

17 April 2026

Mr. Volker Türk
c/o Registry Office, Mr. Khalid Hassine
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Türk,

I am writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) to respond to the recent [Call for inputs for the 2026 report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the implementation of the programme of activities under the Second International Decade for People of African Descent](#). APA is a leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology, comprising a membership of more than 190,000 clinicians, researchers, educators, practitioners, consultants, and students across the United States (U.S.) and around the world. We work to advance the creation, communication, and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve lives. APA provides the secretariat for the Global Psychology Alliance, a coalition of more than 80 associations, universities, and other organizations who come together to apply psychological science to address complex global challenges. We hold special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, are associated with the Department of Global Communications, and have active teams of volunteer psychologists advocating at the United Nations.

In response to your call for inputs on the implementation of the programme of activities under the Second International Decade for People of African Descent, we have compiled the below information that addresses several thematic areas.

Recognition and the Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination: Racism against People of African Descent in the United States

APA recognizes that racism operates at a systemic level and shapes inequities across sectors, including health care and employment. As articulated in APA policy, racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks, and unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, while unfairly advantaging others, and saps the strength of whole societies (APA, 2021a). In its policies addressing systemic racism in the United States, APA clarifies its use of the term “communities of color” as inclusive of multiple racial and ethnic groups that have experienced systemic racism in the United States (APA, 2021b), reinforcing that these frameworks explicitly encompass the experiences and realities of People of African Descent. Consistent with this systems-level understanding, APA’s work addresses the impacts of racism on communities of color broadly.

Access to Justice: Acknowledgement and Apology

APA has explicitly acknowledged its own failings, its history of complicity in contributing to systemic inequities, and has expressed a commitment to a comprehensive approach to dismantling systemic racism and advancing health equity (APA, 2021c).

APA has further stated in its apology to First Peoples that it “apologizes for its contributions to the harms that First Peoples and their communities have suffered and commits to a path of remediation and reconciliation into the future,” while also recognizing “the vital roles of cross-generational bonds from the distant past far into the future.” APA emphasizes that health equity requires addressing historical and contemporary trauma experienced by marginalized communities including intergenerational impacts (APA, 2022a). These statements underscore the importance of addressing intergenerational trauma, historical harm, and pathways toward healing in advancing health equity (APA, 2023).

Trauma affects people differently depending on their identities and life circumstances. People who face discrimination and systemic oppression are often more vulnerable because they have fewer resources and less access to support. Some individuals and groups are targeted directly because of who they are, and the harm from this targeting can be passed down across generations. Collective trauma can also affect entire communities at once, such as after mass violence, disasters, or war, leading to long-lasting emotional, physical, and social effects. While shared trauma can sometimes strengthen community bonds, it can also increase stigma, distress, and social disruption—especially for marginalized groups—which may continue to affect future generations (APA, 2024a).

Development and Employment: Eliminating Racism and Discrimination in the Workplace

APA promotes concrete measures to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in the workplace against all workers, in particular people of African descent, and advocates for policies and practices that eliminate discriminatory outcomes (APA, 2021c). These efforts are reinforced by the principle that equity, diversity, and inclusion must be integrated into all aspects of organizational functioning (APA, 2021d).

Consistent with these commitments, APA emphasizes that the use of valid, reliable, and fair selection procedures is essential to ensuring equal employment opportunity, and that employers should use selection procedures that minimize bias and adverse impact. These practices are grounded in the principle that selection procedures should be demonstrably related to job performance, thereby reducing discriminatory barriers in hiring and advancement (APA, 2018). Beyond hiring practices, APA underscores the importance of working in safe and healthy conditions. Organizations should implement policies and practices that promote fairness, reduce bias, and support the well-being of all employees which are essential for creating psychologically healthy workplaces. A psychologically healthy workplace is one that actively works to prevent discrimination and promote inclusion, reinforcing that eliminating racism and discrimination requires both structural safeguards and ongoing organizational commitment (APA, 2024b).

Development and Health: Measures to Improve Access to Quality Health Services

APA emphasizes that improving access to quality health services for people of African descent requires addressing structural barriers and social determinants of health. Health disparities in the U.S. provide ample evidence that people of color have not experienced health equity, underscoring persistent inequities in access and outcomes (APA, 2021e). Racialized health inequities have persisted, and people of color (including People of African Descent) are disproportionately at risk. Further, trauma exposure, discrimination, and racism have resulted in

barriers of distrust toward health care, reflecting the ongoing impact of structural inequities (APA, 2021e). Psychologists possess the expertise to tackle these challenges and address the social determinants of health, including access to quality care, education, employment, and socioeconomic status (APA, 2021e). Through culturally responsive practice, research, and policy advocacy, psychologists work to dismantle systemic inequities, rebuild trust in health systems, and promote equitable health outcomes for People of African Descent.

APA's work aligns with a population-level approach to development through an intentional focus on population health and systemic change. Population health approaches emphasize the social, environmental, and economic determinants that influence health outcomes and improving population health requires addressing systemic inequities. Psychology contributes to public policy and practice to improve health and well-being at a population level, supporting the integration of human rights into development efforts. This is done by encouraging psychologists to work within and across diverse systems, promote prevention and early intervention strategies, educate community partners on population health, and enlist a diverse array of community partners (APA, 2022a). Crucially, APA underscores that transforming social systems is necessary to advance health equity (APA, 2021d).

