

***Report on the Universal Human Rights  
People of African Descent in Sweden  
(29th March 2018)***

**Alternative Report to Sweden's 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>  
periodical reports to the Committee on the Elimination  
of Racial Discrimination**

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***On behalf of***

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**To the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination  
(CERD)**

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## Introduction

For this alternative CERD report on the universal human rights of people of African descent in Sweden we have decided to focus on recognition. Recognition is the first part of the theme of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024: *recognition, justice and development*.

The Government of Sweden has yet to officially launch, mark and implement the UN International Decade for People of African Descent in Sweden. Contrary to the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD), the Government does not recognise nor refer to the term race for antidiscrimination purposes nor does it recognise structural racial discrimination as such (including racial segregation) even as a *possible* universal human rights concern in the country. Contrary to recommendations by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action* (DDPA), the Government does not recognise let alone seek to rectify the history and lasting impact on structural racial discrimination of European colonialism—including the enslavement of Africans and people of African descent—and Sweden's part in this history and its legacies.

Such lack of recognition is of fundamental importance to the universal human rights situation of people of African descent in Sweden.

Fundamental in this regard is also that the Government of Sweden—in line with both the ICERD and the DDPA—recognises people of African descent as a collective in the country that is particularly subjected to structural racial discrimination and entitled to collective recognition, monitoring and measures for the protection, promotion, full and equal enjoyment of their human rights.

The first part of this alternative report is a list of recommendations for the recognition and promotion of the universal human rights of people of African descent in Sweden. The second part explains the relevance of each of these recommendations with respect to universal human rights.

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*Lund and Malmö—Sweden, 29 March 2018*

## Recommendations

- I. That Sweden explicitly recognises *race* by using the term, as the Convention does, as a ground of discrimination in its Discrimination Act (Article 1 of the ICERD; 2, 3, 15 and 16 on the List of themes);
- II. That Sweden explicitly recognises and monitors race as a possible recurring and compounded ground of discrimination across areas of society such as in employment, housing and education—i.e. *structural racial discrimination*—as the Convention calls for (Articles 1-5 of the ICERD; 2, 3, 4, 15, 16 and 17 on the List of themes);
  - a. Including, that Sweden—in line with the Convention, CERD recommendations and recommendations by the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD)—monitor structural racial discrimination as such and collect periodic surveys and other disaggregated “equality data” on race on the basis of voluntary participation, self-identification and anonymity (Cf e.g. CERD General Recommendation 24; CERD’s Concluding Observations on Sweden 2013; WGEPAD 2015, art. 97);
  - b. Including—in accordance with CERD General Recommendation 34—that Sweden conduct “periodic surveys (...) on the reality of discrimination against people of African descent and provide disaggregated data in their reports to the Committee on, inter alia, the geographical distribution and the economic and social conditions of people of African descent, including a gender perspective” (Article 16 of CERD General Recommendation 34);
  - c. Including, that Sweden—in accordance with the Convention—in explicit terms recognises that the country has a problem with *racial* segregation as such between people of European descent (white people) and non-European descent (people of colour) (Article 3 of the ICERD);
- III. That Sweden explicitly recognises, disseminates, implements and reports on measures taken to implement the *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action* (DDPA)—as called for by CERD General Recommendations 28 and 33.
  - a. Including—in accordance with the DDPA—measures taken to recognise and rectify Sweden’s participation in European colonialism and its structural racial discrimination, slavery and the transatlantic slave trade as crimes against humanity, and the lasting consequences of these practices, structures and injustices (cf. art. 13, 14, 15, 28, 102 and 158 of the DDPA);
  - b. Including—as called for by the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent in its country report on Sweden—an “education of the entire society, from top to bottom, with Sweden facing up to its colonial past and the legacies of European colonialism more broadly”, “that primary and secondary education curricula include information on Sweden’s role in the transatlantic

trade in captured Africans, enslavement and colonialism, with a link to its legacy and modern-day Afrophobia and racial discrimination”, and that “the Living History Forum as a public authority officially also include the transatlantic trade, with enslavement as a starting point” (WGEPAD 2015, art. 96, 109 and 110)

