



The Leadership Conference
on Civil & Human Rights

July 2, 2021

The Honorable Anthony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States State Department
2100 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20500

*Re: Draft UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Systemic Racism and Police Violence
Against People of African Descent*

Dear Secretary Blinken and Mr. Sullivan:

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, we call on the U.S. government to support the Africa Group draft UN Human Rights Council resolution on “Promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers through an Agenda towards Transformative Change for Racial Justice and Equality.”

As organizations committed to civil and human rights and eliminating systemic racism in the U.S., we commend the Biden administration for prioritizing racial justice in domestic and foreign policy. We also congratulate the administration for the successful nomination and election of Professor Gay McDougall, renowned international human rights and racial justice expert, to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and for the Biden administration’s intention to seek election to the Human Rights Council for the 2022-24 term, which signal the U.S.’s continued efforts to re-join multilateral organizations including those focused on human rights and racial justice.

In President Biden’s recent remarks at the signing of the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act, he reflected on the legacy of slavery in the United States. President Biden acknowledged the “terrible toll that slavery took on the country and continues to take,” and he rightly stated that Juneteenth represents “the ongoing work to bring true equity and racial justice into American society.” Secretary Anthony Blinken also reflected on the U.S.’s “responsibility to grapple with the enduring legacy of slavery and to tackle the barriers to full equity and justice for African Americans.”



As you know, over a year has passed since George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derrick Chauvin. Calls for police accountability following Mr. Floyd’s murder, initially led by families of victims of police violence and civil society organizations in the U.S., reverberated around the world and ultimately led to the unprecedented demand for a United Nations commission of inquiry to investigate racist police violence in the U.S. In June 2020, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a watered-down resolution after enormous diplomatic pressure from the Trump administration and other allied countries. Resolution [43/1](#) mandated the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a report on systemic racism in the context of law enforcement globally.

Earlier this week, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released her report detailing the “compounding inequalities” and “stark socioeconomic and political marginalization” that afflict Africans and people of African descent in many countries, including in the U.S. The High Commissioner’s report found that “no State has comprehensively accounted for the past or for the current impact of systemic racism” and called for a “transformative agenda” to uproot systemic racism and address law enforcement violence against Black people and people of African descent.

As a follow up to this groundbreaking report, the Africa Group within the United Nations introduced a resolution to the Human Rights Council that would establish a time-bound global accountability expert mechanism focusing on systemic racism in the context of law enforcement, as well as mandate the Office of the High Commissioner to continue its essential monitoring, documentation and assistance to UN Member States in this area.

Given the enduring legacy of racial injustice in the U.S., we urge the Biden administration to fully support the Africa Group’s draft resolution even if it includes references to the U.S. We encourage the U.S. to embrace this opportunity to exhibit global leadership by clearly expressing its cooperation with the independent mechanism and acknowledging the impacts of slavery and Jim Crow on systemic racism in law enforcement. As President Biden rightly stated in his inaugural address, the U.S. should “lead not merely by the example of our power but by the power of our example.”

In addition to expressing support for the resolution, the U.S. should also implement robust measures to ensure the success and effectiveness of the accountability mechanism. Full cooperation with the mechanism aligns with the Biden administration’s racial justice priorities and honors the U.S.’s international human rights obligations especially under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Accordingly, the U.S. should facilitate collaboration between the mechanism and federal, state, and local governments. Moreover, as you know, transformative change must center the voices and lived experiences of people of African descent and Black Americans; we urge the Biden administration to promote the meaningful participation of civil society and communities directly impacted by systemic racism and police violence including victims and their families.



While we commend the Biden administration for leading a cross-regional joint statement last March on countering racism and racial discrimination as well as other domestic policy initiatives to address racial inequities, we believe that a robust international accountability mechanism would further support and complement efforts to dismantle systemic racism in the United States, especially in the context of police violence against people of African descent.

President Biden made history for being the first American president to visit Tulsa, Oklahoma on June 1 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre. President Biden acknowledged the violence and devastation inflicted upon Black communities by white supremacists and said the “only way to build a common ground is to truly repair and to rebuild.”

The Biden administration has an historic opportunity at global scale to demonstrate leadership on racial justice and human rights and translate campaign promises into concrete action at home and abroad.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson
Interim President and CEO
The Leadership Conference
on Civil and Human Rights

Anthony D. Romero
Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union