



June 30, 2021

UN Report Calls for an End to Racism

In the midst of the continuing violence in Chicago, we all should remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., when he said, “True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.”

One of the earliest pieces of legislation that I passed with bipartisan sponsorship in the Illinois General Assembly was House Resolution 468 (96th GA) urging that social justice be the guiding principle in decision making in the House of Representatives.

What is social justice? One way to think of social justice is that it is justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. It is clear that social justice is needed for Black and Brown people in Chicago, in Illinois, in the United States, and in the world. It is also clear that ongoing systemic and structural racist policies need to be changed for us to ever have social justice, to have justice at all, and thus to have any true peace.

This week, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said, “The status quo is untenable. Systemic racism needs a systemic response. There is today a momentous opportunity to achieve a turning point for racial equality and justice.”

According to a report by New York Times reporter Nick Cummings-Bruce, High Commissioner Bachelet urged nations to take action to root out systemic racism against people of African descent, as she released a report calling for measures to dismantle discrimination and for sweeping changes to policing, as well as reparations.

The 20-page report and an accompanying 95-page conference paper draw on evidence from 60 countries. Work on them started after the May 25, 2020, death of George Floyd, a Black man killed in Minnesota by a white police officer. Its release comes days after the officer, Derek Chauvin, was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in prison.

“We could not find a single example of a state that has fully reckoned with the past or comprehensively accounted for the impacts on the lives of people of African descent today,” said Mona Rishmawi, who supervised the preparation of the report.

It points to common patterns of experience for people of African descent in Europe, Latin America and North America contending with poverty and with barriers to education, health care, jobs, and political participation. The report spotlights the deaths of 190 people of African descent who died at the hands of law-enforcement officers, most of them in the United States, pointing out that few of the victims posed a threat.

The report calls for reparations as an essential step to addressing the suffering inflicted by slavery and colonialism. Monetary compensation was important, the report said, but reparations “should not only be equated with financial compensation.” They could also include formal acknowledgment and apologies, educational reform, and measures to commemorate the experience of people of African descent, it said.

This international report gives another voice for these very goals and ideals that I and so many others have been working for. We need broader participation in the political process, not more restrictions on voting. We need educational reform, truth, and fairness in how our history is taught. We need true economic and job opportunities, especially needed by Black and Brown people. We need reconciliation, but we also need the truth to be told about experiences with law enforcement. And, we need to act now to recognize the power of the protest chant “No Justice – No Peace”, to enable peace to flourish by changing discriminatory structures to create more justice in our city, state, and world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District