- IV. That Sweden—in line with CERD General Recommendation 34—explicitly recognises that people of African descent are particularly subjected to racial discrimination as such in the country and entitled to special measures, as individuals and as a collective, for the promotion and full protection of their human rights;
- a. Including, that Sweden officially marks the UN International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024—with its theme *recognition, justice and development*—implements its official programme of activities, as decided by the UN General Assembly (res 69/16), and, as recommended by the UN WGEPAD, “partner with civil society to take advantage of this historic opportunity to implement a commission working on a national plan for recognition, justice and development of Afro-Swedes and Africans that will effectively ensure that the fundamental rights of people of African descent are applicable, protected and effective” (UNGA Resolution 69/16; WGEPAD 2015, art. 124);
  - b. Including, that Sweden—as called for by CERD and the Convention—*continuously* reviews, adopts and implements national strategies and programmes with a view to improving the situation of people of African descent and protecting them against discrimination (Article 1.4 of ICERD; Article 11 of CERD General recommendation 34, and CERD General Recommendation 32);
  - c. Including, that Sweden—as called for by CERD General Recommendation 34—“Effectively acknowledge in [its] policies and actions the negative effects of the wrongs occasioned on people of African descent in the past, chief among which are colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, the effects of which continue to disadvantage people of African descent today” (Article 17 of CERD General Recommendation 34).
  - d. Including—as recommended by the UN WGEPAD—that “the Government, as an element of public recognition, mark important anniversaries for Afro-Swedes and Africans, such as the anniversary of the abolition of slavery on 9 October, and make the day a national day of remembrance. It should adopt the Stockholm city tour ‘In the Footsteps of Slavery’ (I slaveriets fotspår) and encourage all schools to place it on their academic calendar” (WGEPAD 2015, art. 111);
  - e. Including, that Sweden in its implementation of the Convention and its politics and policies of gender equality has an explicit intersectional perspective that recognises the multiple and compounded forms of discrimination that women of African descent in Sweden are subjected to (CERD General Recommendation 25 and articles 22-24 of CERD General Recommendation 34)

## Explanations

### I. That Sweden explicitly recognises *race*, as the Convention does, as a ground of discrimination in its Discrimination Act (Article 1 of the ICERD; 2, 3, 15 and 16 on the List of themes)

1. Sweden is among the few countries in the world that has eliminated the term *race* from its anti-discrimination law. In the Discrimination Act from 2009, the term is replaced with a broad definition of *ethnicity* as “national or ethnic origin, skin colour or other similar circumstance” (Government of Sweden 2008). In its Concluding Observations from 2013 (on the combined 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> periodic reports of Sweden) CERD notes that deleting the term *race* “may lead to difficulties with the qualification and processing of complaints of racial discrimination thus hindering the access to justice for victims” (CERD 2013, p. 2). In response to this concern the most recent Swedish state party report reiterates an argument in the 2007 Government Bill behind the new act, that “all people belong to the same race: the human race” and that continuing to use the word *race* “might legitimise racist assumptions and confirm *race* as an existing category” (Government of Sweden 2017, art. 25 p. 6; 2007).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it denies that the actual protection against discrimination has been watered down since the broad definition of *ethnicity* includes,
  - unfounded assumptions of “*race*”, attitudes based on sweeping references to perceptions of the characteristics, appearance or background of “immigrants” being used to justify an approach, or where someone in general justifies discriminatory action with derogatory terms about people with a foreign or Swedish background. (Government of Sweden 2017)
2. Here it should be pointed out—which, unfortunately, CERD has not—that the omission of the term *race* from Sweden’s anti-discrimination law has a broader significance than for the possibility to protect against, report and obtain redress for *individual* instances of discrimination. It also acts as a more general political norm for the kinds of discrimination to be recognized in society and how. For implementing the ICERD (and the DDPA) this is key since beyond protecting against *individual instances* of discrimination the ICERD (and the DDPA) more broadly require states to protect against *structural* discrimination.
3. What is more, Sweden’s elimination of the term *race* seems to be based on misconceptions of its nature. Already the four UNESCO statements on *race* (1950, 1951, 1964 and 1967) asserted that however laypeople or scientists may divide people into *rac*es there is no evidence that these divisions represent discrete categories with definitive boundaries, genetic homogeneity or innate psychological differences (UNESCO 1969). However, the UNESCO statements did not categorically dismiss *race*. The first Statement was accompanied by a document entitled *What Is Race?*—which explained that, “*Races* share a general tendency to produce certain physical traits” and that these traits include “hair, eyes, head shape, physique, etc” (Reardon 2005, p. 48). In everyday parlance racially ascriptive words like white or East Asian may be used without presuming the

