred health promotion[xiii].

5	Further research would therefore involve more specific articulation of Communication for Social Change (a development theory) through Culture Centred Approaches approach frameworks.
6	Create a Parliamentary Friends of Africa group (PFA) federally similar to the newly created one in NSW supported by the AAAC. Additionally, an African Australian Advisory Council may serve as a bridge between the Federal government led by the PM/Cabinet.
7	We recommend an adapted policy of Interculturalism or Transculturality, which captures some of the living traits of cultural change as highly diverse contemporary societies become globalised offering a conceptual landscape for considering cultures as relational webs and flows of significance in active interaction with one another[xv].
8	We suggest that change can only come when it's done with, not for. Therefore, we recommend the Australian government needs to fund and implement co-designed frameworks that foreground the dignity of people while ensuring effective participation of people of African descent and their communities must be demonstrated in the design, implementation, and support measures adopted to recognise their hybrid identities and self-determined ideas for flourishing in Australian society.
9	Lastly, we recommend the Australian government legislating a National Human Rights Act that will benefit the whole community, ensuring everyone's human rights are protected.

AAAC's specific requests to the Australian Government

- Funding for research targeted on interest areas identified in this submission; see below Appendix 2 – literature review.
- A National Whitepaper funded by the Australian government to review comparative legal and policy contexts within Australian frameworks; some relevant policy frameworks are outlined in the UN WGEPAD recommendations.
- Funding to host a National conference in 2024 tracking the trajectory of the local, national and international response to the UN WGEPAD recommendations.
- Funding to support the 7-10 focus groups in response to the AAAC survey; see Appendix 4).
- Funding to host three-five full time AAAC positions hired to support the Australian government in responding to and continue liaising with the UN WGEPAD to track our outcomes together longitudinally.

The UN WGEPAD experts 'welcome the expressed intent of the Government to address gaps and human rights concerns with a strengthened Antiracism framework'[xvii].

We understand that for time-poor readers you may only be able to read the first aspects of this submission including the Executive Summary and Recommendations. The following Appendices however, seek to elaborate on the existing UN WGEPAD findings by adding supporting materials and bring new evidence to the table. For example, one of the findings from the symposium in Appendix 4 suggests that for policy makers who want to see change, they need to know that racism is expensive. Through our expertise in this area, the AAAC is in a unique position to analyse and interpret what the data is telling us, turning it into information or knowledge that can contribute to evidence-based policy.

Thank you for reading and considering this submission. We have a growing team of African diaspora and other scholars, specialists and supporters who will continue to support our African-led organisation and approaches moving forward. The proposed outcome of this submission is that without a roadmap identified by African Australians/key stakeholders, this crucial information will remain as recommendations without a strategic focus. The AAAC is available to answer any questions arising from this submission and can be contacted via: info@africanaustralianadvocacy.org.au.

Appendix 1

Background: UN WGEPAD visit to Australia

To set the context for this submission, for Government officials not familiar with the extensive process, a team of UN WGEPAD experts visited Australia from December 10th to 23rd, 2023 to gain further insight into African Australian communities[xviii].

The Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent[xix] was established on 25 April 2002 by the then Commission on Human Rights, following the *World Conference against Racism* held in Durban in 2001. It is composed of five independent experts: Ms. Catherine S. Namakula (Uganda) current Chair-Rapporteur; Ms. Barbara G. Reynolds (Guyana) current Vice-Chair; Ms. Dominique Day (United States of America); Ms. Miriam Ekiudoko Hungary) and Mr. Sushil Raj (India).

The Working Group is part of what is known as the *Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council.* Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the United Nations Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms. Special Procedures mandate-holders are independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. They are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organisation. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.

The UN WGEPAD was invited by the Federal government, *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade* and the *Department of Home Affairs* as part of its commitment to the *United Nations (UN)*. The UN WGEPAD partnered with the AAAC[xx] to hold face-to-face and online meetings with African Australian community members across Australia to coincide with the scheduled meetings with Government representatives.

According to the AAAC's understanding of references to African Australians as per the UN WGEPAD consultation guidelines, PoAd in Australia are considered to comprise of various cohorts such as:

- Ancestors of 12 African descent people who came to Australia in the first fleet;
- Skilled migrants;
- Those with dual citizenship;
- Former refugees and asylum seekers supported by Australia's humanitarian program;
- Those who identify as black or African Americans who have resettled to Australia;
- First, second and third generations of African descent – citizens and non-citizens of Australia.

The visit provided an opportunity for UN experts to interact with people of African descent in Australia; assessed their human rights situation; and gathered information on the forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance they face, and provide recommendations to Government of Australia on how to address the issues. In accordance with their mandate, the Working Group also critically assessed the state of affairs in Australia and identified best practices that could be replicated in other nations. The visit furnished an unbiased and impartial evaluation where summary findings were captured in 125 recommendations in the initial *End of Mission statement*[xxii]. The *Final Report* released by the UN WGEPAD was presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council in September 2023[xxii].

Types of Input

In response to a consultation calling for change, the UN WGEPAD was particularly interested in learning more about the following topics

- Key concerns including the most significant human rights violations that people of African descent in Australia experience.
- Emblematic cases of racial discrimination faced by people of African descent living in Australia;
- Racial bias and discrimination in the criminal justice system and law enforcement, including racial profiling and combating terrorism;
- Afrophobia, xenophobia, racially motivated acts of violence, hate crimes;
- Access to justice, protection of victims of racial discrimination and the legal aid system;
- Access to education, health, employment, housing and public services;
- Human rights of migrants and refugees, immigration laws, detention/probation centre; citizenship and deportation issues;
- Representation in the media, racist discourse, stigmatization and negative stereotyping; negative use of political platforms;
- Cultural Rights;
- Education, history curriculum-recognition and remembrance of past atrocities and legacies, teacher training;
- Racial equality and social cohesion;
- The situation of youth and children; women and girls; and multiple/intersecting forms of discrimination;
- Data collection/analysis and statistics on composition of the population including recent statistical information available on the demographics of Africans and people of African descent living in the country.
- Information on measures to prevent racial discrimination, protect victims of racism and improve the human rights situation of people of African descent (law, policies, action plans, special projects, programmes or other initiatives).

Stakeholder Consultations

As part of its fact-finding mission, the UN WGEPAD met with senior officials from the:

- African Australian Advocacy Centre (AAAC)
- Australian Federal Government (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Home Affairs, Attorney General's Department, Department of Education, Department of Health and Aged Care, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations).
- Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- Representatives from State governments
- Australian Human Rights Commission
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety
- Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions,
- Representatives of Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria
- Officials of the Queensland Government
- The Anti-Discrimination NSW
- Australian Border Force
- Australian Federal Police and Law Enforcement in Brisbane and Canberra
- Villawood Immigration Detention Centre in Sydney.
- Community Members and Faith Leaders

Broader Consultation Process

The AAAC received a small grant from Multicultural NSW provided to support and facilitate consultations that took place in New South Wales, with a portion of the grant also being allocated to other states and the media conference.

The following locations hosted face-to-face consultations, with most sessions also accommodating online participants:

The Working Group met with civil society representatives of African descent from Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Perth and Adelaide.

- Two consultations were held in New South Wales: the Sydney Hall attendance was 47 people in-person and the University of Western Sydney, Parramatta campus involved a total of 189 people attendees (140 face to face and 49 online).
- Two consultations were held in Victoria: one at Victoria University (50-60 face to face and 8 online) and the other at the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (25 face to face and 10 online).
- One consultation was held in Queensland at the African Village Centre in Marooka (25-40 in person and 50 online).
- One consultation was held in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) at the Hyatt Hotel Canberra, where the UN Working Group was based (35-40 in person and 40 people online).
- Met with SA and WA civil society representatives online.

The AAAC identified that 236 participants attended the UN WGEPAD consultation in NSW primarily consisted of members of the African Australian community or their supporters. Participants included a broad spectrum of the community from health professionals, aged care workers, business owners, university students, academics, community and religious leaders, and others. It is acknowledged, that persons of African descent (PoAD) offer a richness of knowledge as well as economic and labour force contributions particularly in the social care and aged care workforces in Australia. For example, there are labour shortages here that are increasingly being filled with PoAD.

The UN WGEPAD also conducted specialist consults with Academics involved in youth justice; lived experience meetings with civil society such as visiting the organisation Pola Practice at one of the housing tower sites affected by the 'hard lockdowns' in Melbourne during the covid-19 pandemic[xxiii].

In response, the UN WGEPAD stated:

> The Working Group heard that racialised approaches of government and Australian society to COVID-19 restrictions clarified the long-lived reality of people of African descent as always under siege[xxiv].

Melbourne public housing tower residents have now been offered $5m payout from the Victorian state government after a class action over the Covid lockdown confirming that human rights breaches occurred. Mental health professionals commented that the UN WGEPAD visit was an opportunity to witness the accounts of significant trauma and what this injustice meant to community advocates.

In NSW, a dedicated consultation held in Pyrmont, Sydney was convened for the descendants of *blackbirding*[xxv] (suggested to be a form of slavery), whereby the Australian government legislated the trade as indentured labour for PoAD to work in cotton and sugarcane fields. Additionally, the UN WGEPAD met with representatives from the Refugee Council of Australia and the Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development (GLAPD).

The gender representation for all of the UN WGEPAD consultations was almost equally split, with close to a 50/50 male-to-female ratio. Additionally, participants came from 42 different African descent groups.

The purpose of consultation

The purpose of the consultations was to provide input for the report, and their success was measured through press releases, YouTube and Facebook views, and the final report itself.

https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-12-27/un-working-group-backs-south-sudanese-australian-mothers/101797212;

https://theconversation.com/no-safe-space-in-society-new-un-report-reveals-the-extent-of-systemic-racism-faced-by-people-of-african-descent-in-australia-213365.

