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Available at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/adan/vol13/iss4/13
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UN Secretary-General Calls for Final End to Racism

United Nations
December 10, 2010
story.asp?NewsID=37018&Cr=racism&Cr1=

As the United Nations system gears up to celebrate
2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent, Secretary-General
Ban Ki-moon delivered an impassioned plea today to the world community to
eradicate racism once and for all.

"The international community cannot accept that whole communities are
marginalized because of the colour of their skin," he told an event at UN
Headquarters in New York to launch the Year. "People of African descent are
among those most affected by racism. Too often, they face denial of basic rights
such as access to quality health services and education. Such fundamental
wrongs have a long and terrible history.

"The international community has affirmed that the transatlantic slave
trade was an appalling tragedy not only because of its barbarism but also
because of its magnitude, organized nature and negation of the essential
humanity of the victims."

"Even today, Africans and people of African descent continue to suffer the
consequences of these acts," he added, calling for their full integration into
social, economic and political life and at all levels of decision-making.

The General Assembly proclaimed the Year in December 2009 in a
resolution citing the need to strengthen national actions and regional and
international cooperation to ensure that people of African descent fully enjoy
economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights, to advance their integration
into all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society, and to promote
a greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage and culture.

"As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, 'all human beings
are born free and equal in dignity and rights,'" Mr. Ban said. "If we are to make
those words real, then we must eradicate racism once and for all. The success of
the International Year requires concerted efforts across the United Nations
system and at the regional and national levels, with the widest possible engagement and participation."

Also addressing the event was the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Ivan Simonovic, who said the International Year offers a unique opportunity to redouble efforts to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that affect Afro-descendents in all parts of the world.

"The International Year must become a milestone in the ongoing campaign to advance the rights of people of African descent and it deserves to be accompanied by activities that fire the imagination, enhance our understanding of the situation of people of African descent and are a catalyst for real and positive change in the daily lives of the millions of Afro-descendents around the world," he told the gathering.