<sup>1</sup> A Public Inquiry published in 2015 suggests that “*race*” be replaced in other Swedish law such as the Criminal Code and the Freedom of Press Act with “notions of *race*” (Government of Sweden 2015).

existence of innate psychological differences or discrete human populations. It makes perfect sense to speak of someone as “a white adolescent male about 6 feet tall” without presupposing the existence of psychobiological or otherwise biologically discrete populations. On a structural level it is possible to refer to, say, the employment and housing situations of “white Swedes”, “people of colour” or “people of African descent” on the basis of visible physical traits and geographical ancestry alone and without assuming that these are any biologically discrete populations.

4. It is also crucial to understand the nature of racial discrimination—especially its structural dimensions—that we do not reduce it to beliefs in discrete (psycho)biological populations. Even if beliefs in discrete (psycho)biological populations may be socially prevalent—at least in principle people may discriminate based on race while holding no particular or less certain beliefs about any innate connections between race and behaviour. For example, a person may find that people of colour in general have alien and inferior mores and therefore discriminate against them—say, in situations of hiring, professional collaboration or promotion—but without believing that such differences are innate. As implicit bias research on race demonstrates, having a socially/culturally derived imagination that allows one to, say, perceive black men as prone to violence may make one act accordingly while explicitly and sincerely rejecting that black men *are* prone to violence (e.g. Eberhardt 2005; Powell and Godsil 2011; Jolls and Sunstein 2006). Without any particular psychobiological assumptions, a property owner may discriminate against black people or Roma as possible tenants in fear that they could devalue the property by making it less attractive on the market. At a broad structural level, white parents may contribute to racial segregation merely by wanting to send their kids to schools conducive to high educational achievement (where the majority of students happen to be white) and keep them away from those that impede educational achievement (where the majority of students happen to be people of colour).
5. Regarding the view that race can be replaced by a broad definition of ethnicity without anything being lost—this too may mislead. While it seems fair to say that the term race at least singles out rough physical traits and geographical ancestry, it seems equally fair to say that the term ethnicity typically does not and that it at least singles out cultural groups (cf. e.g. Valdez and Golash-Boza 2017; Omi and Winant 2015; Mills 1998; Alcoff 2006). For this reason, discriminating against someone, say, by denying them a job because they are black generally is not the same as discriminating against their ethnicity. The person’s ethnicity may be unknown to those who discriminate. She or he may be Bamileke from Cameroon or part Bamileke and part ethnic Swede or adopted as an infant from Cameroon by two ethnic Swedes and therefore self-identify as ethnic Swede. Saying that someone is, say, black, white or East Asian is not the same as pointing out their ethnicity and it would be confusing to speak of black, white or East Asian people as ethnic groups. Not only because their ethnic belonging may be undecided or various, but because insisting on speaking of them as such seems to suppose that they have a culture in common (which if nothing else is the kind of thinking that eliminating the term race was supposed to undermine in the first place).
6. To be fair, though, the broad definition of ethnicity in the Discrimination Act

distinguishes “national or ethnic origin” from *race*—which is replaced by “skin colour or other similar circumstance”. Yet, discrimination due to race—in terms of physical traits and geographical ancestry—is not merely on the basis of skin colour and neither do designations such as black, non-white and East Asian merely refer to skin colour. It is not on the basis of skin colour per se that East Asians are discriminated against as many East Asians may be lighter than many white Europeans. When speaking of people as black, white and so on we are not referring to their skin tone per se. Typically such terms refer more generally to people’s appearances and ancestries (where skin tone may or may not be a decisive factor). Thus, either “skin colour” is taken literally which will render it socially senseless—especially in an anti-discrimination act—or it refers to race.