Furthermore, as a bonus outcome, the AAAC was able to increase engagement with African Australians, Universities and other stakeholders across Australia throughout the process. Individuals or stakeholders were also invited to submit written submissions[xxvi].

AAAC involvement during consultation

The AAAC supported participation in:
* Mobilising community members and groups to attend the consultations.
* Coordinating partners to participate in the focus group consultations.
* Coordinating some participants' transportation to the venues and other logistics such as securing venues.
* Choosing representatives to lead the consultations.
* Organised people to support logistics of taking the UN WGEPAD around Australia for the consultations.

Strengths and Limitations

The AAAC and supporting stakeholders had a limited timeframe to mobilise, however given the framework and collaboration with stakeholders and individuals believes that a broad cross-section of community representation was fulfilled.

A strength of the community consultations was that participants could present in a de-identified manner and share transparently their experiences.

A limitation was that there was potential to capture this 'lived experience data' through the stories and experiences shared, however the set-up supported the initial stages of what partly felt like a 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' focused on 'truthtelling'[xxvii]. Therefore, it was important to ensure the de-identified and intimate process was upheld.

The AAAC are impressed by the invitation of the Australian Government to bring the UN WGEPAD to Australia to initiate a consultation process. Additionally, the AAAC are impressed by the presence of the UN WGEPAD members as they witnessed and synthesised PoAD's lived experiences in Australia for 13 days. This is just the beginning of what is possible.

Appendix 2

Literature Review: Experiences of People of African Descent in Australia

The AAAC's unique positioning is developed through the knowledge developed from walking alongside peoples of African descent in Australia and is built on a *critical transformative paradigm* which prioritises an Indigenous lens of relationality and critical theory[xxviii]. Through this lens, we seek to 'bear social justice issues in mind so that their inquiries become intertwined with a political agenda and are action-oriented towards generating increased fairness in the social fabric' (Romm 2015:411) [xxix].

The second key focus of AAAC's identified strategy in liaising with government, stakeholders and communities is to continue to display a critical voice, but with the intention of building sustaining relationships, trust and credibility. Through this strategy, we believe that different points of view can exist in the same room, thus promoting critical discussion. Through the spirit of building relationship, we draw on the context of the Bantu notion of Ubuntu (I am because you are)[xxx]. This philosophy and metaphysical framework draws on the mutual relatability of humanity in terms of being bound with one another's liberty. For example, if our bla(c)k siblings are free from racial injustice, we are all free[xxxi]. We sincerely hope that embodying this relational process will continue long after this discussion paper with the hope that we can generate dignified interventions together. This is an important component of *Indigenous research methodology* which involves maintaining accountability to these relationships. The 'ceremony' of social research involves mutually gifting each other with knowledge and hospitality and sharing grief in the hard times[xxxii].

Points 13 and 63 of the *UN WGEPAD End of Mission Statement* recommendations note the lack of Australian agencies not maintaining racially disaggregated data and not routinely keeping data on national origin or ancestry in every field[xxxiii]. Despite this, AAAC members have often been advised by government officials that.

We have heard your anecdotal lived experience stories, but where's the data? By that they mean, the evidence!

In their article *Disrupting 'Expertise': Learnings from a Grassroots Lived Experience and Social Work Academic Partnership*, RMIT Social Work scholars discuss their involvement with consumers, families and carers in mental health service delivery, a process mandated by legislation, recommended in policy, and promoted in professional accreditation standards internationally. The Pracademics suggest that while social work academics have an established history of collaborating with organisations and practitioners, examples of industry partnerships between social work academics and service users have emerged more recently. Through a critical examination on the potential of industry partnerships and academic partnerships such as established with this submission and RMIT University, the AAAC invites genuine engagement and significant positive impact for both parties. Martin et al (2021:39) discusses that 'entrenched power imbalances and ideas about expertise are disrupted and recast through consideration of the importance of clear objectives and purpose; the need for deep listening; the prioritising of relationships over task; the possibility of transformation; and new knowledges'[xxxiv]. Like Martin et al, the AAAC recognises the significance of witnessing to promote epistemic justice, along with recommendations for building and cultivating non-tokenistic partnerships[xxxv]. The AAAC therefore places the importance of weighting 'lived experience' data which was also captured by the UN WGEPAD visit with systematic review of literature which prioritises the voices of existing African-diasporic scholars in Australia, and various counterparts.

Parts of the following sections build on the AAAC submission in September 2023 to the *Multicultural Framework Review Panel, Department of Home Affairs* which discussed that Africans in Australia are perceived as "harder to integrate" than other migrant groups and remain one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups of new Australians[xxxvi]. As an organisation, the AAAC are guided by existing critiques of multicultural policy, which still has strong but unspoken remnants of assimilation desires. We acknowledge, alongside Dr. Kathomi Gatwiri's scholarship that there are strong sentiments within the community that the dominant multicultural narrative has functioned strategically to build a colour-blind approach to the Australian experience. Diversity narratives silence racial discourses, often focusing on now-problematised terminologies such as "culturally and linguistically diverse" (CALD), which amplifies experiences of ethnic and cultural diversity while erasing race and anti-blackness discourses within such settings. In this way, multiculturalism and super-diversity narratives hide the salient racist ways human rights violations are normalised in Australia. The following sections highlight a few key themes which discuss experiences of PoAD in Australia.

According to the AAAC: Key areas of focus for African Australians

1.Anti-Black racism and Anti-African discrimination

As highlighted by the UN WGEPAD, racism is a key human rights concern facing African Australians. Extensive research has been carried out by African Australian scholars, particularly Dr. Kathomi Gatwiri and Dr. Virginia Mapedzahama, on the unique form of racism that affects migrants who are both Black and African. These scholars have argued that Blackness and Africanness can be experienced as a "burden" and a "problem" that must be constantly negotiated or defended in multicultural Australia. The urgency of the challenges facing this community in Australia are further exacerbated by anti-Black and anti-African discourses, which have fueled on some occasions political calls for deportations citing "failed integration". As an example, it is common that achievements by African Australians are lauded as evidence of their "Australianness", while "wrongdoing" is attributed to their "Africanness"[xxxvii]. According to Udah (2021) Africans are constructed as strangers, as not belonging to the imagined Australian nation[xxxviii].

It is critical that we address the barriers that complicate integration processes for Africans in Australia to remedy the current growing risk discourses and moral panics about them. Moreover, it is essential that Australia's human rights obligations under international law are fully realised and incorporated into domestic law, via the adoption of a National Human Rights Act. This would ensure that all government policies, including multicultural ones, apply a human rights lens to their drafting and implementation. Such an approach would ensure that issues raised by the UN WGEPAD, such as racism and its differentiated forms, as highlighted by Gatwiri and Mapedzahama, are included from the onset of policy deliberations.

2.Youth and Criminalisation

The Australian context and the way it is negotiated by black African people is nuanced especially when successful integration is akin to assimilation and 'adopt[ing] white culture', while simultaneously erasing one's 'foreignness' as much as possible[xxxix].

Black African youth are often considered inassimilable, and to achieve dignity and respect in everyday life, they must adjust, shrink, or approximate themselves to white culture to reduce incidences and experiences of hypervisibility and over-policing. Additionally, young people of African descent remain overrepresented in youth justice and immigration detention and report experiences of hyper-policing in their communities. Whilst these narratives have been concentrated in the metropolis of Australian capital cities, especially Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland; these narratives have affected the whole population in various forms[xli]. A critical analysis, underpinned by deep understanding of how multicultural policies are weaponised against black communities to produce everyday experiences of racism, have yet to be addressed in any substantial way to understand experiences of black youth in Australia[xliii].

Young people from ethnic minorities and migrant groups, especially those of African descent, are more exposed to both face-to-face and online racism[xliii]. Media reports often portray young refugees as gang members and tying youth gangs' behaviour with belongingness. For Instance, young African Australians are portrayed as responsible for the breakdown of multiculturalism and the inability to negotiate differences with Australian values and beliefs[xliv].

3.Human Rights and Employment

As a state party to the I*nternational Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,* Australia has obligations to ensure the protection of these rights, including the right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work[xlv]. These obligations extend to the guarantee that these rights apply 'without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status'[xlvi]. However, as the UN WGEPAD report highlights, many African Australians do not receive the protection of these rights. While there is a lack of research and data within this area, the lived experiences of African Australians, which have been shared with the AAAC, reveal structural barriers and discriminatory attitudes that prevent full realisation of these rights.

As recognised by the UN WGEPAD, 'overall, the population of immigrants of African descent are relatively well-educated and skilled'[xlvii], with increasing opportunities for migration for black Africans via the skilled migration scheme[xlviii]. However, African Australians' right to work is impacted by workplace policies that limit recognition and acceptance of international credentials and work experience. Many Africans moving to Australia have formal education qualifications, and a significant number have worked in professional jobs prior to migrating. However, African Australians' right to work is impacted by workplace policies that limit recognition and acceptance of international credentials and work experience[xlix]. The AAAC has heard from members who had to requalify and / or retrain to gain employment or who had to accept employment at levels not commensurate with their experience and expertise. This results in additional financial, social, and emotional hardship. Having secured employment, African Australians endure further erosion of their rights through racism, discrimination, and inequality. Some are passed over for promotions even though they clearly meet the selection criteria. Others are set onerous and unrealistic workloads that are impossible to meet, resulting in resignations or unfair dismissals. A systematic legislative review is required to ensure that the relevant workplace / employment laws align with and promote the protection of human rights, including the right to work.. For PoAD to realise their full potential in Australia, employment should be the central goal of National Immigration policy that focuses on economic growth and prosperity while maintaining social cohesion[l].

4.Education

Systemic racism identified in the UN WGEPAD report also intersects with other human rights issues faced by communities of African descent in Australia, such as barriers to sustainable access to housing/accommodation and education[li]. The topic of education requires further exploration in terms of current trends beyond the scope of this review. However, education remains an important focus as it effects a broad cross-section of African diaspora communities.

