

PM of South Africa

My delegation congratulates the chairperson on his appointment as chair of this important forum. Apartheid was the first phenomenon to be declared a crime against humanity in the post-war period. The racist regime that ruled South Africa for over 40 years rejected the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We cannot and may not ignore the history of our country. Our past has shaped our constitution, and if we want to move forward, we cannot deny that past. It is impossible to erase the legacy of 300 years of colonialism and apartheid in two decades. One of the fundamental challenges facing our government, elected in 1994, was the legacy of Bantu education which crippled generations of Africans and denied them opportunities to fully enjoy their most basic human rights. Our Constitution and Constitutional Court are clear that it is the responsibility of the state to affirm those affected by the systemic racism of the past. This is in line with the special measures contained in the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Therefore, affirmative action measures cannot be interpreted as discriminatory. It is a reprehensible distortion of historical and current realities to view affirmative action as discrimination against formerly advantaged sectors of the population. Section 29 of the South African Constitution provides for the right to education. Since 1994, our government has tirelessly pursued transformation measures in all aspects of education. In fact, two thirds of government spending is dedicated to functions that seek to give effect to constitutionally mandated social rights. Chairperson, our government has embarked on an extensive review of the manner in which it provides funding to students at our tertiary institutions. On the 30th of August this year, the Commission of Inquiry delivered its report, and it proposes, among others, that all students at our universities and colleges be funded through a new cost-sharing model of income contingency loans. It also proposes a new fee capping mechanism. The report is currently being processed by the relevant ministries. Further, a number of youth development programs are in place, providing a wide range of services, opportunities, and support to young people and their families. Chairperson, over the years, we have found that this forum has been misused to promote sectarian agendas. Such organizations would be well advised to rather focus on reparations to victims of apartheid and not on undermining government's important efforts to address challenges of discrimination that are still rife in our society. I thank you.