

Equity, Justice, Development: People of African Descent in Latin America in Comparative Perspective

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

**Cartagena (Colombia)
March 24-26, 2011**

In 2001 the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) recognized that people of African descent have for centuries been victims of racism, racial discrimination and enslavement. It therefore spoke to the importance and necessity of ensuring their full integration into social, economic and political life. While great strides have been made towards such integration in many societies where there are people of African descent, much more progress needs to be achieved.

In an effort to continue to focus on the conditions of people of African descent, the United Nations has declared the year 2011 as the “International Year for people of African descent.” Coincidentally, 2011 will also mark the bicentennial of independence for Cartagena, Colombia. Cartagena’s bicentennial follows on the celebration of 200 years of independence in other “Bolivarian States” in 2010. With these important commemorative moments in mind, SEPHIS, in collaboration with the Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Cartagena will host a 3-day Conference on “Equity, Justice, Development: People of African Descent in Latin America in Comparative Perspective” from March 24-26, 2011. The Conference will also coincide with the UN declared “International Day for Remembering the Victims of the Slave Trade” on 25th March.

The Conference will provide an opportunity to assess the progress of people of African descent in Latin America over the last 200 years, especially in multi-ethnic societies where they still form an ethnic minority. There are approximately 150 million people of African descent in Latin America, representing about one-third of the total population. This means that there are almost four times as many people of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean than indigenous people, who number about 40 million. In a region characterized by great disparities between wealth and poverty, a disproportionate number of African descendants suffer a lack of infrastructure and utilities and are exposed to structural discrimination. Indeed, it has been estimated that Afro-descendants make up over 40 per cent of the poor in Latin America while being only a third of the population.

As in other ex-colonial societies, it is expected that the bicentennial will be marked by debates over the post-colonial condition and the implications of independence, especially for those who feel alienated from power and access to resources. The failure to incorporate all ethnic groups as equal citizens and to accept cultural differences in an egalitarian rather than hierarchical way often results in contests over equity, rights, justice and respect. National development and stability are

corroded by intolerance and racism, frequent outcomes of multi-ethnicity. Deeply embedded in societies, and operating insidiously, structural discrimination results in dramatically unequal and unfavourable outcomes for minority groups subject to it, even in the absence of overt discrimination under laws and regulations.

While focused on Latin America, the Conference will provide a space for comparative analysis with other countries in the Global South where people of African descent experience structural and other forms of discrimination; where ethnic difference is used as a tool for regulating and marking groups as ‘distinct’; and where the long struggle over identity, cultural production and against textual and visual representations, continue. More importantly, the Conference will engage with the long history of the production of cultural difference and the ways in which cultural difference is produced through deploying the language of ethnicity. The Conference will explore these issues through a wide range of sub-themes as indicated below:

- ▶ People of African descent in the decolonization movement and in the construction of the “nation” in Latin America
- ▶ New directions in the study of people of African descent in the Global South
- ▶ Knowledge production, commodification, and representation (electronic media, visual, textual)
- ▶ Structural discrimination against people of African descent (e.g. in education, the justice system, sports, in the collection of population data, etc.)
- ▶ Citizenship, rights, justice, reparation
- ▶ Globalization, structural adjustment & international relations
- ▶ Gender, ethnicity and power
- ▶ Slavery, memory and commemoration
- ▶ Culture, ethnicity and identity
- ▶ Economic empowerment: obstacles and opportunities

SEPHIS has been engaged in networking among researchers across Africa, Asia and Latin America since 1994. The programme’s objective is to create a South-South network on comparative historically-oriented research and to encourage a new generation of researchers from the South to participate in global debates on development. The Conference aims to attract scholars and policy-makers from across the Global South working from different disciplines in the Social Sciences and the Humanities. Those interested in participating are invited to submit a one-page abstract indicating the scope, nature and approach of their intended papers. The abstract and an academic CV of no more than two pages (in English or Spanish) must reach the convenors of the Conference by e-mail by October 30, 2010. For those selected to participate, we will require you to submit your completed paper (in English OR Spanish) electronically by January 30, 2011 to facilitate the interpreters. In addition, you will be expected to deposit a hard copy of your paper with the Secretariat on your arrival in Cartagena.

SEPHIS will offer a limited number of grants to assist successful applicants living outside of Cartagena but in the Global South, with their travel and/or accommodation costs. However, grants will only be dispensed to participants upon timely receipt of papers.

Applications should be sent to the persons listed below:

- Prof. Alfonso Múnera (local coordinator) <alfonsomunera55@hotmail.com>
- Prof. Verene A. Shepherd (SEPHIS STC Member) <officeofprofshepherd@yahoo.com>

