

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE



“In the 21st century, diversity, openness, and tolerance are vital national assets”

–Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

The United Nations and the Organization of American States designated 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent to strengthen national actions and regional and international cooperation to:

- Ensure that people of African descent fully enjoy economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights;
- Advance their integration into all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society; and
- Promote a greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage and culture.

The United States, as a multi-ethnic, multi-racial democracy with strong ties of friendship in the Western Hemisphere, recognizes and celebrates the rich contributions of African descendant populations to the fabric of our societies.

Background

People of African descent live all over the world. In the Western Hemisphere, approximately 12 million Africans were brought to the Americas over the 400-year history of the transatlantic slave trade. An estimated 50 percent of those enslaved Africans ended up in Brazil and five percent went to the United States. According to a study distributed by the Inter-American Development Bank, African descendants make up one-third of the total population in the hemisphere. African descendants make up the majority of the Caribbean population. The largest numbers of African descendants are in Brazil, the United States, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador.

Despite historic discrimination and continuing challenges with exclusion and inequality, people of African descent have contributed to science and technology, education, independence and civil rights movements, agriculture, language, cuisine, culture, and the arts.

U.S. Bilateral Efforts

To promote racial equality for people of African descent in the Western Hemisphere, the U.S. Department of State worked with its partners to launch the U.S.-Brazil Joint Action Plan to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Discrimination and Promote Equality in October 2008 and signed the U.S.-Colombia Action Plan on Racial and Ethnic Equality in January 2010. These agreements focus on sharing best practices and implementing programs to improve access to justice, political institutions, employment, health care, civil rights, education, and environmental justice in Brazil, Colombia, and the United States.

Collaboration

During the International Year for People of African descent, the U.S. Department of State will collaborate bilaterally and regionally to:

- Promote inclusion and equal participation of people of African descent in all aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural life;
- Explore our shared regional African Diaspora roots;
- Create awareness of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture, and contributions of African descendants;
- Participate in diverse forums to advance the rights of African descendants; and
- Engage multilaterally to bolster continued inter-regional dialogue and cooperation between the OAS and the African Union on democracy and human rights.

For more information please contact the Race, Ethnicity, and Social Inclusion Unit at RESIUNIT@state.gov or your local U.S. Embassy or Consulate.