APA highlights the need to move beyond individual-level explanations, noting that psychology's traditional focus on individual behavior fails to acknowledge structures that perpetuate inequity (APA, 2021d). Consistent with this, health outcomes are shaped by social determinants including housing, education, and socioeconomic status are key determinants of health and well-being (APA, 2022a; APA, 2022b)

APA also emphasizes that an ecological approach recognizes the role of systemic and institutional factors in shaping outcomes, supporting culturally responsive and structurally informed approaches to health equity (APA, 2017). APA has underscored the importance of culturally grounded and holistic approaches to well-being, recognizing the interconnectedness and respect for all sentient beings, mental health and wellness, as well as the sovereignty, strength, spirituality, resilience, and perseverance of communities. These perspectives reinforce the need to adopt culturally sensitive, community-informed approaches when addressing systemic racism and health inequities (APA, 2023).

Consistent with these commitments is APA's advocacy for mental health of Black men and boys in the U.S. Effectively addressing the mental health of Black men and boys requires innovative solutions that are grounded in an understanding of the many issues affecting men's health, including social, biological and environmental factors, informed by scientific rigor and data, and driven by the community and the men and boys whose health we are trying to improve. It is critical that we use a comprehensive population health approach that addresses systemic and structural issues as well as social drivers of health.

Through a robust advocacy agenda, APA advocates for initiatives that would improve health outcomes for Black men and boys including: support for a Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, funding and developing research to improve prevention, treatment, and crisis care for children and youth, with a particular focus on youth in underserve communities; passing firearm safety legislation; supporting program to diversity the mental health workforce and improve access to culturally competent care, such as the [Minority Fellowship Program](#); increasing the number of mental

health community training program; and increasing the number of mobile crisis outreach and program.

Multiple or Aggravated Discrimination: Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective (Women and Girls)

APA policy highlights the importance of an intersectional and gender-responsive approach to addressing discrimination. Women and girls face intersecting forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other identities, which must be addressed in policy design and implementation. In this context, psychology supports the human rights of women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, while recognizing that barriers to health care disproportionately affect marginalized women and girls (APA, 2024c).

APA affirms that psychologists, as related to their professional codes (APA, 2016), have an ethical responsibility to be leaders of social-justice/human-rights initiatives, including initiatives aimed at achieving equality for all girls and women (consistent with various UN documents, including the UN 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) (APA, 2024c).

APA further emphasizes that an ecological approach considers the multiple social identities and contexts that influence individuals' lived experiences, reinforcing the need for policies responsive to the realities of women and girls (APA, 2017).

APA also recommends that content about violations of girls' and women's rights, nationally and internationally, including psychology's role in perpetrating and normalizing violations of girls' and women's human rights is incorporated in education across levels (high-school to post-graduate levels) so that all levels of the field are knowledgeable about these violations and the harm that they cause, understand their ethical responsibilities regarding girls' and women's human rights, and seek to develop skills to advocate on behalf of girls' and women's rights, nationally and internationally (APA, 2024c).

APA emphasizes that any global framework for people of African descent must address the intersecting realities of Black women and girls, particularly across the African Diaspora. This approach must draw on the strength and wisdom of African ancestors, recognizing that healing is often rooted in collective memory and traditional practices that predate modern clinical frameworks. For many, wellness is not merely a personal goal but a "biological imperative" (Evans, 2021) to counter the "weathering" effect—the physiological wear and tear on cardiovascular and neurological systems caused by chronic exposure to systemic racism and misogyny (Geronimus et al., 2006).

Specific stressors like "adultification" also force a rapid maturation on Black girls, leading to harsher disciplinary actions and a loss of childhood innocence (Epstein et al., 2017). Statistics show a critical need for targeted intervention:

- **Maternal Health:** Black women are significantly more likely to experience postpartum depressive symptoms but less likely to receive a diagnosis or treatment than their White counterparts (Artiga et al., 2025).

- **LGBTQIA+ Vulnerability:** 46% of Black LBQ+/SGL women have been diagnosed with depression, nearly double the rate of their straight peers (The Trevor Project, 2022).
- **Youth Risk:** Over 20% of Black transgender and nonbinary youth reported a suicide attempt within the past year (The Trevor Project, 2022).

Consistent with APA's commitments to address these disparities, APA advocates for "identity-affirming" and intersectional care that moves beyond the "Strong Black Woman" trope, which often glorifies self-sacrifice and exhaustion at the expense of mental health (Abrams et al., 2019). True resilience is found in the cultivation of Black joy as a profound form of resistance and healing. This involves reclaiming "third places"- community-based environments where Black women and girls can experience safety, "digital kinship" (Wade, 2019), and radical rest.

By integrating the wisdom of ancestors with contemporary psychological science, we can foster an environment where resilience is not defined by enduring pain, but by the ability to thrive. This requires culturally responsive clinical models that prioritize the "struggle for childhood" for Black girls and validate the pursuit of happiness as a fundamental human right. Protecting the mental health of Black women and girls is essential to the health of the entire African Diaspora, ensuring that the legacy of strength passed down through generations is matched by a future of wellness and liberation.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to explain how psychological science can play an important role in implementation of the Second Decade for People of African Descent. We can also direct you to a summation of the APA's dedicated policy efforts to dismantle racial inequity in the field of psychology as a further reference. If we can provide any further information or other assistance, please feel welcome to contact Kelley Haynes-Mendez (khaynes-mendez@apa.org) or Gabriel Twose (gtwose@apa.org).

Sincerely,

Lauren G. Sommers

Lauren G. Sommers, PhD, JD

Executive Lead Psychologist, Public Interest

American Psychological Association

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