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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on the Promotion
and Protection of Human Rights
Fifty-sixth session
Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda

PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

**Written statement* submitted by All For Reparations and Emancipation, a non-
governmental organization in consultative (Roster) status with the Economic and Social
Council**

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

[24 June 2004]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

We, the Afrodescendant minorities throughout the Americas Region and Slavery Diaspora, have been attending and intervening at the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights for eight years. We have been praying for our most basic human rights: our language, culture, and religion; and, we have been repeatedly asking for the recognition of our self-chosen name, Afrodescendants. The Working Group on Minorities has recognized us, the Afrodescendant minorities, suffering the lingering effects of slavery.

Both the Sub-Commission and the Commission on Human Rights place minorities on their agenda. They invite minority leaders to travel to Geneva and speak on behalf of their people as delegates of NGOs. Human rights scholars are well aware that we Afrodescendant minorities are among the poorest of the poor in the countries in which we live. Yet, from their empty pockets the leaders find the money to come to the U.N. and speak on behalf of their people.

The date when minorities are recognized on the agenda of the Sub-Commission and the Commission on Human Rights is not fixed in the time-table of these Conferences. It seems that even though the United Nations has declared the importance of protecting the rights of minorities, leaders of minority NGOs are often placed in a powerless "minority" position when it comes to speaking at these Conferences.

Frequently the Conferences fall behind in their schedule, and re-scheduling of the minorities agenda item is done without consideration of the minorities themselves. Three times the representative of the NGO All For Reparations and Emancipation, AFRE, has been forced to return home to the United States without delivering his statement himself, due to changes in the time-table.

The United Nations is perceived to be the zenith body of law and order of the world. What other body of law can we call upon? We call upon you, the Sub-Commission. The Sub-Commission has a more respected voice than do we, the minority. As ex-slaves, up from civil death and given birth, what more can we ask, or of whom can we ask that the class of persons fitting the description, minority, have a permanent place on the agenda of the Commission on Human Rights, just as the Indigenous people have their place.

In April of 2004, Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke to the Commission on Human Rights about the Rwanda genocide and the importance of protecting minorities. On the very day that he was speaking about the importance of protecting minorities, the scheduled time when minority leaders would be able to speak to the Commission on Human Rights was pushed forward over a four day holiday weekend.

This act made the commitment of Secretary-General Annan ring hollow, as minority representatives experienced their powerlessness and their unprotected position within the U.N. The Afrodescendant leader, Mr. Silis Muhammad, was unable to stay in Geneva for an extra five days; therefore, he could not speak about the utter destruction of the original identity of his people and their prayer for U.N. recognition and assistance.

We respectfully ask the Sub-Commission to fix the agenda item 5(c) Prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities within the time-table, and make a commitment to minorities that their interventions will be heard on the date that the agenda item is scheduled. We

have seen this consideration given to the Indigenous Peoples, and we feel that minorities, in particular Afrodescendant minorities, are in a comparable position. Fixing the agenda item 5(c) would be an act of recognition and an example to the Commission on Human Rights.