Young African diaspora are experiencing exclusion through racism and Othering in the school setting. Inclusive learning in the school setting must be considered taking into consideration the impacts of systemic and everyday racism.

A sense of belonging and inclusion could be supported through the introduction of sporting[liii], or third-space art activities. Creating an open or third space for dialogue through arts activities supports processes of identity transformation for young people and assisting with the flourishing of their identities[liv].

Adult migrant English language classes are an important opportunity for new arrivals to thrive in Australian society. The major legislative reforms to the AMEP announced by the government in August 2020 ensured more migrants were able to gain access to English language classes without the restrictions of the previous conditions. However, the considerations added to the program commencing in July 2023 relating to outcome-based funding jeopardise the positive steps made towards English language proficiency[lv]. This puts pressure on teachers to pass people who may not have met standards, and negatively impacts and pressures those who are not maintaining the pace of the class. Language difficulties are the most common cause of vocational and educational post-settlement difficulties in Australia[lvi]. Standardised progress in ESL classes do not consider the differing proficiency levels of African diaspora, nor does it consider the trauma and cultural shocks/adjustment moving to a new country can have whilst potentially managing multiple family responsibilities in country of origin and in Australia[lvii].

Diasporic education plays a vital role in addressing the educational disparities caused by narrow-minded nationalist policies and discussions that consistently impact marginalised young people. It achieves this by rethinking how subjects like values and history are taught and learned, among others. Furthermore, diasporic education creates opportunities for innovative teaching methods that are closely tied to the local but also globally interconnected urban environments where many minoritised students reside and lead their everyday lives[lvii].

African diaspora educated across the globe and who often have unique Indigenous knowledges can contribute to the Australian economic and environmental climate by contributing in areas of sustainability and business[lix]. There is limited literature or systematic review on these contributions requiring further analysis/research.

The barriers identified in the previous sections, which require further examination, are experienced as 'everyday' and 'pervasive' and have serious implications for mental health concerns.

5.Mental health

Migrant and minority stress affect the body and mind profoundly. In research, African Australians often report being unable to thrive, feeling deeply unworthy of being included in mainstream Australia, and feeling powerless against the dominant media, which constantly fuels the deficit narrative against them[lxi]. Because of this and multiple other stressors in the African community, the mental health needs are significant, and this is compounded by the lack of cultural safety in the current Eurocentric practice models. Navigating such complex cultural codes and the frequent 'Othering' on a daily basis produces what William Smith refers to as 'Racial Battle Fatigue', a concept that has been extended in the Australian context by Dr. Kathomi Gatwiri. These intersectional experiences of marginalisation effects the wellbeing, dignity and belonging for this community[lxii].

During the UN WGEPAD's consultations in Australia, numerous participants provided testimonies that underscored the insufficiency of culturally appropriate mental health care services for individuals of African descent in Australia. These testimonies highlighted a concerning pattern of over-generalisation, wherein both 'CALD' (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities and 'African' communities were treated without due consideration for their unique community-specific health needs.

Within the context of this consultation, participants articulated apprehensions pertaining to racial trauma and minority stress, phenomena that continue to remain unacknowledged and unaddressed within the prevailing Australian healthcare practice models. The ramifications of this oversight are substantial, resulting in the misdiagnosis of individuals and a consequential absence of appropriate therapeutic interventions. This inadequacy in care predisposes African Australians to escalated measures, including detention and involuntary infusion therapy, exacerbating their mental health struggles.

As various communities are affected differently, an intersectional approach to tackling mental health concerns is required, such as consideration of demographic indicators including age, gender, sexuality, potentially even country of origin etc[lxiii]. For example, women's acculturation experiences are vastly different to that of younger diaspora.

Diaspora of South Sudanese origin primarily raise concerns regarding raising children in Australia. Intergenerational gaps identified include difficult in sustaining relationships with some teenage children as well as identifying the impacts of Sudanese culture, for example, on child rearing which may be different from Western-centric approaches[lxiv]. In contrast, young diaspora's experiences of life in Australian society are vastly different.

Diaspora have multiple identities and often find themselves having to act differently depending on where they find themselves. They often find themselves being expected to act differently according to whether they are with their African family, Australian friends, or in the community which is an exhausting charade to front to satisfy multiple cultural expectations. Young South Sudanese Australians, for exampe, may also have experienced trauma and they, or their immediate families, arrived in Australia from difficult economic, political, and social conditions, resulting from civil war and tribal disputes spanning 50 years[lxv].

Appendix 3

Genesis of Localised and International Approaches to a Roadmap

Symposium: From Recommendations to actions: Local responses to the UN WGEPAD preliminary report

- Date: 11th August 2023
- Location: Hybrid In person and Virtual
- Conference Room 2, Level 9, Peter Shergold Building, Western Sydney University,
- Parramatta City Campus & Online: Zoom

Purpose of the symposium

In partnership with the AAAC, Western Sydney University's Social Justice Network (headed by Pro-Vice Chancellor Engagement and Advancement Prof. Alphia Possamai-Innesedy) initiated the symposium *From Recommendations to Actions: Local Responses to the UN WGEPAD preliminary report*. Lead by Dr. Kathleen Openshaw, symposium partners invited experts to share their knowledge and expertise on approaches to address the 125 recommendations tabled in the UN WGEPAD preliminary report.

The symposium was in response to the UN WGEPAD's preliminary report and recommendations following their visit in December 2022. The symposium brought together experts and stakeholders from across an array of sectors including local government leaders, academics, students, human rights lawyers, community leaders, community organisations and representatives from local government and settlement-based services currently working with people from African diasporas in Greater Western Sydney (GWS) and beyond, to chart a way forward from high-level report recommendations to tangible actions and co-created solutions.

This work, building on and responding to the UN WGEPAD recommendations, is being undertaken in the context of the *United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent 2015 – 2024*[lxiv] with the theme "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development".

The symposium built on the theme to elevate the experiences of people of African descent in the Australian context, across states and territories. Throughout the course of the UN WGEPAD visit, broadly it was identified that no explicit programme of activities has been implemented by the Australian government in response to the *International Decade for People of African Descent.* However, this does not mean that stakeholders and Australian Africans have not been working to achieve positive wellbeing outcomes for themselves and engaging innovative projects with a strong justice foci around the nation, as evidenced in the diversity of community submissions to the UN WGEPAD in December, '22.

The purpose of the symposium was to sustain conversations about how to co-create solutions among a diversity of relevant stakeholder to the complex challenges faced by people of African descent living in Australia - a very diverse cohort of people across all demographic indicators. The focus was on how to use a strength-based approach to begin affecting change locally, with a view to agitate for these matters to be at the centre of government policy.

This event was opened by Lord Mayor of the City of Parramatta, Sameer Pandey. His address described the importance of people of African descent in contributing to the City of Parramatta, one of the most diverse local government areas (LGA) in Australia. Lord Mayor Pandey went on to describe how proud he was that so many African communities called Parramatta home, and that he was committed to seeing all in Parramatta not just survive but thrive. Ms Charishma Kaliyanda, MP for Liverpool was also in attendance, and indicated her strong support of the African communities across her LGA and Greater Western Sydney more widely.

The symposium was a productive continuation of conversations already taking place among interested stakeholders, that both celebrate the value African communities bring to Australia and address the challenges faced by the communities of African descent. Presenters at the symposium discussed key themes derived from the UN WGEPAD recommendations: human rights frameworks and international obligations; children and families; education; youth empowerment; health (mental and physical health); challenging everyday racism; racial discrimination and employment; community action including engaging African communities with the UN WGEPAD preliminary report and highlighting strengths-based approaches.

Presenter's Key Points Summaries:

Speaker Dr Kathleen Openshaw – Anthropologist and Lecturer, Western Sydney University

Racism and human rights transgressions	The UN WGEPAD report explicitly outlines experiences of racism and human rights violation towards people of African descent. • Capitalise on the report of the working group to challenge those in positions of power. • Challenge homogenising and deficit narrative within the wider Australian society on people of African descent and African settlement in Australia. • ·Communities are not always considered experts in their own lives, their voices are often muted, ill-considered or spoken over, lack of opportunity to inform decision makers.
Strengths based approach	• Build on the work undertaken by the working group to reframe societal views of people of African descent. • Use strength-based perspectives to reframe narratives from deficit to affirmative narratives of settled communities. • Communities have solutions to many of the challenges their face, starting at the local level.
Presenter Recommendations	• Translate the UN WGEPAD actions from national to the local through co-creating solutions to the complex challenges faced by people of African descent living in Australia. • Draw on the themes of the UN Decade of African Descent 2015 - 2024 to mobilise specific actions at a local level that can be adapted and applied in other settings/context to meet local needs. • Social justice actions to address the issues faced by the African diaspora, agitating for these issues to be at the centre of government policy.

	• Collaboration and partnerships such as the AAAC and WSU Social Justice Network to provide platforms for deliberations and ideas for action. • Discussion from today to actions for tomorrow, showing up and contributing to the discussions.

Speaker: Cr Sameer Pandey - Lord Mayor City of Parramatta

An inclusive City – home to Migrant Communities	• Parramatta is home to the African diaspora, where they have built community and make a positive contribution to the broader community, NSW and Australia. • Lack of awareness and knowledge of the struggles, resilience and successes faced by people of African descent in the community. • City of Parramatta is committed to make city spaces welcoming and inclusive, where people of African descent can engage and maximise opportunities.
Future growth and economic opportunities for all	• The City is on a growth and transformation trajectory as shown in demographic studies with an anticipation of greater economic opportunities for all. • As the City embraces these opportunities and the vision for the future, it aims to bring along all residents and not leave anyone behind and that includes people from African backgrounds.
Presenter Recommendations	**"We may have different religious , different languages , different coloured skin but we all belong to one human race" Kofi Annan , former UN Secretary-General.**

	• Harness the community strategic plan and programs targeting multicultural communities to strengthen and foster inclusion and participation within City of Parramatta and other local governments. • Identify opportunities to establish businesses and build capacity to seize economic opportunities to grow and flourish. • Utilise existing social hubs (libraries, pools, others) to access services and opportunities for the community to thrive and have a positive experience. • Build on existing framework to practice, preserve and promote multifaith and multi culturalism fabric for greater community wellbeing. • Establish partnerships with higher education institutions based in Parramatta for skills and capacity building for future jobs.

