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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Geledés - Instituto da Mulher Negra, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 August 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Effects of Environmental Racism

It is crucial to discuss an extremely urgent issue: the intersection of climate justice and racial justice. Representing Geledés - Instituto da Mulher Negra, a Brazilian organization that has been dedicated for 36 years to defending the rights of Black women and the Afro-descendant population in Brazil, I must emphasize that these groups face systemic discrimination that limits their access to social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental opportunities due to the prevailing racism and sexism in our society.

The recent climate agenda leads us to an unavoidable conclusion: there can be no climate justice without racial justice, and vice versa. The disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation from climate change on racialized communities in this country demand a reorientation of our political institutions, economic systems, and legal frameworks. Institutional racism, a legacy of colonialism, places the Afro-descendant population in conditions of permanent vulnerability. In the context of climate change, this institutional racism unfolds into environmental racism, reflected in the unequal distribution of environmental damages caused by climate changes where Afro-descendant communities are often the most affected and the most neglected in terms of reconstruction proposals.

It is also crucial to highlight that international documents and agreements have recognized the need to combat racism and promote inclusion. Brazil, in particular, has made progress by including in the text of the last Political Declaration of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development a commitment to "intensify our efforts to combat racism, all forms of discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, stigmatization, and hate speech at all levels, through cooperation, partnership, and inclusion, and with respect for diversity."

This commitment is an essential initial step, but it is still insufficient on its own. We need to acknowledge and address the intersections between environmental racism and other forms of social exclusion. Analyses of human rights violations must consider the multiple discriminations faced by Black women, who are disproportionately affected by climate change and rights violations.

An example of this is the so-called "racial sacrifice zones". This term refers to areas that disproportionately suffer from environmental degradation due to discriminatory practices and unjust environmental policies, thus impacting mainly racialized communities. These zones are often located near sources of industrial pollution, toxic waste dumps, or other sources of environmental degradation, such as intensive mining and deforestation.

Thus, the concept of "sacrifice zone" expands to include the racial aspect when we consider how decisions about where to locate polluting activities are often influenced by socioeconomic and racial factors. Historically, racialized communities are the least equipped to resist or legally recourse against such harmful locations due to economic and political limitations. This situation perpetuates cycles of poverty and health problems, solidifying these communities' vulnerability to climate change and other environmental disasters.

Therefore, denying environmental racism is to deny institutional racism and means ignoring the living conditions in Black, peripheral, and occupied territories facing drought and environmental devastation.

In light of this, several measures must be taken:

1. **Differential Recognition of Climate Impacts:** because, as already mentioned, the consequences of climate change are not the same for everyone. Race and gender significantly influence these impacts. We need to develop effective methods for collecting and analyzing data that recognize these differences. We cannot limit ourselves to averages that obscure racial and gender disparities.
2. **Integration of Race and Gender in Adaptation Plans:** Our national disaster prevention and adaptation plans must include Afro-descendant women as essential agents of change. They must have full access to the necessary resources for implementing actions and for disaster recovery.

3. Valuation of Traditional Knowledge: The traditional knowledge of Afro-descendant women in areas such as climate adaptation, governance, and agriculture is an invaluable resource. This knowledge, linked to human rights, must be central in decisions that affect the future of our planet.
4. Inclusion of Afro-descendant Perspectives in Science: It is vital to consider the studies and research developed by Afro-descendant scientists and researchers, who offer enriching perspectives and innovative solutions from their experiences in the territories.
5. Public Funding for Climate Adaptation: It is essential that developed countries allocate adequate funding for climate adaptation, recognizing the specific needs of the most affected communities.
6. Access to Financing for Afro-descendant Women: Ensuring that financing for adaptation is accessible to Afro-descendant women and women's organizations is crucial. This includes simplifying the submission and financing processes and providing appropriate information and training.

Each of these determinations is a fundamental step to ensure that climate justice is also racial justice. By integrating these guidelines into our policies and actions, we are not only promoting equity but also strengthening our overall response to climate change.
