

ICSWG PFPAD

International Civil Society Working Group for the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

PFPAD LAUNCH REPORT

SUBMITTED TO

The United Nations Permanent Forum
on People of African Descent

2023

Executive Summary

The Permanent Forum on People of African Descent is a consultative mechanism for people of African descent and other relevant stakeholders as a platform for improving the safety and quality of life and livelihoods of people of African descent, as well as an advisory body to the Human Rights Council, in line with the program of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent and in close coordination with existing mechanisms.

Members of civil society attended the first session of the Permanent Forum on 5 December – 8 December and compiled feedback and recommendations to inform the continued development of the Permanent Forum and its agenda. This report is by no means comprehensive, but is designed to provide guidance and specific recommendations as planning is underway for the May 30 – June 3 PFPAD session taking place in New York City, United States. It represents the partnership and collaboration civil society desires to have with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in our effort to make the Permanent Forum as effective and impactful as possible.

Executive Summary



The PFPAD must be adequately funded to support its operations as a viable entity within the UN Framework. This means the United Nations must increase the level of financial investment in the mechanism and encourage member states to do the same.



Articulate a fundraising strategy that will support the PFPAD in the long term



Refer to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues UNPFII as a helpful guide for the structure and function of the PFPAD.



PFPAD Members should be transparent with the agenda for which they will seek to accomplish during their terms and should engage civil society to share these agendas so as to be in alignment with civil society actions (rather than acting unilaterally)



The PFPAD should be comprised of people of African descent. The process for nominating individuals to serve as PFPAD members should be transparent with allowances made for civil society input into PFPAD nominees.



Language accessibility is imperative for successful engagement of civil society in the PFPAD's affairs. Therefore, translation and interpretation services in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese should be made available for all official PFPAD sessions including official consultations with the PFPAD Secretariat and for both virtual and in-person sessions.



All PFPAD sessions as well as official consultations with the Secretariat should include a virtual option.



Ensure the PFPAD is adequately staffed to thoroughly carry out all functions in a timely manner.

On 5 December – 8 December 2022

more than 600 members of civil society converged in Geneva for the formal launch of the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (PFPAD). This convening, the product of years of advocacy by people of African descent, marked a significant historical moment and presents an historic opportunity for people of African descent around the world.

The International Civil Society Working Group (ICSWG) for the PFPAD is a formation of civil society individuals and organizations from around the world working toward the establishment of a strong and effective Permanent Forum of People of African Descent. Since the resolution to establish the Permanent Forum was established in 2021, this working group has mobilized civil society, hosted events to spread knowledge and awareness of the Permanent Forum and worked closely with partners, groups, and communities to advocate for the Permanent Forum to be well-resourced, supported, well-attended, and impactful. The ICSWG utilizes several mechanisms to carry out its mission including monthly general meetings, seven subcommittees that carry out the working group's objectives, and developing mechanisms to promote transparent and democratic processes for the PFPAD to engage civil society.



It is critically important that civil society plays a prominent role in helping to set the agenda for the Permanent Forum sessions and providing feedback both on substance, content, and logistics of the Permanent Forum. In keeping with this commitment, the ICSWG took a number of steps to capture feedback from the PFPAD launch. From this feedback, the ICSWG has drafted a series of recommendations that are designed to inform the PFPAD activities and outputs, as well as lay the groundwork for preparation for the May/June PFPAD session in New York City. Additionally, we believe the strategy that our working group used to develop key agenda topics can serve as a model for the Permanent Forum to utilize going forward.

The ICSWG took the following steps in the lead up to the PFPAD launch:

- 01** Held monthly meetings since August 2021 complete with notes and recordings
- 02** Established seven (7) subcommittees charged with carrying out the working group's mission and vision: Advocacy, Education & Outreach, Partnerships, Fundraising, Communications, Youth, and Culture
- 03** Developed a public online feedback form to assist in developing an agenda for the PFPAD launch. The form was distributed broadly to civil society organizations and individuals around the world in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese
- 04** Held a public Agenda-Setting Forum attended by people of African descent from around the world to analyze data received from the forms and discuss the potential topics in-depth.