Speaker: Prof. Alphia Possamai Innesedy – Pro-vice Chancellor Engagement and Advancement, Professor of Sociology, Chair Social Justice Network, Western Sydney University

Social justice movement in Western Sydney University	• Western Sydney University (WSU) has a history working to deliver social justice initiatives. The university is committed to strategic engagement work to produce solutions to interconnected challenges facing society (race, class, settler-migrant communities, health and so forth). • WSU leadership has shown exemplary actions such as Prof. Peter Shergold who has dedicated his career to social justice work, an advocate for investment in, and the rights of, migrants and refugees, and humanitarian status individuals across Greater Western Sydney (GWS).

	- WSU also houses the Whitlam Institute at its Parramatta South campus, named after the former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam who changed the political landscape and Australian history, by ratifying several international human rights treaties, including the convention on the elimination of racism, leading to the introduction of the landmark anti-discrimination Act of 1975 in Australia. - The symposium being held at WSU reflects how the university sees itself and shows its values based and principle led university, creating a space for dialogue and engagement in burning issues facing the community of GWS. - The UN WGEPAD report reflects global challenges of heightened levels of overt racism, discrimination, and xenophobia, driven through social media where these divisive narratives are socialised into the public discourse with significant consequences and harm particularly for people of African descent.
Western Sydney region	- Western Sydney University through its Sustaining Success Strategy and Mission statement are committed to enable education within the African diaspora, produce research to meet the needs of the African diaspora and bring about thriving communities. - Through the partnership with African Australian Advocacy Centre the University has provided a safe space for a meeting of minds to discuss and co-create solutions to the issues affecting people of African descent including the recommendations contained in the UN WGEPAD preliminary report. - The WSU serves the communities where many people of African descent have settled and recognises that its success is intertwined with that of the community.

Presenter Recommendations	• Dialogue is key to achieving structural change through recognition that social justice, freedom, respect for human dignity benefits everyone. That improvement in the conditions of people of African descent can benefit broader society. • Human rights are not politically aligned but a right for all. Building actions out of the recommendations of the UN report, will build resilience and social harmony. • The report provides evidence base and a starting point to create a roadmap or blueprint for change and actions to co-create communities that are more equitable and sustainable. • Western Sydney University is committed to the region that is a powerhouse and space of diversity and potential of thought hope and path to solutions.

Keynote address: Dr. Barbara Reynolds – Chair UN WGEPAD

Ongoing work advocating for the human rights of people of African descent, involves recognising that when we promote the human rights of one group it promotes the human rights of others across the globe. Conversely, if human rights of one person are violated then we are all in jeopardy (of having our human rights violated). This speaks to a community focused way of being captured in philosophical approaches such as Ubuntu.

Baseline

This work and journey are of immense importance

1. Immense pressure on African Australians to either fit in completely (assimilated) or maintain their African-ness completely, citing similar literature from Hispanic communities settling in the US, with intergenerational conflict. Described challenges with African Australian identity through the question what does it mean to be a Black Australian? Identity formation occurs through engagement with social spaces such as the home, school, workplace and worship, marketplace and social spaces.
2. Disproportionate number of men in incarceration without trial, based on cultural test, the procedures not in harmony with international human rights principles. Incidents of duress, despair and resignation occur as a result of this experience, with no end in sight.
3. Intellectual disconnect between partners in government and civil society and the world perceptions of the country Australia, which is seen as upholding human rights, the rule of law, egalitarianism, and so forth.

Presenter Recommendations

- Need to address the justice system specifically concerning interactions between law enforcement and people of African descent in their communities and broadly for humanity, so that communities can thrive and contribute to the place they now call home and to be at home.
- Need to create thriving communities not just surviving on the margins.
- The AAAC and cohorts need to take the recommendations and formulate a plan of action.

   - **Advocacy** – advocate, promote and share and represent the people in the various spheres including in the criminal justice system, advocate for their rights.
   - **Education** – educate every Australian on the settlement of people of African descent, the path to Australia and their experience of life in Australia.
   - **Activism** - build on the activism and education efforts, bringing all people together including faith communities, civil society, political spectrum and broader community from all walks of life along the journey.

- **Alliances** – build alliances with the government as law makers and the authority responsible for upholding the rights of all within the country, governance and public participation. Alliances should extend to others including the private sector, influencers such as sporting athletes, artists in all arts industry. Academics to provide the evidence to make the case for change and the educators who develop the curriculum to frame these changes.
- **Build digital literacy skills for people** – an opportunity to upskill the community to access digital information.
- The role of cultural identity and creating cultural education hubs for young people to connect with their history and roots in a safe environment, to plug the cultural vacuum and transfer the cultural knowledge and values so that future generations are grounded in their African heritage as Australians. Who is an African Australian (AA), what does it mean to be an AA to other Australians, do you need to be either/or, or both?!
- Representation matters ('you can't be what you can't see' - Marian Wright Edelman). There is an opportunity to curate positive stories in the media showcasing successful role models of African Australians such as judges, magistrates, academics, successful business owners, high and low office, challenge the deficit narrative through positive stories and allow people of African descent to see themselves represented in a positive way and be inspired to succeed in their new country of residence.
- Build thriving communities through increasing education - technical, academic, vocational, higher education, basic education (high school) completion. Financial resilience – build economic independence, financial viability.
- Share your journey with others including the UN so that the lessons learned can be shared with other communities facing similar challenges.

Panel discussions

Children and Families
A/Prof. Kathomi Gatwiri – Southern Cross University/ ARC DECRA Fellow

Baseline

- Representation and advocacy are important for research.
- Developing a theory and framework on dignity and experiences of racism.
- The interlocutors explain the experience and what does dignity looks like, as a feeling akin to being undressed, which in the African cultural context an experience of deep shame and humiliation.
- There is little research and literature on dignity and racism. To understand the phenomenon A/Prof. Gatwiri is looking at theoretical frameworks from critical disability studies perspective. How people living with disability experience and maintain their dignity when they are relying on others to provide intimate acts of care, such as toilet routines, bathing, dressing and feeding them. How do they retain a form of dignity and being seen as a complete and full human being. The work of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition may be a framework to apply in understanding the issue.
- Currently collecting data on how Africans are defining dignity and talk about racism in the context of racism. Cultural discourse is framed around cultural competence and safety, how does this playout when there is no dignity in place? How can people have racial safety when they cannot say they have dignity?
- The UN Human Rights Charter talks about dignity as being inherent and cannot be taken away. However, people do not notice dignity until it is taken away, lack of dignity is associated with minute and micro experiences of racism.
- People of African descent explain and see dignity as simple acts such as smiles, people takes an interest in me as a person, person sits next to me in public transport, people assuming the best of and that an individual to be assumed to be a good human being, not needing to prove ones humanness, it is having your skills and capacity to grow and lead in the workplace. Feeling included in public spaces involves a sense of belonging.
- The processes of indignity are in the simple aspects it is when people feel un-included, invisible, eroding of the natural state of the body that is desirable and wanted.

Presenter Recommendations

- African philosophy of Ubuntu sums it up – "I am made human by humanising you" that is "one's sense of humanity is amplified when others see them as complete and full human beings, and are recognised as existing, supporting and contributing citizen in Australia. By first humanising oneself you can then humanise others, which leads one to ask, when people dehumanise others constantly what have they done to their own sense of humanity, so that their default is to dehumanise people of African descent? Some answers lie in being victims of patriarchy colonialism and white supremacy.
- When children of African descent grow up in societies where they are constantly dehumanised, that has impact of their sense of self as they grow and become adults. What kind of adults do they become? The evidence of impacts of racial trauma is already established and it is confronting.

Racism is Expensive

- For policy makers who want to see change, they need to know that racism is expensive. If a child goes from birth through to an adult interacting with various social institutions where their lives and social experiences are shaped by being dehumanised at every social interaction, be it schooling, health, sport, medical services, employment, this leads to adults who cannot function, who engage in other forms of pain-based behaviours, dysfunctional individuals' in the society who cannot reach their full potential.
- Preventative work to support families and communities and children to grow up with a sense of dignity, a sense of being seen and part of the human community in Australia and they are mirrors of community.
- Building programs that build dignity for people of African descent so that they can feel dignified and putting some sense of clothes on them, this can be achieved through simple acts of humanity such as smiling, sitting next to them, being of service to their needs and so forth.

Education

Dr Alfred Mupenzi – Excelsia College

Baseline

- Research often frames Africans in Australia as a homogenized group, however, they come from various parts of the continent with different histories, skills, and educational backgrounds and are a heterogenous group.
- Terminology such as Africa and people of African descent is problematic as it is homogenising. We can see that there are distinct categories of people of African descent with different reasons for coming and settling in Australia and that needs to be recognised.
- Yvette is a practitioner – describes that the concept of early childhood is Western, in other cultures the concept does not exist. Nevertheless, early childhood refers to the foundation years centres around the family, play, memories, nostalgia, and a story that shapes who we are. Early childhood education is important as it sets children up to succeed in their adult years, reducing future mental health problems.
- Experiences of childhood vary based on context and circumstance of upbringing, growing up in a refugee camp there were challenges but there was love, friendships and people who cared for each other.
- Education should not be defined as giving people knowledge as general terminology, there is a role for Indigenous ways of education in the formative years for children of African backgrounds. Challenges of raising children in individualistic society as opposed to collective society, in African culture "it takes a village to raise child", however, in Australia children are brought up in an individualistic society. Bringing kids of African descent into a society where they do not have a church they belong to, a community, they do not have that sense of being, becoming and belonging which results in social challenges.
- When unpacking issues of racism consider the foundational level, the law is just but people are unjust, who is causing the injustice, not what the law says. The young people in detention centre have had minor transgressions, lack of community, not feeling a sense of belonging.
- Lack of education within refugee background parents may result in lack of support for their children accessing public education, literacy to support kids with schoolwork and understanding the schooling system.

