

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES
PERMANENT COUNCIL

**CELEBRATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF PERSONS OF AFRICAN DESCENT**

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Commissioner Margarete May Macaulay
Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons of African Descent
Rapporteur on the Rights of Women

OPENING WORDS

Good morning, everyone. A very special greeting to **the Secretary General of the OAS, Mr. Luis Almagro**, and to my fellow **Epsy Campbell, Vice-President of Costa Rica**.

Yesterday was marked as a historical day because we were commemorating the International Day for Persons of African Descent for the first time -thanks to the resolution adopted by United Nations-.

I want to highlight the hard work that the Government of Costa Rica has done to achieve this international recognition, as well as the creation of the Permanent Forum in the United Nations, and the different measures at the national level that have recently been adopted in favor of the Afro-Costa Rican population.

Likewise, yesterday the Commission was launching a quite novel report on standards for persons of African Descent and their economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights. **Intersectionality** is the central axis of this report.

Therefore, my presentation today focuses on *the intersectionality approach to combat structural discrimination and systemic racism*.

**THE INTERSECTIONALITY APPROACH TO COMBAT
STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION AND SYSTEMIC RACISM**

First, we understand what “intersectionality” means. The concept of intersectionality has been fleshed out in the academic field of Critical Race Theory (CRT), as a phenomenon where multiple categories of vulnerability, particularly gender, ethno-racial background, and socioeconomic status are intertwined and have a disproportionate impact.

The evolution of the doctrine of this **approach** has been written into the legal precedents of the Inter-American Court in the cases of *Ramírez Escobar v. Guatemala (2018)*; *I.V. v. Bolivia (2016)*; *Gonzales Llu et al v. Ecuador (2015)*, among other ones, wherein it was ascertained that social inequality stemming from the intersection of factors such as gender, national origin, sexual orientation, migratory status, and socioeconomic situation, has given rise to contexts of discrimination.

Specifically -on Persons of African Descent-, in the case of *Workers of the Fireworks Factory in Santo Antônio de Jesús and their Families v. Brazil (2020)*, the Court found that “(...) the intersection of factors of discrimination in this case increased the comparative disadvantage of the alleged victims (...) who share specific factors of discrimination that are suffered by persons in a situation of poverty, women and Persons of African Descent, but, additionally, suffer a specific form of discrimination on account of the convergence of all of these factors and, in some cases, because they are pregnant, girls, or because they are young girls and are pregnant.”

This IACHR has recognized that **intersectionality as a method of analysis involves observing the simultaneous convergence of multiple factors of discrimination, caused by different things, which entails a synchronic convergence of different causes of discrimination**. This means that two or more causes can be found that heighten vulnerability in one single event of discrimination and this has a synergistic effect, which goes beyond the simple sum of the different forms of discrimination, or which trigger a specific form of discrimination that only operates when several conditions of vulnerability exist in combination.

The [research](#) conducted recently by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), confirms the importance of introducing an intersectional perspective to help shine a light on gaps in the social, economic, education, health and other spheres faced by African Descent women and men as compared to non- African Descent.

Consequently, an intersectional approach brings into full sight what is rendered invisible when categories such as gender and race are conceptually regarded separately from one another. In this way, States are obliged to make public policies using a human rights-based approach and an intersectional perspective, so that the ethno-racial diversity of the region is recognized and thus ensure the right to sustainable development on an equal basis and without discrimination.

Based on the foregoing, it is essential to shed light on the relationship between different categories of vulnerability (age, gender, migratory status disability, sexual orientation and gender expression, socioeconomic status, inter alia), and how they intersect with “African Descent ethno-racial background” giving rise to patterns of structural racial discrimination.

Under this premise, the IACHR reaffirms that **analysis of intersectionality is key to comprehending human rights violations against Persons of African Descent** and aids in constructing effective and timely responses for the realization and protection of their rights