- 05** | Held post-forum discussions and outreach to update the data with additional feedback with an emphasis on the Global South.
- 06** | Partnered with the PFPAD Secretariat, PFPAD members, supporting governments, and civil society organizations to coordinate housing, travel, and other accommodations for delegates seeking to attend the PFPAD launch, with an emphasis on youth and elder attendees
- 07** | Organized and hosted fourteen (14) virtual and in-person side events in the lead up to and during the PFPAD launch

Post-PFPAD, the ICSWG did the following:

- 01** | Developed an online survey instrument to gather feedback from PFPAD attendees several dimensions including content, activities, and logistics. This instrument was translated into English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese and was distributed to attendees
- 02** | Hosted a Post-PFPAD Town Hall on January 24, 2023 to discuss preliminary findings from the survey and garner additional feedback
- 03** | Created a poll that of 3 feedback questions that was distributed during the Post-PFPAD Town Hall to generate additional feedback on potential recommendations for PFPAD members to consider in preparation for the May/June 2023 session



Summary of Feedback

Among words used to describe the launch of the PFPAD in Geneva include **“inspiring”, “historic”, “promising”, and “educational.”** These responses reflect the hard work of PFPAD members, the Secretariat, and civil society to make the launch meaningful.

Respondents were asked to rate the overall quality of their PFPAD experience on a scale of 1-5 (Very Negative, Negative, Neutral, Positive, Very Positive). Twenty-two percent of respondents indicated the overall PFPAD experience was “Very Positive”. 50% indicated the experience as Positive. 25% indicated their experience as Neutral, and 2% indicated they had a Negative experience. Respondents were asked to share – in their own words – some of the positive takeaways from the PFPAD experience. Their responses include the following:

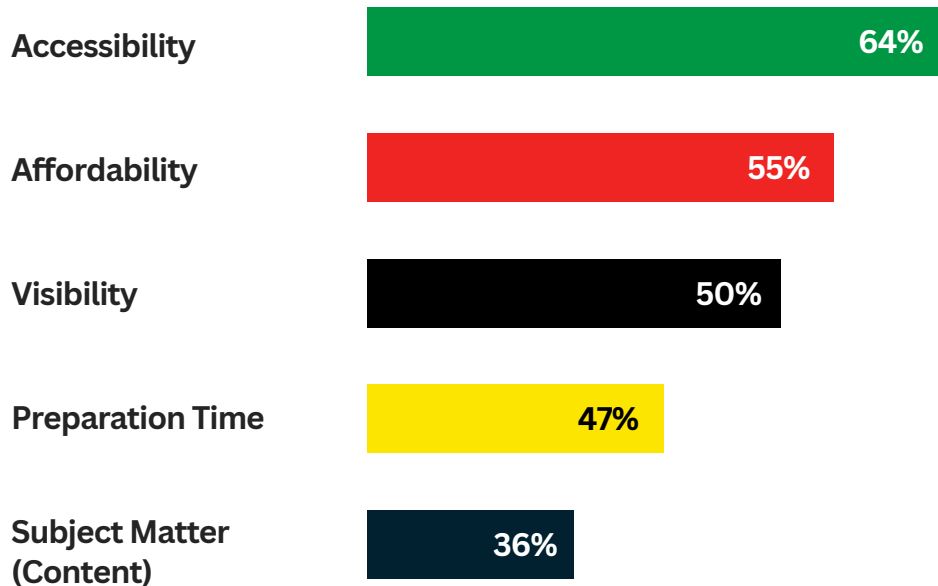
- Meeting the delegates from all parts of the world, each continent was represented
- Opening, Interventions from Civil Society, Experts’ presentation to carefully link the history, links with Africa and African Diaspora, Faith Connections, Reparatory Justice themes
- The ability to provide remarks from Civil Society and NGOs
- Diplomacy and contact with decision-makers and influencing them through formal and informal communications
- Aspirational language and messaging and connecting with aligned individuals
- Evidence-based presentations with tight analyses; interactive side events
- Participants’ comments, input and depth of knowledge covered a wide range of issues and realities that people of African descent face today. This provided a lot of food for thought regarding potential solutions

Attendees were asked to indicate and rank the aspects of the PFPAD that could be improved upon.