Presenter Recommendations

- Cultural education – to give children of African descent a sense of being, becoming and belonging in the society they find themselves in as refugees, and so forth, which is beyond education from a Western cultural context.
- Find ways to for informal education processes in formative years similar to the Indigenous ways, where children were taught in the home, in the community in their society alongside formal schooling.
- Children need mentors and support to encourage them to pursue formal education and that applies to parents as well who may not have completed any formal schooling themselves.
- There is a role for religious institutions (for example) to support families, in their efforts to settle and find a sense of belonging and community.

Youth

Speaker: Dr Sarah Williams – AAAC Member and RMIT Lecturer

Baseline

- Bringing a national perspective to the symposium and being part of giving witness when the UN WGEPAD visited Melbourne, to shed light on the experiences and recent (sometimes mysterious) deaths of young people of African descent especially young males, from South Sudanese backgrounds.
- Reconciliation assumes an existing relationship, maybe that is present, maybe it is not.
- Pivotal relationship with politicians – described discussions with politicians who described an uncomfortable reaction to the UN WGEPAD report and its language and feel that it has an accusatory tone.
- Ubuntu is a concept and philosophy that we can reflect on in our work in this space.
- The concept of integration with negative media representation of people of African descent degenerating into discourse about gangs, questions on the abilities of people of African descent to integrate into the Australian society, criminalisation of young people seen as with no prospect of reform/rehabilitation.
- Until recently Australians have avoided the term racism and systemic racism was often not spoken of. Noting that race is a social construct, race as a concept does not exist, we are all dignified people if we share that dignity and bear witness, we open up opportunities for change.

Strengths-based approach

Lessons from the Born to Stand-Out PhD research and project – this project captures the experiences of young Australians from South Sudanese refugee backgrounds and shares their journey to reclaim spaces that have felt unwelcoming and unsafe through music expression.

- Young people of African descent using art (rap) to claim their space and make their voices heard on issues affecting them.
- The challenge of being Black in white spaces, where you are forced to perform happiness to feel safe (not threatening to others), to be humanised, to feel welcome and not feared.
- Music as an art from served as an education platform providing an opportunity for the young people to learn English.
- Hip Hop has opened up spaces for young people express themselves and to feel a sense of belonging.
- Described a case study from her experience as a youth worker - Stages of systemic racism, an example of, young boys of South Sudanese background who struggled with identify and peer networks at a very young age (12-14yo after their arrival in Australia as children), resorting to criminal activity to belong, which impacts on the parent. Single mother relocated for better environment (perhaps leaving behind support networks). After a few years working with the family, identified that single parent struggled to cope resulting in poor health and mental health outcomes, lack of access to services and resulted in mysterious death. Further down the track, younger son ended up in indefinite detention from the harsh character laws; her other son battled with chronic alcoholism.

Presenter Recommendations

- Born to Stand Out as a concept has resonance with Thomas Sankara's idea of renaming Burkina Faso, which loosely translates as 'Towards Standing Upright', which can tie in with the idea of dignity and dignified solutions.
- The symposium provides an opportunity to capture the lived experience narratives - going to be important to building the data and evidence base for some of the issues to counter the racialised media narratives – Racial Justice and Equity

- Contemporary Politics of Belonging - Transcultural and Intercultural Identities (see above summary recommendations from this submission)
- Visions for the Future – Communicating Social Change, digital ethnographies to share new narrative and stories how do we understand social change, so creating multimedia (videos) to capture these stories is important (also see below).
- Multiculturalism - transcultural and intercultural identities – the young people are required to have multi personas to fit into different social spaces and thrive. This is a burden on young people and requires them to have resilience and strength, to overcome and live a fulfilled life.
- Not just about youth participation but self-determination and agency.

  - Lack of data to counter the narrative, so need more storytelling to counter negative narratives, such as documentaries told in the young people's voice and perspective.
  - Need to reframe grant funding and agency of young people.
  - Young people are engaged and involved in their own struggles organising and advocating and agitating for their rights.
  - Young people are falling through the gaps and there is a need for interventions.

Health (Mental, Physical & Psychosocial)

A/Prof Olayide Ogunsiji – School of Nursing and Midwifery, Western Sydney University

Strengths-based approach

- Extensive research on African migrants and refugees on health and mental health as extensively covered in the recommendations.
- How do migrants settle in a new country? Described existing barriers to entry into workplaces (lack of recognition of qualifications and experience), lack of recognition of existing skills as a global citizen and worker with experience from other places in the world. Efforts to gain local knowledge and experience leading to rejection and feelings of dejection impacting physical and mental health.
- People of African descent statistically are on a growth trajectory based on ABS, in the context of living with health issues, if no adequate attention is paid to these issues the health problems for the community will increase with impacts on services demand and costs.
- Deficit narratives on people of African descent can lead to self-perceptions of inadequacy and internalised negative views, however, the reality is that many refugees are skilled and qualified in their countries of origin.
- Language barriers and interpretations of abilities to function.
- People of African Descent have professional skills and we need to recognise that can improve our self-esteem and sense of knowing what skills we have.
- Africans need to unite to fight for the common wellbeing, strength in unity rather than division by country.
- Food as a source of cultural connection, there is a need to cultivate traditional African foods for health and well-being, as most often people coming in with food from Africa, they are forced to discard it due to quarantine laws. Work with others to build the knowledge of nutritional value of African foods collaborating with researchers, dieticians, scientists, and others.
- Strategy of unity rather than division, there are 54 countries in African, devalue and reduce our critical skills that we collectively hold. There is a need to recognise and acknowledge each other's skills and knowledge.
- Each of us has a role play in actualising the recommendations into tangible action, through advocacy, that is, promote, share, and educate at all levels, everywhere and wherever we are.

Challenging Everyday Racism

Dr. Alanna Kamp – Social & Cultural Geographer, Senior Lecturer School of Social Sciences, Challenging Racialism Project, Western Sydney University

Baseline

- The existence of racism and it's impacts on individuals across all aspects of life are often denied
- Ensuring that anti-racism work is prioritised at the local, state, and federal government levels is a difficult task.
- Data is key to convincing governing bodies that racism is real and has impacts on individuals, communities, and broader society.

Strengths-based approach

- We can draw from Anti-racism approaches used to tackle racism against other communities who have similarly experienced intersectional discrimination within settler colonial states.
- Anti-racism interventions, informed by up-to date and meaningful academic research and community consultation, can have the potential for reach and impact.
- Communities should be active participants/co-creators in research processes and the translation of research findings into meaningful resources and actions for change.
- Those with power and privilege should take on more responsibility to combat racism, it should not be left to the targets of racism to fight it alone.

Presenter Recommendations

- Research and document experiences to build evidence base (that responds to the needs of organisations that can act on the findings) of specific experiences of racism without homogenising or conflating experiences of communities.
- Work with governments and non-government organisations to fund research, for example, the 'COVID Racism' project was funded by the Victorian government and the Centre of Resilient and Inclusive Societies.
- Disseminate research findings to participating communities (ethical conduct of research), relevant authorities, funding bodies, community organisations (make research useful for change).

- Check and validate the research findings with the research participants, ask the participants how the research findings can be used to combat racism.
- Work with affected communities to co-create tailored education programs to prevent and counter denial of racism and build individuals' capacity to identify and respond to everyday racists contexts.
- Evaluate interventions and build evidence for effective programs (support implementation and funding).

Lessons from the Challenging Racism Project:

Sharing insights and lessons from the project on challenging racism in everyday context, which has sought ways to challenge and ground safe and effective anti-racism interventions in research collaborations with national media outlet (SBS) and the training program for bystander antiracism training.

- o Workshops have been delivered to schools, local government (councils), corporates such as banking institutions, including various sporting clubs and NGOs.
- o Training includes by-stander energy racism action – which refers to an active disruption process for normalised everyday racism. This involves the bystander taking responsibility for dealing with the racism away from the target. It challenges the witness or bystander to act where a racist incidence occurs, collect and document evidence with the target of the racist incident.
- o Active process that disrupts moments of daily racism, where bystanders can take any of the following actions (not in any order)

Check-in	Call it out	Report it	Talk about it
❑with the target of the racist act	❑let the offender know that racist actions are not okay, it was offensive, it made people feel unsafe and uncomfortable.	❑collect and document evidence that can be used to pursue legal action, with consent from the target	❑de-normalise and challenge racism through conversations and awareness raising with our communities, families, workplaces

Racial Discrimination and Employment

Dr Virginia Mapedzahama – Director Diversity Council Australia (DCA

Baseline

- DCA is about all communities' diversity inclusion and equity in workplaces. It is a multiracial, employer focused organisation working to seek organisational change from employers' perspectives.
- Racism frames our lived realities as people of African descent in the Australian society.
- Employers are not focused on racial issues as their primary focus is on doing what is best for their organisations, it is therefore no coincidence that there is a lack of people of African descent in leadership roles and other specific types of roles, rather it is a function of the system (systemic racism).
- Racism is not at the centre of change focus is on cultural diversity in the workplace, while cultural diversity is important, however, it is used to mask constructive discussion on race and racism in the workplace.
- Racism is a difficult issue to discuss with employers and generally people are not comfortable discussing racism, cultural diversity is used to mask racism or Antiracism discussion.
- Research conducted in 2021, on the back of Black Lives Matter movement, raised similar issues within Australia, and DCA members expressed an interest in gaining better understanding to be able to act. DCA research found issues cut across and similar experiences and parallels across marginalised communities.