**II. That Sweden explicitly recognises and monitors race as a possible recurring and compounded ground of discrimination across areas of society such as in employment, housing and education—i.e. *structural racial discrimination*—as the Convention calls for (Articles 1-5 of the ICERD; 2, 3, 4, 15, 16 and 17 on the List of themes);**

7. Among the characteristics that sets the *International Convention on All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (ICERD) apart from most other anti-discrimination law is that it includes a broad “structural” view of racial discrimination. The definition of racial discrimination in Article 1.1 of the ICERD entails a broader protection against racial discrimination than on an individual and case by case basis where members of such groups may be discriminated against in specific situations and incidents such as when applying for a job or in public facilities. It encompasses protection against any form—most notably, recurring and compounded forms—of interpersonal, social, institutional and other societal “distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference” based on race with “the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights”. For example, interpersonal, social, institutional or other public conditions where people of African descent are more likely than white Europeans to have their equality of rights impaired in employment, housing, education, public spaces, by law enforcement and so on. CERD General Recommendation 14—on how to interpret Article 1.1 of the ICERD—stresses that whatever the reasons for such group differences it is the de facto enjoyment of rights that matters: “A distinction is contrary to the Convention if it has either the purpose or the effect of impairing particular rights and freedoms” (CERD 1993). This sort of broad structural view of racial discrimination and the obligation of states to protect against it is emphasized throughout the ICERD.
8. Central to the problem of Sweden’s elimination of the term race is that the state does not recognise, monitor or address structural racial discrimination even as a *possible* universal human rights issue.
9. The growing number of people of colour in the country makes the problem even more pertinent. Although rough estimates of racial groups may currently be gleaned from available data on people’s country of birth and citizenship, this will not be possible in a future that already is here with a growing amount of members of society who have third- and fourth-generation, etc., immigrant backgrounds.

10. Based on available statistics, from the official census bureau Statistics Sweden, on the country of birth of Swedish residents and the country of birth of the parents of residents born in Sweden—factoring in African countries and countries in the Americas with known African descendant demographics—today it is possible to surmise that approximately 2% of the Swedish population are of African descent (cf. McEachrane 2014, introduction).
11. According to Statistics Sweden, immigrants today make up about 17% of the population, 9% of whom are born outside Europe, and the number of immigrants to Sweden—not to mention their descendants—are expected to rise in the future (Statistics Sweden 2016, pp. 22, 31). This can be compared to the US, which in 2015 had an immigrant population of 13.2% (United States Census Bureau 2015). In Sweden, immigrants are especially concentrated to the major cities—the three largest cities have around 15% non-European immigrants alone (Statistics Sweden 2016, p. 28).
12. Yet, neither in, for instance, the recent state party report to Sweden, the current Government's national plan against racism since 2016 nor in the work of the Equality Ombudsman (DO) can one find as much as any mention of possible human rights disparities between people who visibly are of European descent (white people) and people who visibly are of non-European descent (people of colour) or whether the latter may be particularly vulnerable to discrimination in Sweden. The report mentions that ethnicity is the second most common ground for discrimination (after disability) in complaints received by the Equality Ombudsman (DO)—which is tasked with monitoring compliance with the Discrimination Act—but makes no further distinctions regarding “ethnic groups” (Government of Sweden 2017, p. 5).
13. The recent national plan against racism as well as the state party report to CERD mentions housing segregation as a problem and a new long-term reform programme that will run from 2017 to 2025 to tackle it—but no mention of whether it is a form of racial segregation between white and non-white members of society (Government of Sweden 2017, p. 15). Though, from available studies it seems clear that residents with a non-European background—and especially immigrants from Africa and the Middle East—tend to live in segregated low-income neighbourhoods with other immigrants (Marcinićzak et al 2015; Aldén and Hammarstedt 2015). The three largest cities in Sweden—Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö—are today as segregated as Los Angeles in the US (Östh et al 2014). In Sweden too, neighbourhoods with increasing numbers of non-white residents have tipping points that result in “white flight” (Aldén, Hammarstedt and Neuman 2015). And as in many other countries, among the results of urban segregation in Sweden are social stigma, feelings of hopelessness, growing social unrest and violence and increasingly segregated primary schools with a strong effect on educational performance (Malmberg et al 2013; Nationella operativa avdelningen 2015; Vallström 2015; Andersson et al 2010).
14. There also seems to be reason to consider the possibility of recurrent racial discrimination against people of African descent and other people of colour in employment in Sweden. For example, the unemployment rate of immigrants in

Sweden with a non-European background is about four times that of natives (OECD 2015, pp. 310, 313). For Africans, it is five times (Aldén and Hammarstedt 2014, p. 11). This despite that “Sub-Saharan Africans” in Sweden, according to a survey by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights, may on average be more highly educated than the general population (FRA 2017, p. 89). Among those who neither work nor study people from Africa and Asia are overrepresented (Government of Sweden 2013, pp. 15, 94-95). Immigrants from other European countries are about as likely to find jobs that match their level of education as native born Swedes—whereas immigrants from non-European countries (and especially those who are from Africa and Asia) are highly unlikely to do so (Ibid, p. 16). In contrast to non-European immigrants who came to Sweden as children and have received their highest education there, childhood immigrants from Western, Central and Eastern Europe do not receive lower pay or otherwise lower returns relative to their education than native Swedes (Katz and Östberg 2013, p. 27). “Sub-Saharan Africans” living in Sweden report among the highest incidents of workplace discrimination across the EU (17% in the last 12 months) (FRA 2017, p. 36).