Five areas specified were

- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Visibility
- Preparation Time
- Subject Matter (Content)

When asked to select the biggest areas of improvement for the PFPAD, the results were as follows:





Accessibility

Accessibility is the practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible. There are many types of accessibility such as visual, motor/mobility, and auditory. Respondents were asked to rate the quality of accessibility throughout the forum. 85% of respondents indicated that accessibility at the forum was either Neutral, Negative, or Very Negative. Ensuring the broadest participation as possible for the PFPAD requires the United Nations to take seriously the many dimensions of accessibility and to be responsive to the needs outlined.

Some specific observations include:

- No visible ASL interpreter on the premises
- Lack of full interpretation services (e.g. Portuguese language was excluded and only included after significant outcry from civil society and PFPAD member advocacy)
- Lack of virtual options for all PFPAD events
- Poor signage and visibility of signage to assist with navigating the UN campus
- Distance participants had to walk from the gate to the main building entrance on the campus with no vehicles to provide assistance and limited access to wheelchairs
- Lack of access to mobility resources such as wheelchairs, golf-carts, cars, or other modes of mobility
- Support Pre-PFAD and Post-PFPAD virtual side events that allow for more subject areas to be covered and increase participation for those unable to attend PFPAD sessions in-person

Recommendations

The United Nations should conduct a disability access analysis which includes their capacity to provide physical assistance (wheelchairs, walkers, staff supports) to mobility challenged individuals. Recommendations from such an audit should be implemented. Such an audit is critical not only for PFPAD participants, but for all people around the world who visit the United Nations for any reason

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Provide vehicles to transport individuals from the gate to entrance

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Create a special provision or designation for individuals who need to enter the UN headquarters through the main gate; in New York City, provide special credential for individuals who need mobility support so that they have access to mobility vehicles

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Assign a point of contact along (with phone number and email address) at the UN headquarters to whom those who need mobility support can reach throughout the duration of the session(s)

Include sign-language interpreters in main sessions

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Include all major languages representing the African Diaspora (English, Spanish, French, Portuguese) in session interpretations and in PFPAD member meetings

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Contract with a language interpretation/translation provider to provide language support for all PFPAD civil society meetings and for the PFPAD formal sessions

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Include virtual options for all main sessions and side events and ensure that civil society participants receive relevant links to join virtual sessions

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Work to designate side events in the same venue or as close to the main meeting space as possible. Travel to side events often interfered with the ability to participate robustly in the main sessions. In addition, travel to side events was difficult for those who are mobility challenged.

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Take into account the healthcare needs of the immunocompromised and elders by providing personal protective equipment (PPE) including hand sanitizer, masks, and other mitigation measures to limit the spread of communicable diseases such as Covid-19



Affordability

The costs of attending the PFPAD privileges well-funded NGOs from the Global North. While some attendees were able to take advantage of travel and housing stipends, the costs for many are still prohibitive. The following recommendations can help ensure the PFPAD is affordable for civil society whether in New York City, or in Geneva:

Recommendations

Provide more advanced notice for scholarship opportunities for attendees

Create a similar mechanism as CAGI in New York City to provide assistance with identifying reasonable and affordable accommodations in close proximity to the UN headquarters

Create a database of hotels, hostels, and other affordable housing options that are close to UN headquarters and update this list regularly

UN OHCHR allocate (and encourage member states to allocate) additional resources to fund housing stipends and travel scholarships

PFPAD Members develop a coherent fundraising plan for how they will use their collective position to raise funds to support the PFPAD Secretariat. This plan should be shared with the ICSWG and civil society broadly so as to garner support and collaborators for carrying out the fundraising plan



Preparation (and Preparation Time)

Planning to attend a convening of the scope of the PFPAD is a significant challenge and adequate time is required to prepare not only for the logistics of travel (flights, hotel accommodations, etc.) but also to prepare for the substance of the gathering. Attendees expressed feeling that they did not have sufficient time to arrange for flight, hotel and ground transportation due to delays in receiving registration confirmation. More broadly, the date of the first PFPAD session was announced in August, leaving only four months for civil society to spread the word about the launch as well as prepare logistics.