Strength-based approach

- There is appetite and genuine desire to know from members (employers).
- People of African descent experience discrimination in employment, as shown in research conducted by DCA.
- Use language that makes clear that multiculturalism is different from racism or Anti-racism.
- Good news is employer groups (DCA members who make up 25% of the ASX300 [Australian financial markets]) want to be informed and educated, to be able to tackle racism.

Presenter Recommendations

- Help employers gain an understanding of racism, talking about it and a back to basics 101 Antiracism talks. Described the opportunity to bring back into everyday discourse the term racism so that it is not viewed as a negative but an issue to be addressed.
- Talk about the negative racialised Black bodies within the Australian context, show others they are also racialised though not in a negative way as African Australians. Systemic racism is covert and lived experiences demonstrate how prevalent racism. Talking about it is not creating it but bringing to the fore and visualising it, to be able to address it.
- Find new concepts/frameworks to enable discussions about systemic and structural racism.
- Racism at work – exploring intersections of race and gender in workplaces different groups experience racism differently, research into experiences of women of colour.
- Seeking funding to undertake research.

Human Rights Abuses and Community Action

Ms Kirsten Keith – Human Rights Consultant, Executive Committee Advisor & Lawyer, AAAC

Baseline

- The UN WGEPAD report details the prevalence of racial discrimination and a litany of human rights abuses as experienced by people of African descent in Australia.
- Australia continues to practice indefinite detention, where individuals can be held in legal limbo for indetermined periods, in breach of international human rights law. This practice according to Dr. Alice Edwards, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, could be classified as enduring, degrading, inhumane, or psychological torture, in contravention of Australia's obligations under the Convention against Torture as well as under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and other key human rights treaties that Australia is party to.

Racial discrimination is a deeply damaging and pervasive abuse of human rights and human dignity. It is one of the most destructive forces dividing societies and responsible for the death and suffering of a grotesque scale throughout history. "UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres 2023.

- Australian human rights framework fails to protect human rights, there is a clear implementation gap between human rights standards and local laws, policies, and governments.
- Australia has a fractured and incomplete human right system, which is inaccessible to many. Human rights charters differ across states and territories are not unified federally leading to gaps in protection for many.
- The UN WGEPAD report points out that immigration service providers engaged in racist behaviour.
- There is a need for enforceable protections for the human rights of all, the absence of law is a major disservice for the community.

Strengths-based response.

- There is recognition that there needs to be a National/Federal Human Rights Act in Australia, this issue is currently being considered by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights in Canberra as part of its review into the human rights framework.
- AAAC has made a submission to the Joint Committee in support of the national Human Rights Act drawing from the UN WGEPAD report and pointing to the failings of current human rights framework which fails to protect the human rights of those of African descent.

Presenter Recommendations

- AAAC will continue to advocate for a national Human Rights Act, which would expressly articulate Australia's human rights obligations and impose a positive duty on public authorities to apply a human rights lens from the outset when drafting decisions, laws and policies. It is hoped that the Act will foster a culture of greater understanding of and respect towards the rights of others. A society that respects the rights of all is one that is fairer and equitable.

- Service providers must be bound by human rights approach and obligations in providing immigration services.
- Community organisations have a role in raising awareness and education about human rights and help others understand their rights.
- Community organisations by themselves or in collaboration with other stakeholders, such as universities, to agitate for action and protection of human rights.
- Take the opportunity to help shape government policy by delivering submissions.
- Respect at work report advances a multicultural lens and intersectional approach to addressing work based sexual violence and discrimination, this is a useful way to view issues holistically not in silo but include racism and LGBTIQA+ concerns.

Engaging African Communities with the UN WGEPAD Preliminary Report

Dr Atem Dau Atem – The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)

Baseline
- Racism frames experience, silences, creates unsafe spaces, mystifies structures so that there is lack of understanding of how it works.
- Racism is embedded in all the structures, from the exclusion of people from Indigenous backgrounds and progresses to the new settlers from African descent who have migrated or were born in Australia.
- Engagement around racism and issues like this is tough, Africans in Australia are not a homogeneous group, we are a diverse group with different cultures and that difference carries weight.
- Different periods of migration frame experiences of communities.
- Education levels and language proficiency vary across groups and play a significant role in determining access to opportunities and support.
- Challenges with the way data about African migrants is collected and the tracking of migration based on African descent clusters people from different racial backgrounds into the same African category. 'African' includes people from European descent, Indian descent from the African continent, for example.

Strengths-based approach.

- The discussions about the issues are framed around Western approaches that help analyse the issues (they are not African) as shown in Figure 2 below, all these frameworks are used at STARTTS.
- Specifically, Social Capital Framework - developed by STARTTS with University of New South Wales. The basic idea is that state organised violence erodes social norms and relationships therefore amplifying the impact of trauma. One way for helping communities who have experienced state organised violence is to support them re-establish and strengthen social relationships and norms within those communities and across communities and with societal structures (social capital bonding, bridging and linking). Social capital speaks to this in terms of norms such as trust and cooperation in society. STARTTS framework identifies three social capital objectives 1) social capital networking and connection, 2) social capital norms, and 3) social capital enablers.

Trauma informed approach	Strength and asset based approach	Social capital framework
❑acknowledges that trauma is something that affects people throughout their life ❑to work with people, you need to ensure that they are safe, that you build trust with them, that they are empowered ❑building trust and safe spaces to engage people from African descent	❑looks a the strengths of the people - what do people have, what do they bring and what can they use to resist the (racist) system ❑It's not just about people being victims. As people of African descent we also have something to contribute to the Australian social fabric?	❑Social networking and connections ❑refugees and some migrants who experienced violence, war in their countries, and people get displaced, that experience, what it does is it targets relationships. It takes away trust from you. That's how it works. You can't trust everybody, takess agency away. ❑Social capital norms ❑Encouraging people to build a relationship. Encouraging people to build trust, encouraging people to build those norms that allow people to actually work together as communities, as groups, as family. ❑Social capital enablers

Presenter Recommendations

- **Safety** – cultivate safe relationships within communities and foster trust, to enable people to access help when needed without fear.
- **Reliability, openness, and accountability** - do what we say we will do and be held accountable for our actions and commitments to the community.
- **Solidarity** – among Africans first and extend that solidarity to other marginalised groups (for example Africans saying Sudanese people are problematic in public forum is not great as we are all Africans/Africans descents)
- **Mobilising** resources particularly financial resources – we need resource to employ people to follow through the recommendations of UN WGEPAD report, the work should not rely on volunteers and free labour.
- Understand and engage politically and with our political representatives at various levels (local, state and federal).
- Know the issues affecting African Australians and the organisations you are approaching and their core functions/purpose.
- Understand individuals experience of racism and the intersection of racism with, for example, generations, gender, age, language proficiency, values, and norms (these differ for those who migrate, and the kids born here).

Open discussion panelists and guests

Olivia Wellesley-Cole - African Women Community Support Group Inc.

We need to sort out the terminology we use with reference to who is a Black Australian. Often that refers to first inhabitants of the country we call Australia, Indigenous and Aboriginal communities.

We need to build a clear understanding of what is racism (this is often confused with insult) rather than the everyday slights that constitute racism, therefore, there clearly is a need for education on what racism is and what it is not.

Virginia Mapedzahama
- Home Affairs is reviewing the multicultural framework, this is an opportunity for people to contribute and make their voices heard. If multiculturalism concept is outdated, put in a submission, and make suggestions. [The AAAC has made a submission]

Julian Nkrumah
- There is a need to understand functions of colonial structures which were designed to divide and rule. This requires that as people of African descent we unite and speak one language to be able to make progress.
- To foster community collaborations and progress, the communities need to heal, a program like "Healing Hands" needs to be investigated and implemented. We need to find ways and commit ourselves to come together to act, to understand what is hurting us and breaking us apart. If we do not understand what the issues are, they will continue to manifest into perpetuity within the community. Coming together can also help make progress and enable us to face the enemy metaphorically.

Clement Meru Settlement and Community Programs Manager at SydWest Multicultural Services and Chair of the African Alliance, New South Wales.
- Collaboration is important among the various groups and sub-groups from African backgrounds, to make sure we leave no one behind.
- We need to mobilise (and socialise) - sharing the UN WGEPAD report with the various community groups.

- We need to identify key stakeholders who need to be provide input and build capacity for the groups to make representations, including the recommendations of the WGEPAD report.

- We need to share the workload, as often times it falls on a few people to work on the issues and they get exhausted, and that poses a risk of loss of individuals from burnout.

Rosemary Kariuki NSW Police Multicultural Liaison Officer, 2021 Australian Local Hero
- African Australians need to be represented in all areas of the society, need to know the politics, and have a seat at the table (discussed a critical lens regarding this language) where discussions happens to represent our interests.
- Rosemary is a member of the Australian Multicultural Council, where various community groups make representation on issues affecting their communities. Having learnt that during COVID pandemic the Australian government stopped funding master's level education programs in Third World (African) countries, Rosemary was able to take up the issue with the relevant Minister and advocated for the funding to be restored, which has since been restored. This shows the significance of being represented and having a 'seat at the table'.
- Discussing systemic racism on the side-lines does not bring it to the attention of the relevant decision and policy makers, hence representation is important even at political level.
- We need to start increasing our presence in various bodies where conversations are had in the country.

Zoom questions broadening allyship and advocacy from others.

Dr Vincent Ogu - AAAC Board Member and Chairperson at Africa Health Australia

He writes, how best can we broaden and raise the profile of advocacy against racism and build allies in civil society, community, parliament, and government.

