RIAFRO urges OAS member states to include the variable of self-identification for Afro-descendant populations in responses to COVID-19

On April 24, 2020, a virtual meeting on the responses and challenges to COVID-19 in the Afro-descendant population organized by the Inter-American Network of High Authorities on Afro-descendant Population Policies (RIAFRO) took place, during which RIAFRO member states and international organizations exchanged information and good practices.

Participants included authorities on the Afro-descendant population policy of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru, as well as representatives of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Afro-Latin American Research Institute, Harvard University (ALARI).

During the interventions, the participants recognized the efforts made by the Member States and international organizations in the response to the pandemic; and stated that COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting primarily Afro-descendant populations, as a result of discrimination, and inequality conditions.

They also expressed their concerns about the potential deepening of socioeconomic gaps and setbacks in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights among the Afro-descendant and non-Afro-descendant populations, due to the impact of the pandemic on the economies of the OAS Member States.

They also pointed out the need to bear in mind that the majority of people of African descent work in the informal sector and/or in sectors where social distancing measures have a direct impact; and that their vulnerability is not necessarily being considered by Member States.

In addition, they highlighted the urgency of attending to Afro-descendants in situations of greater vulnerability and potential victims of multiple discrimination, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities, children, adolescents, youth, women, persons deprived of liberty, migrants, refugees and displaced persons and LGBTI persons.

Last but not least, the evidence shows that most States do not have sufficient disaggregated data, nor is there a variable where Afro-descendants may identify themselves in the healthcare strategies and protocols in health centers and in social measures in response to the pandemic.
Due to the aforementioned, RIAFRO recommends that OAS Member States include the variable of self-identification for Afro-Descendants in a cross-sectional and intersectional manner in responses to the COVID-19 emergency, in accordance with the Ethnicity and Health Policy of the PAHO, the OAS Permanent Council resolution on “The OAS Response of the COVID-19”, and the inter-American legal framework such as the American Convention on Human Rights, the Protocol of San Salvador, the Inter-American Conventions against Racism, All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance, the Plan of Action for the Decade of People of African Descent in the Americas (2016-2024).

Likewise, RIAFRO recommends that OAS Member States implement the PAHO Ethnicity and Health Policy and the Plan of Action for the Decade for People of African Descent in the Americas (2016-2024) in response to COVID-19.

Finally, RIAFRO recommends that OAS Member States, international organizations, and international cooperation agencies bear in mind the Afro-descendant population as they prepare instruments during the COVID-19 health emergency, as well as in policies that will be developed and implemented after the pandemic.

RIAFRO is the OAS inter-American network that promotes dialogue, coordination, and permanent collaboration among national authorities, with the goal of implementing policies for people of African descent, in accordance with international and regional obligations in the Americas.

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