Preparation regarding UN protocols both in and out of session are also critical to ensure a productive convening. For many attendees, this was the first time visiting the UN headquarters in Geneva. Proper orientation prior to arriving at UN headquarters (whether in Geneva or New York) will allow attendees to contribute in substantive ways. Several recommendations have been set forth to support preparation and preparation time for subsequent PFPAD sessions:

Recommendations

Share important dates for town halls, civil society consultations and other events with at least 4 months advance notice to increase civil society ability to plan and participate

More advance notice for registration confirmation for the PFPAD. Some attendees' registration was confirmed only two weeks before the session, leaving very little time to obtain travel and accommodations at a reasonable price

Engage civil society in a transparent process that includes a call for inputs, town hall(s) with interpretation available, and draft agenda for the subsequent PFPAD session at least 3 months in advance

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Conduct trainings on UN protocols that include overviews of how meetings are conducted, protocols for civil society public comment, protocols for post-session summaries, and protocols civil society should follow in any written statements or summaries

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Conduct general human rights trainings in advance of the PFPAD session to orient the masses to the human rights framework. Engage civil society as partners to help set up and conduct these trainings



Subject Matter – Content

With regard to the content of the PFPAD, respondents indicated a desire for more transparency in the process of setting the agenda for the PFPAD main sessions. Besides a consultation in October 2022, there was no formal sharing of the process by which the PFPAD agenda was developed. The ICSWG engaged a robust agenda-setting process in order to ensure civil society input in the agenda for the launch session. It is hoped that this sort of transparent process is undertaken to ensure maximum participation by civil society in setting the agenda for the PFPAD.

Also, more thought should be given to the design of the PFPAD container. The main sessions themselves are quite limited in terms of how and when people are allowed to speak, the length of their speech, and the level of interaction attendees have with one another. Side events offer a level of flexibility that can serve civil society purposes. Yet, more thought should be given into the kinds of spaces that can be designed to functionally support the ongoing work of civil society organizations gathered for the PFPAD.

For example, strategy sessions require ample time to engage in robust dialogue, debate, and strategy planning. Questions arise on how to build on strategy sessions so that the work continues in between PFPAD sessions. Creating spaces for workshops, strategy sessions, and planning in addition to the standard lecture style main sessions will create a more functionally relevant PFPAD and create avenues for tracking progress on collective initiatives at each PFPAD session.

Moreover, PFPAD summaries were given at the end of sessions. While summaries are useful for the purposes of reporting back what was discussed recommendations are a much more impactful mechanism with which to move the needle on the issues addressed. Recommendations lay the groundwork for tracking progress on issues that are addressed in PFPAD sessions and provide a benchmark for continued advancement on the issues. Therefore, the PFPAD sessions should incorporate space for both summaries and recommendations that can be clearly articulated, codified, and used to track progress on key issues.

In addition to the responses to the sessions that were held, respondents indicated several subject matter areas they believe should be addressed in the upcoming PFPAD session.

They include

Migration Policy, Border Violence, and Immigration Policy and the intersection of State Violence and Criminalization

Health (physical) and overall well-being of people of African descent

The use of data, analytics and new/emerging technologies with regard to people of African descent (also with consideration of ancestral technologies, spirituality and practices).