Gloria Tabi - Author of Inclusive Teams & Workplaces: Everyone Wins! and Founder, Everyday Inclusion

- Why do we not speak about the mechanisms that create and sustain racism?
- We cannot fix the problem that we do not understand and race and the technology behind racism is not understood that is why racism persists.
- Are the approaches to combating racism not fit for purpose perhaps?
- Empowerment and entrepreneurship - when we have financial capacity, we then also have capacity to exert power in other places and that is really important.

Closing remarks

Prof. Brian Stout – Dean School of Social Sciences, Pro Vice-Chancellor Humanities, Arts and Social Science Cluster

- Prof Stout thanked Kathleen and Tori, and all the organisers for the event and everyone who has joined today in person and online. The report that has been circulated has at 125 recommendations and that is an incredibly dense document, however the findings particularly around the criminal justice system are not surprising as discussed in December 2022. Criminal justice system and impacts on young people and the outcomes, layered with racism is fertile ground for severe impacts on young people.

Presenter's Closing Considerations

- Reiterate the importance of advocacy and of building alliances as pointed out by Dr Reynolds in their opening address.
- Data is important – The School of Social Sciences collaborates with people from African heritage and has meaningful interactions with Africa. As a university WSU and specifically the School of Social Sciences has almost 10% of faculty, staff, and students of African heritage, that is a good place to start. However, there is still a need to build accurate data sets of infeed countries and staff and student from African descent. We cannot measure what we do not know, and we need to improve how the university measures student participation for student from African descent.
- Inclusive curriculum - needs to include African theorists, particularly given the cohort of students from African backgrounds.
- ·Alliances are especially important and judging by the audience there are strong lliances. Various forms of alliances, some are formal partnerships, others, informally and formally with a range of organizations. The WSU has alliance with other universities and always developing new alliances. For example, through the Challenging Racism Project a formal alliance has been established with the Stephen Lawrence Centre in the UK, to put that work on a global stage.
- Those alliances are so important to the university and community groups that the university works with, as the research outputs, feed into the curriculum and support students as they move towards employment.
- Allyship – being an ally it is a verb phrase not a noun, it is doing something to build connections and bring forth the Antiracist agenda.
- Recognition of qualifications from African universities, WSU has an initiative to offer recognition of qualifications from African countries in medicine. The university plans to roll this out to other areas to support getting those qualifications recognised and getting accredited to work here.

AAAC Report back on United Nations visits to New York and Geneva

Mrs Delphine Yandamutso - AAAC Founding member

Mrs Yandamutso reported back on representation of AAAC at the UN Permanent Forum on people of African descent that took place end of May and June 2023 in New York with the theme "Realising the dream".

Key learnings and outcomes:

- This was the first delegation of African Australians at the UN forum. It appeared that there is lack of awareness of people in other parts of the world of the presence people of African descent in Australia.
- Some of the discussions revolve around global reparations, justice, Pan-Africanism for dignity, justice and peace, transnational migration, recognising and addressing systemic and structural racism, a data-driven evidence-based approach and health, wellbeing, and intergenerational trauma.
- UN declaration on the promotion, protection, and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent and a declaration of a second decade of people of African descent.
- Australians of African background are new to the UN forum. It was good to hear from people who have been doing this work for a long time and to experience solidarity.
- Recommend everyone reads the forum's website for key recommendations.
- Similarly key issues from the forum include the need for: education, data, need to talk about racism. Suggested that engaging in healthy conversations about racism can lead to better outcomes.

Mr Daniel Gobena – AAAC Founding member and Secretary

Attended the forum on Economic Empowerment of People of African Descent in Geneva, May 2023

Key learnings and outcomes:

- The aim was to uncover the root cause of economic disparity for people of African descent and to forge a path towards true empowerment. Discussions covered similar issues to what Delphine talked about as well, about systemic racism, reparation, digital equity, breaking free from economic burdens.
- Ubuntu emerged as a unifying theme amongst people of African descent at the forum.
- What can we learn from other migrant and settler communities, a book Culture and Migration by Thomas Sowell may have some pointers for the community.

Some key factors to thriving communities:

- Family - is if families are intact, that is a high indicator of economic outcomes and better well settled communities.
- Mentorship - a program of mentoring. So, when new people come in, what they will do is that they'll actually take that person, take them on holiday, like a tourist tour around. When that person is high inspired and wanting to do something.
- Sponsorship – what is that we have. They are supremely important. The supreme value they have is in self-reliance.
- Celebration - every month, everyone who received their driving license, they'll be celebrated.
- Dignity is important." Let us not lose track of that. I think of how to dignify someone, I think we said that you can't separate, you can't divide, you cannot do something if you restore dignity.

Where to from here:

Noël Zihabamwe - AAAC Founding member and Chairperson

African Australians have shared stories that highlight the challenges faced in settling in Australia, as follows:

- Achieving the Australian dream only to live a nightmare – experiences of new homeowners in communities where they are explicitly threated and told they do not belong. Living in fear for individuals and their family's safety.
- Experiences of overt racism in professional settings, where having an accent is equated to not being good at the job, rather recognising the additional language skills that can be of benefit to the organisation.
- Interactions with criminal justice in Australia are concerning.
- Detention of people of African descent and deportation without access to appropriate legal support to financial barriers among other issues is also concerning.

Our AAAC objective is clear:
To foster a society free from racial discrimination, ensure equality, and advance the rights and well-being of people of African descent communities within the Australian context.
As we embark on this transformative journey, we understand the significance of policy and legislative alignment.

To achieve this:
- We have established AAAC and built collaboration with academic institutions, government and various parts of civil society to run events like today to undertake, collaborate on research and most importantly build relationships and consultations with African Australian Communities.
- We have started conducting a comprehensive review of existing laws and policies to identify areas where alignment with UN recommendations is needed.
- We will further our collaboration with legal experts, lawmakers, and human rights advocates to draft and advocate to amend legislation to promote equality and combat racism.

The UN WGEPAD report highlighted the following for the AAAC. Our speakers today reaffirmed:

- *Education is a powerful catalyst for change.* Partnering with educational institutions like WSU, RMIT, and so many others, we will integrate African Australians 'history, contributions, and experiences into curricula at all levels. Additionally, we will develop cultural competency training for educators, ensuring inclusive and respectful learning environments that celebrate diversity.

- *Law enforcement reform is a crucial step in promoting justice and equality*. Collaborating with law enforcement agencies, we will advocate for mandatory training programs focused on de-escalation, cultural sensitivity, and combating racial profiling. By establishing transparent mechanisms for reporting and addressing cases of police misconduct and discrimination, we hope this will build trust and accountability.

- *Economic empowerment and inclusion are vital for prosperity.* We hope to create partnerships with businesses to promote diversity in hiring, leadership, and supplier networks. To encourage mentorship and entrepreneurship programs to provide support and resources for African Australians.

- *Data collection and analysis are essential for evidence-based policies.* Research is a key founding principle of AAAC. One area of research we want to work towards is to implement a national data collection system to document areas of discrimination experienced by African Australians to allow us to track progress and disparities across various sectors.

- *Human rights education is the cornerstone of building an inclusive society.* AAAC already works with the Australian Human Rights Institute, Anti-Discrimination NSW, Keep NSW Safe, Moving forward together and others. We hope together to encourage public awareness campaigns to be developed to educate citizens about human rights, diversity, and the importance of combating racism.

- *Strengthening our collaboration is integral to our local and global impact.* The AAAC will actively participate in local, state, federal and international forums when we can. We will be sharing our experiences, challenges, and successes in advocating for the UN WGEPAD recommendations to be implemented. Collaboration with other groups, like minded organisations and nations will enable us to exchange best practices and engage in joint initiatives to combat racism and other recommendations.

- This journey requires collective dedication, collaboration, and a commitment to social justice and equality for all Australians. Since the founding of AAAC, we have used strengths-based approaches.
- Community empowerment and collaboration are at the heart of our mission. We have started to establish community-driven initiatives that empower African Australian communities to actively participate in decision-making processes, advocate for change and work collaboratively with government and others to make Australia which our home, better.

Looking back to look forward and celebrate our success

- Let us come together and go forward, united in purpose. Together, we can build a society that celebrates diversity, empowers communities, and upholds the principles of human rights, equality and strive to create a brighter and more inclusive future for all Australians.
- Thank you to the speakers from the community and academics who shared wisdom, expertise, perspective, and their lived experience during the event.
- A moment of reflection and a call to action moving forward with the insights and chart a way forward.
- Our commitment to championing the rights of the marginalised and vulnerable speaks volumes about the values we uphold. Together, we're forging a path toward a more just and compassionate world, where every individual's dignity and rights are upheld without compromise.
- From the symposium's deliberations we all want to foster a society free from racial discrimination, ensure equality and advance the rights and wellbeing of people of African descent in Australian context. The purpose of the platform is to advocate for issues affecting our people and celebrate our success.

Emergent themes from the symposium

1.Funding
- Employment - funding is required to engage full-time employees to undertake the work required to realise and implement the key recommendations and findings of the UN WGEPAD. Relying on volunteers and free labour has some negative impacts on the few that are engaged and can lead to missed opportunities for engagement and delivery of program for the community.
- Programs – we need funding to develop and deliver community programs with support from governments at all levels.

2.Advocacy
- Political advocacy - intensive and concerted effort is required to advocate for the needs of people of African descent with policy makers at all levels of government including through direct engagement with politicians as needed.
- Law – enforcement advocacy – engagement with law enforcement and the justice system to identity opportunities to de-escalate, strengthen safe and culturally appropriate approaches, stop racial profiling and police brutality towards people of African descent.