15. The state party report points out that “Afrophobic” hate crimes are by far the most prevalent of any category and that Afrophobia/anti-black racism is an extensive social problem (Government of Sweden 2017, pp. 28-31, 40-42). The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention recognises Afrophobic hate crimes as a category and the current Swedish government has put some measures in place to combat Afrophobia such as tasking the Equality Ombudsman with carrying out awareness-raising initiatives on the subject (National Council for Crime Prevention 2017; Government of Sweden 2017, §34 p. 9). Still, there is no mention of Afrophobia as a form of racial discrimination and no reference to race or racial distinctions as such in relation to it.
16. Exclusively using terms like ethnicity, national origin, immigrant background, skin-colour and other similar circumstance when speaking of societal patterns of discrimination against people who visibly are of non-European descent—may miss how and why such people can be discriminated against. For example, insisting that it is the ethnicity of people living in Sweden who visibly are of non-European descent that is the reason for their discrimination, may not be able to account for discriminating situations where their ethnicity—whether they are, say, Tigrinyan Eritrean Swedish, German, Irish American or Miao from China—may be unknown or irrelevant or any discriminating patterns where merely pointing out that some people have foreign ethnicities seems insufficient. Similar things may be said of national origin or immigrant background. And, again, skin-colour, when taken literally, neglects other visual features and will make little social sense as a ground of discrimination. Even when understood as a symbol for physical appearance more generally it may only make sense as a ground of discrimination in conjunction with notions of geographical descent.
17. In addition, exclusively using terms like ethnicity, national origin, immigrant background, skin-colour and other similar circumstance may impede transnational comparisons of discrimination against people who visibly are of non-European descent. For example, how to make sense of such data as that across the EU people of non-European descent—in particular people of African, North African or

Middle Eastern origin—seem to suffer significant discrimination in employment whereas white European immigrants commonly do not (OECD 2013, pp. 209-210). Or if, why and how Sweden may display similar patterns of discrimination against people who visibly are of non-European descent as in former European colonies. For example, why and how it could be the case that if the most discriminated minorities across Europe tend to be Roma and people of African (including North African) descent, across former European settler colonies in the Americas they tend to be indigenous peoples and people of African descent (FRA 2017; Hernandez 2013, pp. 73-101; Telles 2014).

18. To be fair, though the state of Sweden does not refer to race or racial distinctions for antidiscrimination purposes nor describe structural *racial* discrimination as such—it is not without any recognition of structural racism whatsoever. This has been true at least since 2005-2006 when a massive series of 15 state public reports on grounds of ethnic or religious structural discrimination was published (e.g. de los Reyes and Kamali 2005; Lappalainen 2005). Yet, besides not making any references to race and racial distinctions there seems to be a tendency to reduce structural racism to matters of belief and attitudes. In the national plan against racism from 2016 the Government declares that it is important to recognise the existence of structural racism. The plan describes it as widespread conscious or unconscious beliefs about ethnic groups, which lead to that members of such groups have different access to rights and opportunities, and suggests that individual cases of discrimination or hate crime are not isolated events, but part of a larger context (Government of Sweden 2016, p. 11). Similarly, the National plan defines Afrophobia as “ideologies, beliefs or values that express hostility against Afro-Swedes...” (Ibid, p. 11). Such a definition seems to neglect how society may be organised—by design or not—in ways that lead to recurring and compounded disadvantages and unequal access to rights for people of African descent. For instance, de facto segregation and unequal access to basic resources such as education, the portrayal (or lack of portrayal) in educational material of the histories and current situations of Africans/people of African descent or lack of accumulated opportunities, power and influence in society.

