

A Resolution Calling on the United Church of Christ to Adopt the
United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024)

SUMMARY

This resolution calls on the United Church of Christ to recognize the United Nations declaration of an International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). In declaring this decade, the United Nations acknowledges that African descendant people are a group whose rights must be protected and promoted. The United Nations accounts for over 200 million people who self-identify as African descent living in the Americas. The resolution calls on the United Church of Christ to: 1) acknowledge this Decade; 2) adopt its frameworks for addressing the issues affecting African descendant people; and 3) promote the Decade and resulting outcomes for advocating for the rights of African descendant people.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL and ETHICAL RATIONALE

At the outset of the creation stories, God declared that all that was made was good. Included in the goodness of creation was the creation of persons in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). The *Imago Dei* is present across many traditions which note that the equality of human kind rests on the theological premise that all people reflect the Divine. The sin of racism and the disenfranchisement of individuals because of their race or skin color is antithetical to the *Imago Dei*.

The unity of the church continues to be threatened by racism and all forms of discrimination. The global racial divide is a threat to the unity of the church which looks to the accord that Jesus prayed for. “That they may all be one” (John 17:21) is a reminder of the oneness that is exemplified in God’s love for all God’s people. Racism is a challenge to the church and continues to be a dehumanizing force robbing communities of rights, freedom and dignity.

The unity of the church is reflected in the rich diversity that is present in all of God’s people – race, gender, ethnicity, theology, sexuality – all are created in the image of the Divine. It is a core value of the United Church of Christ to work towards equality and to ensure that an inclusive communication of the Gospel is present and accessible for all. The Gospel is a call to action on behalf of the least of these. Jesus’ ministry was a message to the margins of his day “to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18).

The call to the church is to bring the good news of the Gospel, and to ensure that the oppressed go free. The oppression of racial injustice must be addressed in all areas of society. The church has the opportunity and mandate to be present in addressing the challenges facing people of African descent globally.

BACKGROUND

The history of racial injustices in the United States and across the Americas includes the commodification of African lives through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. While records point to the earliest enslaved people being brought into the United States in 1619, the kidnapping and enslavement of African people date back to the early 15th century and the arrival of the Portuguese on the African continent. “The ensuing centuries of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

brought about the removal of 12-15 million Africans from their continent to, at first, provide essential labor for the system of exploitation and expropriation of economic and other resources in the European colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands in the Americas that built European mercantile empires, and subsequently, to meet the need for uncompensated labor during the era of the Industrial Revolution in European nations and their colonies.” This bounty of uncompensated labor supported a plantation economy founded in imperialism and undergirded by the demonization of Africans and African-ness.

This arrival of African people in the Americas was undergirded by stereotypes of African people. These stereotypes were present in naming Africans as inferior to Europeans. This vilification and stereotyping of African peoples was supported by Christianity and Christian doctrine. By utilizing the Bible, theology, and the Church as instruments of oppression, white supremacy and white privilege became normative in the Americas. These instruments of racism are still present among us almost two hundred years after emancipation and over fifty years beyond the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

The United Nations stated: “In proclaiming this Decade, the international community is recognizing that people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected. Around 200 million people identifying themselves as being of African descent live in the Americas. Many millions more live in other parts of the world, outside of the African continent.” These 200 million people in the Americas identified by the UN are the descendants of Africans who were kidnapped from the African continent and enslaved in the Americas.

The United Church of Christ and its predecessor bodies have been strong advocates for Civil Rights for African descendant people in the United States. The General Synod has spoken on several occasions regarding racism. In 2003, the Twenty-Fourth General Synod adopted the resolution “Calling on the United Church of Christ to Renew Battle Against Racism in all its Guises.” The Twenty-Fourth General Synod also adopted a resolution “Calling the United Church of Christ to be an Anti-Racist Church.” Both of these resolutions informed a commitment to combat racism including racism directed toward people of African descent.

In its call for the church to be an anti-racist church in 2003, the UCC referenced the 2001 United Nations World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa and its affirmation that “racism has historically through imperialism and colonization created an unequal world order and power balance with present global implications impacting governments, systems, and institutions.” The International Decade comes four years after the International Year for People of African Descent (2011).

WHEREAS, the human rights of African descendant people globally and in the United States continue to be challenged by the presence of racism and the legacy of whiteness, and

WHEREAS, a myriad of social issues are byproducts of the racial inequities stemming from prejudice, bigotry, White privilege, White fragility, and White supremacy, and

WHEREAS, the numbers of incarcerated people of African descent in the Americas continues to grow, and

WHEREAS, disparities in healthcare, housing, education, the plight of women and girls, and a myriad of interconnected issues point to the need for addressing racism and calling attention to the need to protect the human rights of African descendant people.

WHEREAS, in many countries, while African descendant people attained civil rights, the human rights guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly continue to be elusive, and

WHEREAS, data show that police have continued killing Black men and women at disproportionate rates, even after the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor sparked international protests against racism and police brutality, with a total of 164 Black men and women who were killed by police from January 1 to August 31, 2020, and

WHEREAS, in June of 2020 four black men, Malcolm Harsch, Robert Fuller Dominique Alexander and an unidentified Black teenager were found hanged to death, all reported by authorities to have committed suicide, a claim disputed by their family members and many other people, and

WHEREAS, the Bible and Christian theology affirm *imago dei* – that all people are created in the image of God; and

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has consistently shown leadership in advocacy and for the rights of African descendant people in the United States and globally; and

WHEREAS, the United Nations declaration of the Decade calls for the promotion and protection of the rights of people of African descent; and

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ passed several resolutions that address the unfair treatment of people of African descent, that call for legislation and action to address injustices perpetuated against African descendant people and continues to decry the systems that support and perpetuate white privilege and white supremacy as tools that produce racism and racial inequality;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ continues to advocate for the dismantling of racism and racist institutions through education and policy;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the thirty-second General Synod of the United Church of Christ recognize the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015 - 2024);

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the United Church of Christ increase awareness of the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) among its congregations and work ecumenically to promote the Decade;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the United Church of Christ utilize this Decade to intentionally address the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the United Church of Christ adopt the Decade themes of recognition, justice and development as frameworks for its advocacy, commitments and engagement in the fight for the rights of People of African Descent.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.