3.Education and recognition of qualifications
- Early childhood education (ECE) – ensuring that young children can access educational programs from a young age through participation and enrolment in ECE to build fundamental skills for success in formal education.
- Primary and high school education – create safe schooling environments where students from African descent do not experience racism and feel a sense of belonging in the school. Support teachers to provide appropriate support [particularly where children of African descent are a minority]. Support students to complete HSC or equivalent as much as possible to ensure they have the necessary skills to participate in economic activity (reading, writing and thinking).
- Higher education sector – Engage with the university sector to provide pathways for access to higher educational education whether it is through Vocational education (TAFE) or university or colleges.

4.Research (data gathering and evidence-based approaches) -
- For policy makers to take claims seriously we need to gather evidence to support demands for change and challenge the status quo. Without evidence it is hard to prove the claims and challenges faced by people of African descent.

5.Alliances, collaboration and partnerships
- Our success depends on other's support, we need to build strong alliances and be allies for other marginalised communities. Improving our conditions (as marginalised peoples) will improve the conditions of other marginalised communities. When we promote the human rights of one group it promotes the human rights of others across the globe.
- We need to work alongside others to build strong, resilient and vocal communities agitating for change, these may include NGO's, faith communities, universities, government at all levels, universities, individuals, and others who share our plight and want to see change.

6.Challenge and inform policy interventions -
- Be aware of policy interventions that will likely have negative and harmful impacts on African Australians, challenge such policies through formal submissions and engagement with policy makers. Particularly, we seek to engage with law enforcement and justice agencies to alleviate the immediate problems with heavy handed policing practices, racial profiling, indefinite detention, representation in the judicial system and so forth to bring to an immediate end the harm caused by such practices.

7.Early intervention to prevent health and mental health challenges
- Repairing damage from racism is expensive, early intervention in prevention programs is vital to ensure new migrants and settlers from African descent can have safe and dignified existence in their new home and country.
- Developing culturally safe programs with medical and auxiliary health services that can address and support people of African descent settle safely in Australia with minimal(no) racist experiences from service providers.
- Dignity (developing a framework for understanding community experiences of racism) to tailor a response program that addresses experience of racism from African Australian perspective.

8.Representation at various community forums and political levels (local, state and national)
- African Australians should take the opportunity to participate in formal community and political structures through membership and office bearers of local organisations (sporting clubs, P&C, community reps, and others) and running for political office at all levels.

9.Racism in professional and employment settings
- Research (e.g. Diversity Council Australia) shows the challenges (such as racism, lack of recognition of qualifications and skills,etc) faced by people of African descent in workplaces. We need to engage to employers through established platforms to put forward the challenges within the employment sector and explore practical solutions that benefit the employers and meet our community needs.

10.Mentorships and sponsorships
- We need to cultivate mentors and mentees to support foster growth and individual growth for people of African descent, in the workforce and schooling systems. Those who can afford to, need to sponsor the disadvantaged to fulfil their goals and ambitions and support their aspirations.

11.Entrepreneurship and self-reliance (akin to Vukuzenzele
- **A** South African expressions of wake/get up and do it for yourself!) - Entrepreneurship and self-reliance for new settlers in the colony can be very empowering, establishing businesses that service our people's needs and foster that self-reliance outside of welfare and mainstream employment can be a way to regain dignity and provide services to our people in ways that are culturally appropriate and meet the consumer needs for health, clothing, beauty, care services and so forth.

12.Co-creating solutions with the community towards community resilience
- A number of programs already existing that have been developed to deal with racism, we need to work with the developers and community to adapt existing Anti-racism programs, for example AHR - Racism It Stops with Me, WSU - Challenging Racism Program and others and tailor them for our purposes and experiences.

13.Access to African traditional foods for health and well-being
- African people face challenges and barriers in bring traditional staple foods into Australia due to quarantine laws, some are absolutely valid, however we need to find ways to increase access to traditional foods.

Appendix 4

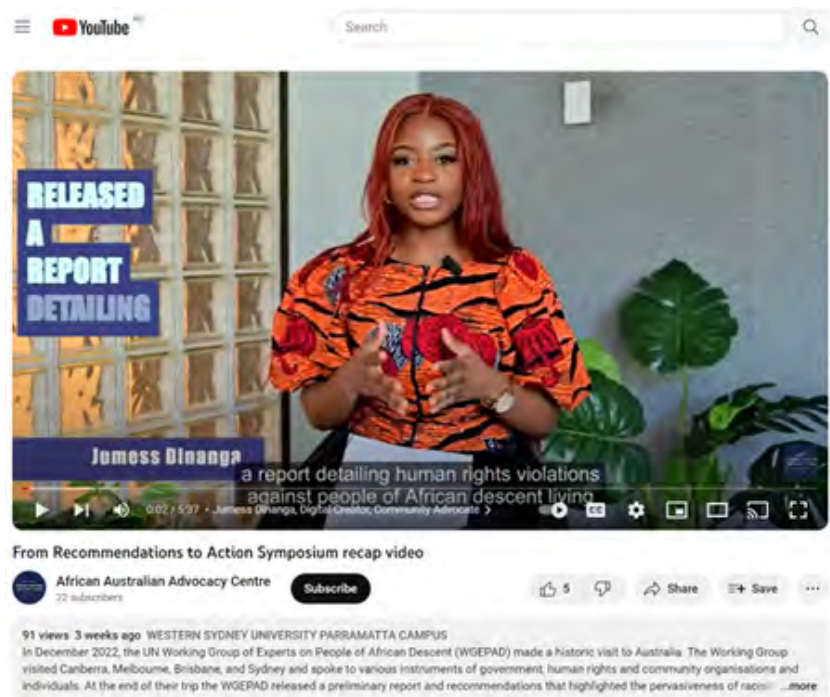## Localised or topical approaches moving forward

AAAC video summarising the UN WGEPAD visit/call to action

Through the theoretical framework of Communication for Social Change, which questions if social change is occurring if in fact it is not communicated ie. gauged by general public knowledge of a topic, this project is innovative as it also has a public facing component responding to real-world problems through capturing stages of the project/thought leadership components with creative methodologies such as through digital ethnography ensuring the broader public are aware of the project with strategic focus through a National platform website hosted by the AAAC.

Roundtable focused on Immigration detention in Melbourne

Additionally, funding was received from RMIT Enabling Impact, Platform Activity fund to host and record a Roundtable in October at RMIT (Melbourne campus) with scholars and stakeholders to discuss the treatment of African diaspora in Australian Immigration detention, particularly the cancellation of young South Sudanese visa's threatened with deportation back to South Sudan. Young South Sudanese therefore remain in offshore Immigration detention indefinitely. Response to this human rights issue was listed as one of the UN WGEPAD recommendations. In the UN WGEPAD summary statement, it was outlined that:

From Recommendations to Action Symposium recap video - YouTube

From Recommendations to Action Symposium recap video

African Australian Advocacy Centre
22 subscribers

91 views · 3 weeks ago · WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY PARRAMATTA CAMPUS
In December 2022, the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD) made a historic visit to Australia. The Working Group visited Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Sydney and spoke to various instruments of government, human rights and community organisations and individuals. At the end of their trip the WGEPAD released a preliminary report and recommendations that highlighted the pervasiveness of racis...   ...more

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South Sudanese former efugees reported high rates of incarceration, indefinite detention, mental health concerns, and suicide in Australia. In schools and in the community, reports of severe and pervasive racism have impacted their sense of belonging and their opportunities. "Disproportionate numbers of people of African descent have been categorised as unlawful non-citizens and banished indefinitely from Australia's population to offshore and inland detention facilities," the experts said.

The Working Group found that Australia's use of indefinite detention under section 501 of the Migration Act presents grave human rights concerns, including with respect to due process, prior notice of collateral consequences, retroactive application and the racialised arbitrary and subjective nature of its use. The experts recommend that the Government immediately end the practice of indefinite detention under Section 501, which is incompatible with international human rights law.

The mental health of children, men and women of African descent is an urgent concern requiring culturally appropriate and trauma-informed care, prevention and non-carceral approaches", the experts said.

All children in 'detention' need to be decriminalised and returned to their families and communities with a view to shifting to a public health-centred approach that addresses the underlying causes of juvenile offending.

RMIT University and AAAC invited guest collaborator Assoc Professor Kathomi Gatwiri from Southern Cross University as a guest workshop presenter to discuss Antiracist pedagogy and towards decolonising practice.

Working Group Survey (Consultation

On 12th August, 2023 the AAAC launched the 'Working Group Survey (Consultation)'. The consultation process is an expression of interest call out to continue to mobilise the people who contributed to the UN WGEPAD consultation in Dec '22. The survey is an expression of interest and the feedback will play a vital role in establishing 7-10 working groups that will champion various aspects of community advocacy, ensuring that the interests are represented and the voices are heard.

The working groups will be established to guide and support AAAC's work towards addressing issues raised in the final report. Through this survey, the AAAC seeks to gain a deeper understanding of needs, aspirations, priorities and challenges.

The planning process will be established in November '23 following the release of the UN WGEPAD full report at the Human Rights Council in Geneva end of September '23.

Closing Remarks - Noël Zihabamwe - AAAC Founding member and Chairperson

Noël Zihabamwe (Chairperson of the AAAC) presented on a panel at the UN Human Rights Council focused on 'Facilitating the journey to racial justice' identifying 20 years of work of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent chaired by Ms. Barbara Reynolds, (Chair UN WGEPAD). The proceedings can be viewed via:
https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/10/halting-and-reversing-lasting-consequences-slavery-colonialism-genocide-and-apartheid.

Upon returning from Geneva in October 2023, the AAAC Executive team will meet with Australian Government officials to deliver this response submission report.

> **"As we look ahead, we are committed to continuing our partnership with the UN WGEPAD and the Australian Government from local to federal level and other stakeholders. Our ongoing collaborations ensure a brighter future for people of African descent in Australia. Together, we can build a society that celebrates diversity, upholds the principles of human rights, and provides equal opportunities for all Australians".**

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