### **III. That Sweden explicitly recognises, disseminates, implements and reports on measures taken to implement the *Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA)*—as called for by CERD General Recommendations 28 and 33.**

19. Two of CERD’s general recommendations for how to interpret the ICERD—General Recommendations 28 and 33—call on states to take the DDPA into account when implementing the ICERD, disseminate the DDPA and include in their periodic reports information on measures they have taken to implement the DDPA (OHCHR 2002, 2009). Concomitantly, CERD’s latest Concluding Observations of Sweden from 2013 recommends that the state gives effect to the DDPA when implementing the ICERD and that its next periodic report includes information on measures taken to implement the DDPA (CERD 2013, §23 pp. 7-8).
20. The DDPA is the most comprehensive universal human rights instrument against racial discrimination, takes a similar broad view of it as the ICERD, and, in addition, includes international issues such as racial inequities in environmental control,

migration, trade and national debt and summons a global fight against racism with measures at the national, regional and international levels (OHCHR 2001).

21. Of all universal human rights instruments, the DDPA is also the clearest and most elaborate on the connections between European colonialism and racial discrimination (OHCHR 2001). Inter alia, the DDPA pronounces that, colonialism has led to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of colonialism and continue to be victims of its consequences. (OHCHR 2001, art. 14 p. 17)  
It regrets “that the effects and persistence of these structures and practices [of European colonialism] have been among the factors contributing to lasting social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world today” (Ibid). Among the most egregious aspects of European colonialism—that the DDPA claims are major sources of racism and racial discrimination, and moreover acknowledges as crimes against humanity—are slavery, slave trade, apartheid and genocide (OHCHR 2001, art. 13 p. 16, art. 15 p. 17, art. 28 p. 20). With respect to the massive human suffering caused by slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade, apartheid, colonialism and genocide the DDPA asserts “the moral obligation on the part of all concerned States and call upon these States to take appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences of those practices” (OHCHR 2001, art. 102 p. 38). Accordingly, the DDPA recognizes the need to develop programmes for the social and economic development in developing countries and the Diaspora in areas such as debt relief; poverty eradication; technology transfer and the facilitation of welcomed return and resettlement of the descendants of enslaved Africans (OHCHR 2001, art. 158 pp. 49-50).
22. Until in recent years Sweden has actively denied any involvement in the histories and legacies of European colonialism. It continues to deny the relevance of race and structural racial discrimination as such to society. Exclusively using terms like ethnicity, national origin, immigrant background, skin-colour and other similar circumstance may make it seem like race and structural racial discrimination also is irrelevant to Sweden in the sense that the country did not participate in nor contribute to the structural racial discrimination of the colonial era, bears no responsibility for it and is not implicated by any of its legacies with respect to universal human rights.
23. Sweden’s response in its latest state party report to CERD (2017) to the recommendation by CERD in its most recent Concluding Observations on Sweden (2013) that it takes into consideration the DDPA when implementing the Convention—is to refer to its national action plan to combat Afrophobia, antiziganism, Islamophobia and racism against Saami people, and its tasking of the state agency the Living History Forum to, among other things, carry out “a major education initiative on different forms of racism and intolerance in history and today, to run until 2019” (Government of Sweden 2017, §43). However, the national action plan itself does not mention the DDPA nor colonialism or racial discrimination as such (Government of Sweden 2016). Nonetheless, in the ongoing fulfilment of its task the Living History Forum has taken some steps towards recognizing the relevance of colonialism to Sweden. Its website describes

Sweden's ongoing relationship to Sápmi (the Northern part of Scandinavia inhabited by the only recognised indigenous peoples of Europe, the Sami) as a colonial one and a piece written by Michael McEachrane places Afrophobia/anti-black racism in the context of European colonialism and the enslavement of Africans (Brännlund and Drugge 2016; McEachrane 2016). A review report from the Forum on historical research on racism in Sweden links it (in particular anti-black racism) to an era of European colonialism—albeit without implications to universal human rights as indicated by the DDPA (Ericsson 2016, pp. 81-82, 139, 150-152).

