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THE DDPA AND THE WAR ON REPARATIONS FOR AFRICAN PEOPLE

“Of all our studies, history is best qualified to reward our research.”
Malcolm X

The Undeclared War on Reparations in the United Nations

In 2023, we are in the midst of an undeclared battle for reparations at the United Nations. This battle revolves around the Durban Declaration and Program of Action [DDPA] and the newly created UN mechanism, the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent. To understand how we got here and the importance of this battle for African people globally, we must review some history.

The DDPA was the first international declaration that the Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery as crimes against humanity for which reparations were due the descendants of the victims. It obliterated any statutes of limitations arguments against reparations under international law. This unprecedented and historic victory for African people at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (Durban, 2001) was achieved by a coalition of the majority of the UN member States and Black led civil society on a key issue: reparations for people of African descent. It demonstrated that an organized, determined and united civil society working with the developing countries can win on important issues in the United Nations.

Our experience as NGOs [non-governmental organizations] at the United Nations in Geneva since 1989 had taught us [The December 12th Movement International Secretariat and the International Association Against Torture] that victory in this international forum of public opinion would be determined by the content of the final UN document. We saw “Victory” being tied to three issues: 1) Declaration of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Slavery and Colonialism as Crimes Against Humanity; 2) Reparations for the Descendants of the victims of these crimes; 3) Recognition of the economic basis of racism.

Western Opposition to Reparations

From jump, the Western European and Other Group¹, the US in particular, opposed reparations. At the first international PrepCom (Preparatory Commission) in Geneva in 2000, the U.S. delegation, cynically headed by a Black woman, threatened to withdraw from the WCAR if reparations was being considered. This was such a blatant contradiction for the self-proclaimed “world champion of human rights” that by the second international PrepCom in 2001, the US had changed its tactics to say the real issue was Anti-Semitism.

¹ WEOG = Western Europe, U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel

Our response to the WEO group opposition was to organize the Afro-Descendant Coalition, composed of African people from across the Diaspora who were coming to the world conference, to support these three key issues.

In the United States, we, along with the National Black United Front, organized “the Durban 400,” an NGO delegation of 400 people from mainly across the US, to go as a unified force to lobby member countries around those three issues.

In the months preceding the opening of the World Conference, one of the major South African representatives told us, “You cannot believe the amount of pressure the US is putting on us. They threaten to pull out from the Conference if we endorse the reparations issue.”

Victory at the WCAR

In Durban, South Africa the battle was intense. In the interests of achieving a consensus document, the African group agreed to drop the demand for reparations for colonialism. The Caribbean countries stood firm. And the Palestinians did not make Israel an issue. Thus there is nothing in the DDPA negative about Israel. Nevertheless, once it became clear that the world was moving in our favor, the US cowardly withdrew, falsely citing the “antisemitic nature” of the conference. The remaining WEO countries caved under the weight of superior organization and world public opinion and the DDPA was adopted by consensus. History was made.

The Western Attack on the DDPA/Reparations

From the day after the WCAR ended, the WEOG, in collaboration with the UN Human Rights Secretariat, launched their counteroffensive to disappear the DDPA. Their chief tactics were death by neglect, death by omission.

For example, there was no five year review held as with all other previous world conferences. An 8 year review took place only after pressure was brought by civil society. Over the past 20 years there has been little to no budget allocated or publicity/programs to educate the world about the DDPA, or its offshoots, the International Year and the International Decade for People of African Descent. Also at critical moments, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights fails to implement resolutions adopted that confirm the primacy of the DDPA.

The Permanent Forum on People of African Descent [PFPAD] - A Trojan Horse in the struggle for Reparations?

Which brings us to the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent. Potentially the Forum can be a positive instrument in the struggle for People of African descent. However the new mechanism is being employed as a vehicle in the anti-DDPA states ongoing attack on the DDPA by being presented as an “either, or” proposition.

It cannot be that in order to have the PFPAD there must be: a cutback or elimination of the Working group on People of African Descent; elimination of the Eminent Persons group; no adherence to DDPA guidelines for programs and activities.

But even more tellingly we know that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark” when the Permanent Forum is heartily, almost fervently, embraced by the same countries (the US and Canada) who remain in vehement opposition to the DDPA and reparations.

For example, at the just concluded session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, U.S. Ambassador Michele Taylor said, “*We also look forward to the upcoming Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in New York this May, of which the United States is a proud champion. We*

were the only country that made a voluntary contribution to support the historic launch of the Permanent Forum last year.”

What are we going to do?

It is clear what role the U.S., Canada, Israel and the anti-DDPA countries want the PFPAD to play – the slayer of the DDPA and with it the international basis for Reparations for African people. The only issue is what are we going to do. Will we allow the historic victory for African people encapsulated in the DDPA to be snatched from us without resistance. Or will we fight to demand the primacy of the DDPA and to ensure that the PFPAD function within DDPA parameters as a forum to champion African people’s still unfulfilled demands for reparations. The choice is obvious. We said it 25 years ago. We say it now.

**THEY SOLD US! THEY STOLE US! THEY OWE US!
REPARATIONS NOW!**