

For the Attention of the Conference Parties – COP 16, Cali, Colombia.

November 1, 2024

Statement from Barbara G Reynolds

Member and Current Chair of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent

In my individual and personal capacity and not on behalf of the Working Group.

It is immensely important to recognise and acknowledge that enslaved Africans who were brought to work the land, land to which they could claim no title at that time, land on which they shed their blood, sweat, and tears, land that fed and enriched the enslavers and colonisers, land that fed them but only from the crumbs of enslavers and colonisers, land where the flora and fauna, soil and climate conditions were different enough to present challenges, land on which they forged a new identity, community, and new resolutions, and finally a land in which many of them bury their pennies alongside their dead, saved their dimes alongside their dignity, hid their nickels sufficiently to wrest emancipation from enslavement, end colonisation, navigate segregation and emerge on the other side with their heads held high, hopeful and optimistic, determined to make their way forward.

The issue of land rights for people of African descent, therefore, as it is for indigenous peoples, is not *merely* a matter of 21st Century economics, or even convenience, is about maintaining the tenuous links between the past and the present that are under threat and the security of future development. It is about the identity, history and future of Africans and enslaved Africans trafficked to the Americas and Europe, and the human rights situation of all peoples everywhere. In this regard, Articles 1 and 2 of the 1986 UN General Assembly Declaration on the Right to Development is instructive (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-right-development>)

Over the centuries, adopting and adapting their traditional knowledge to their new homelands, people of African descent became not only beneficiaries of the natural resources but protectors of the natural resources. These ways of knowing are integral to their being and living in harmony with the land. Not recognising their relationship with the land and their contribution to its protection is harmful not just to people of African descent but to the very environments we seek to protect and maintain for future generations and for the planet. To this end, I urge Conference Parties to include explicitly and specifically people of African descent in the resolution.

Thank you!

Handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B.G. Reynolds".