24. Overall, it seems fair to say that thus far Sweden's possible role in and responsibilities for the national and international ramifications of colonialism to structural racial discrimination, as recognized by the DDPA, largely remains unrecognised by the state. Though the Swedish state recently has taken some steps toward exploring its participation in European colonialism, it has yet to recognise structural racial discrimination as such even as a possibility within its borders. Let alone the possibility that there may be structural racial discrimination and inequities within Sweden's borders as well as in its relationship to the outside world and in other parts of the world—that are results and continuations of a colonial era that Sweden participated in, benefited from and bears some responsibility for.
25. Sweden in fact was part of, contributed to and benefited from the shaping of the world of the colonial era around race. This included views and attitudes regarding the superiority to the rest of the world of white Europeans and European civilization; the dismissal and suppression of non-European and indigenous peoples and cultures as heathen, primitive and undeveloped; the appropriation by Europeans, to their material benefit, of the human and natural resources of non-Europeans; being white as a condition for equal dignity and rights; and the systematic (national and international) subjugation of people of colour and indigenous people to a second class status.
26. From at least the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the infamous Berlin Conference 1884-1885 Sweden too participated in the European scramble for overseas colonies (Nováky 1990; Nilsson 2013). Like other European countries Sweden had fleets of chartered African, East Indian and West Indian Companies. In 1650 the short lived but prosperous Swedish Africa Company (1649-1663) established a minor trading colony at Cabo Corso in present day Ghana, where fort Carolusburg (later renamed Cape Coast Castle by the English) was built by enslaved Africans (Nováky 1990). Besides gold, ivory, sugar and other products the Company traded in enslaved Africans (Ibid). For centuries plantation sugar was imported to Sweden with refineries being built in Stockholm and Gothenburg in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1738 Swedes consumed 450 tons of sugar per year which alone required the labour of some 500 enslaved adults and by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Swedish sugar consumption alone required the labour of at least 15 000 enslaved adults annually—approximately the same number of people living in quite large Swedish cities at that time such as Malmö or Norrköping. Enslaved persons were also involved in producing other major colonial imports to Sweden during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, for example, coffee and cotton products. During the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Swedish herring from the Gothenburg county was exported to

plantations in the Americas. Around the same time, Sweden's largest export, iron, played a major role in the transatlantic and colonial plantation economies to produce voyage iron, guns, shackles, chains, hoes and machetes. As late as 1922, according to a report from the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture, "colonial goods" (kolonialvaror) such as coffee, spices and cotton materials were among the most common wholesale goods in the country (Naum and Nordin 2013, ch 4 and 13; Evans and Rydén 2007; Rönnbäck 2007; Müller 2004; Government of Sweden 2008a, p. 95; Government of Sweden 1922, p. 14).

27. Another example of Sweden's involvement in the international racial ordering of the colonial era is its small overseas colony in the Caribbean, the island of St Barthélemy, which it held for nearly a century 1784-1878. Until Sweden signed the act at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 promising not to participate in any new importation of enslaved Africans—Gustavia was a significant free port in the Caribbean for ships with enslaved Africans in addition to ships with other colonial merchandise such as tobacco, sugar, coffee and rum (Pålsson 2016, pp. 61, 65-66, 224-5; Kern 2004). In June 1787 alone, 159 ships arrived and 160 ships left the island, out of 1033 and 1082 ships respectively for that year (Pålsson 2016, p. 61). Around 1804-1805 Gustavia was among the most prominent "slave ports" in the Caribbean with approximately 20 ships with an entire cargo of enslaved Africans, out of altogether 1800 vessels, entering annually (Pålsson 2016, p. 62; Weiss 2016, p. 138). As a free trade zone under a militarily neutral Swedish flag the island became a (semi-)cosmopolitan, multi-national, -ethnic and -religious haven for white entrepreneurs from across Europe, North America and other islands in the Caribbean. According to *Le Code de lois de la Martinique* [The Code of Laws of Martinique]—which was applied on St Barthélemy and based on the French *Code Noir*—race determined rights. White people on the island enjoyed equal basic rights and freedoms and could become, if they were not already, naturalized Swedish subjects. "Free coloured"—who in a less governmentally controlled free port like Gustavia had more opportunities than in most other places in the Caribbean—could in principle become Swedish citizens too, but—be they "negroes" or "mulattoes" with the same colour as white Europeans—not enjoy equal rights. For example, though they had some rights such as the right to own some forms of business, land and other property, they initially had no voting rights under the Swedish flag. However, after a petition campaign in 1821, and the Swedish authorities wanting to avoid anything like the Haitian revolution long-term, the free coloured received severely limited voting rights. They were also due flagellation if assaulting white persons and relegated to segregated housing quarters. Enslaved persons had no rights, were by law the private property of their owners and subjected to such practices as being punished with death, hot iron torture or 150 lashes and the loss of an ear if they tried to escape (Weiss 2013, 2016, pp. 175-180; Pålsson 2016, pp. 68-9, 78-83, 2017, pp. 323-4; Wilson 2010).
28. In the decades immediately prior to WWII, typical colonial era racial views of white superiority and non-white inferiority were prevalent in Sweden and actively promoted by the state. For instance, pre-WWII school books—and also post-WWII school books, though less explicitly—routinely referred to "lower" and "higher" races, "us" when describing the European conquest of Africa, Africans as savages without history, Europeans as bringing the blessings of civilization to humanity, Europe as the epitome of historical evolution and the rest of humanity as on lower

