



GELEDÉS
INSTITUTO DA MULHER NEGRA

GELEDÉS – INSTITUTE FOR BLACK WOMEN DEMANDS RECOGNITION OF THE AFRO-DESCENDANT POPULATION AT COP16

Geledés – Institute for Black Women is attending COP16, the Conference on Biodiversity, in Cali, Colombia, following negotiations on the new work program under [Article 8\(j\)](#), which addresses traditional knowledge related to biodiversity. This article acknowledges the importance of knowledge, innovations, and practices from Indigenous and local communities for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Geledés advocates for the recognition and inclusion of Afro-descendant populations through a cross-cutting approach within its eight elements, with particular emphasis on the sixth and eighth, or by introducing a new element called “Recognition and Full and Effective Participation of the Afro-Descendant Population.” Geledés, like other Afro-descendant organizations, does not consider the Afro-descendant population to fall under the “local communities” term currently used in the article, as it is limiting. Therefore, it calls for the expansion of the language used.

[Article 8\(j\)](#) establishes that each contracting party of the Convention on Biological Diversity must, as far as possible and as appropriate, subject to national legislation, respect, preserve, and maintain the knowledge, innovations, and practices of Indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Additionally, it promotes the application of such knowledge by encouraging the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of innovations and practices.

The Afro-descendant population comprises approximately 300 million people, according to the [Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent](#). This population includes descendants of victims of the transatlantic and Mediterranean slave trades, including the sub-Saharan slave trade, who primarily live in the diaspora across North, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean. Afro-descendants are an integral part of the historical, economic, political, environmental, and social processes shaping and developing nations across Latin America and the Caribbean. According to Cecchini et al. (2021), national censuses estimate that 21% of the total population of the region—more than 134 million people—are Afro-descendants. In Brazil, 56% of the population identifies as Black or Afro-descendant, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2022).



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Globally, Afro-descendant populations are disproportionately concentrated in "sacrifice zones"—regions facing life-threatening risks due to environmental degradation. This historical reality has provided economic and political benefits to some while subjecting many to conditions of extreme vulnerability.

In light of Brazil's climate crisis, Geledés advocates for the recognition of environmental racism by both national and international authorities. The synergy between biodiversity protection and climate change mitigation and adaptation is essential for shaping public policy proposals. The concept of environmental racism highlights how environmental degradation and climate injustice disproportionately affect racialized communities. It calls for the reorientation of political institutions, economic systems, and legal frameworks to implement anti-racist measures for adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage reparations. It also requires recognition of the systemic racism historically experienced by Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations and of the deliberate institutional actions that continue to keep these communities in conditions of social, political, and economic vulnerability worldwide.

In Brazil, land, forest, and human rights defenders have long resisted extractive activities and development projects—many tied directly to fossil fuel production—that, in practice, exacerbate the climate crisis. These activities pressure the most vulnerable territories, deforest forests and other biomes, pollute the air, contaminate water sources, disrupt community relationships, and cause forced displacement. These actions are responsible for systematic violations of the rights of Afro-descendant, quilombola, rural, and Indigenous women.

At the international level, the concept of Afro-descendants has gained significant recognition within the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS) frameworks, as evidenced by:

1. World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (2001) – Durban Declaration and Program of Action;
2. Document E_CN-4_2003_WG-20_WP-3-E (January 28, 2003), from the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent;
3. UN General Assembly Resolution 64/169 (2009) – Proclamation of 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent;
4. UN General Assembly Resolution 68/237 (2013) – Proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent;
5. UN General Assembly Resolution 75/314 (2021) – Establishment of the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent;



6. - **UN Proclamation of the International Day for Afro-Descendant Women and Girls (2024)**;
7. - **AG/doc.5871/24** – Adoption of the concepts of Afro-descendant people and populations by the OAS General Assembly (2024);
8. - **Pact for the Future (2024)**.

It is urgent and necessary for the parties to advance in creating and implementing legal frameworks that recognize the rights of Afro-descendant populations. Despite growing pressure from Afro-descendant movements worldwide for the racial dimension of the climate crisis to be acknowledged, this population has yet to be meaningfully included in official documents and negotiations.

Brazilian civil society recognizes the historic opportunity that COP16 represents in addressing climate challenges through a racially equitable approach. Thus, the term "Afro-descendants" must be officially included in this year's COP16 outcomes—both in written policy and in its committed implementation—acknowledging the fundamental role of Afro-descendant communities worldwide in conserving nature and sustaining life.

It is important to note that Brazil is advancing the Afro-descendant agenda, in partnership with Colombia, and is seeking consensus among countries to adopt the proposal for Afro-descendant inclusion. Geledés is present at COP16 to demand greater ambition from nations—particularly Brazil—ensuring that the Afro-descendant population plays a leading role, with the Brazilian State acting as a key player in negotiations, bilateral meetings, and discussions under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).