Climate change impacts and climate reparations

The International Economic Order and the role of multilateral financial institutions on economies and their impact on Africans and People of African descent

Local, national, regional, and global governance and governance structures

Issues impacting youth of African descent around the world (sub-forum)

LGBTQIA issues

Education – African-centered education, worldview and addressing systems of education that marginalize Africans and people of African descent

Durban Declaration and Program of Action

Cohering the PFPAD with other UN mechanisms (CERD, CSW, WGEPAD, etc.)

These issues emerged repeatedly from civil society feedback. We welcome a transparent process for ensuring that these topics are included in any agenda-setting discussions and plan to engage civil society again to assess the top session topics they would like to engage at the upcoming PFPAD session.

General Recommendations

The ICSWG has worked to ensure that the PFPAD lives up to the potential envisioned by those who worked for years to establish it. We believe the following recommendations are essential for the PFPAD to live up to its potential:

The PFPAD must be adequately funded to support its operations as a viable entity within the UN Framework. This means the UNOHCHR must increase the level of financial investment in the mechanism and encourage member states to do the same. A fundraising strategy should be outlined by the Secretariat and shared with civil society which will create a basis for civil society to raise funds to support PFPAD activities

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While we recognize the PFPAD has had just its first session, we call attention to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues UNPFII as a helpful guide for the structure and function of the PFPAD. The UNPFII is 10 days, has posted a provisional agenda several months in advance and is financially supported. The UNPFII is comprised of individuals identified as indigenous and maintains a Trust Fund on Indigenous Issues which facilitates follow-up to the Forum's recommendations, awareness raising and outreach on indigenous issues as well as representation and participation of Permanent Forum members at significant international meetings for its mandate. These critical functions can and should be replicated on the PFPAD.

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We assert that people of African descent exist in every continent and region of the world and therefore maintain that the PFPAD should be comprised exclusively of people of African descent. The process for nominating individuals to serve as PFPAD members should be transparent with allowances made for civil society input into PFPAD nominees. The utility of the PFPAD extends only so far as people of African descent around the world are able to participate fully. Language accessibility is imperative for successful engagement of civil society in the PFPAD's affairs. Therefore, translation and interpretation services in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese should be made available for all official PFPAD sessions including official consultations with the PFPAD Secretariat and for both virtual and in-person sessions.

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In the Covid 19/Post-Covid 19 era, virtual meeting options have become a critical tool for accessibility. All PFPAD sessions as well as official consultations with the Secretariat should include a virtual option.

Actions undertaken by PFPAD members in their capacity as PFPAD members should be carried out with advance consultation with civil society groups to ensure alignment with objectives, strategies, and tactics outlined by civil society in their advocacy initiatives and campaigns. This ensures that PFPAD members are accurately representing civil society as well as moving in alignment with civil society.

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Ensure the PFPAD Secretariat is adequately staffed so that it has the capacity to manage PFPAD affairs including engaging civil society, supporting efforts to ensure robust participation by civil society in PFPAD sessions, and supporting PFPAD members themselves. This will reduce delays in registration time, processing, and general support during PFPAD sessions.

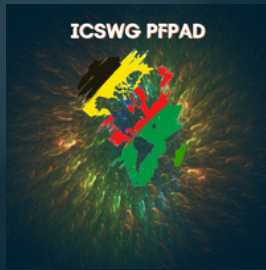




Conclusion

The launch of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent on 5 Dec – 8 Dec 2022 was an historic moment that brought together more than 600 people of African Descent from civil society around the world. It presents a promising start to a powerful era of advocacy to realize the rights and recognition of people of African descent. While we are excited and hopeful about this mechanism, we know there is a significant level of advocacy necessary to ensure that it is well-resourced, well attended, comprehensive in its ability to address key issues of concern, and holds legitimacy in civil society based on open, transparent and consistent engagement with civil society. These recommendations are designed to improve upon the strong start at the PFPAD launch.

The ICSWG intends to continue to mobilize civil society as vigorously as possible to ensure continued engagement with the PFPAD and the advancement of our goals via the PFPAD.



Thank You

To the ICSWG co-leads and the working group for your work in both supporting the launch and contributing to this report.

For more information, please contact

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