stages of development (Palmberg 2009, pp. 37-38). Before the war it was commonplace in Swedish culture at large to portray Africans in overt racial stereotypes as at a lower stage of human development, primitive, childlike and ridiculous (McEachrane 2001; Fornäs 2004; Palmberg 2009).

29. The 15 member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) currently are calling on Sweden and other European states to, in the words of the DDPA, “take appropriate and effective measures to halt and reverse the lasting consequences” of such practices as slavery, the transatlantic slave trade, apartheid and colonialism (OHCHR 2001, art. 102 p. 38). CARICOM is requesting that Sweden and other European states finance a 10-point CARICOM Reparatory Justice Program (CRJP) (CARICOM Reparations Commission 2014). Most of the measures included in the program are already recommended by the DDPA—such as an official apology for the crimes against humanity that were perpetrated in the region, debt relief, technology transfer, illiteracy eradication, an indigenous peoples’ development program and a program for the welcome return to Africa of descendants of enslaved Africans (OHCHR 2001). CARICOM has vowed to take Sweden and other European states to the International Court of Justice if they are unwilling to support the CRJP (CARICOM 2016).
30. For Sweden, CARICOM’s demand for reparations is an opportunity to implement the DDPA and face up to and—if and where ever it may be due—take responsibility for its participation in a colonial order of racial discrimination and human rights violations. Though the state of Sweden never was a major colonial power compared to, say, Britain or France—its direct and indirect contributions to and material benefits from the enslavement of Africans and its institutionalized suppression of the rights of people of African descent on St Barthelemy speaks to ways in which Sweden too has both privileged and undermined human rights on the basis of race.

**IV. That Sweden—in line with CERD General Recommendation 34—explicitly recognises that people of African descent are particularly subjected to racial discrimination as such in the country and entitled to special measures, as individuals and as a collective, for the promotion and full protection of their human rights**

31. Although the Government of Sweden has taken some steps towards recognising “Afrophobia” in hate crimes and as a social problem—again, it over psychologizes the issue, fails to see it as an issue of race and as part of a wider issue of structural racial discrimination as such, and does not yet recognise the universal human rights entitlements of people of African descent in Sweden as a collective to measures of *recognition, justice and development*.
32. An example of this is the reluctance of the Government of Sweden to officially mark and implement the UN International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024. A civil society delegation consisting of (in alphabetical order) Madubuko Diakit , Victoria Kawesa, Michael McEachrane, Kitimbwa Sabuni and Felix Unogwu met with the Swedish Minister of Culture and Democracy, Alice Bah Kuhnke, on 2 June 2015 to ask the Government to mark the Decade by an official

launch of it and setting up Commission for its implementation. The same day we published a joint opinion article on the website of the Swedish Public Television (SVT) calling on the need for Sweden to officially mark the Decade—not least bearing in mind current and projected future immigration patterns. The same year the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African published a country report on Sweden that also called on the Swedish Government to implement the Decade. The Decade is strongly supported by the ICERD and the DDPA. However, Sweden has yet to officially mark and implement the UN International Decade for People of African Descent.

33. Accurately, actively and consistently recognising as well as rectifying the human rights situation of people of African descent in Sweden and its historical roots in colonial era structural racial discrimination, denial of equal human dignity and rights, and a racially based Swedish nationhood—can go a long way towards a racially and ethnically inclusive society with respect to human rights and non-discrimination.
34. Sweden prides itself in being at the forefront of gender equality. For example, the current Government takes pride in being the world's first Feminist Government and in having [a feminist foreign policy](#). Recognition of how race and gender intersects has now become an official part of the interpretation of both the ICERD and CEDAW. Still, Sweden does not recognise such intersectionality in its gender equality and feminism and does not include women of African descent and other women of colour on equal terms.

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