



## Celebration of International Decade for People of African Descent in Switzerland

Key points:	Promote in Switzerland the implementation of a program of activities in the spirit of recognition, justice and development for people of African descent
Organization:	African Foundation for Migration and Development, African Diaspora Council of Switzerland and Cooperaxion Foundation,
Project length:	Autumn 2017 – 2025

**Background of UN's decade:** There are around 200 million people identifying themselves as being of African descent living in the Americas. Many millions more live in other parts of the world, outside of the African continent. Whether as descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism or as more recent migrants, they constitute some of the poorest and most marginalized groups. The promotion and protection of human rights of people of African descent has been a priority concern for the United Nations. The *Durban Declaration and Program of Action* acknowledged that people of African descent were victims of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism, and continue to be victims of its consequences. Still, despite advances, racism and racial discrimination, both direct and indirect, de facto and de jure, continue to manifest themselves in inequality and disadvantage. The *International Decade for People of African Descent* (2014 to 2024) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2013, provides a solid framework to all relevant actors to join together with people of African descent and take effective measures for the implementation of the program of activities in the spirit of recognition, justice and development. It is also a unique opportunity to further underline the important contribution made by people of African descent to our societies and to propose concrete measures to promote their full inclusion and to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

**Switzerland:** The transatlantic slave trade and commerce between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century had an important and lasting impact on Swiss society. Switzerland, or at that time the Helvetic Confederation, was neither a colonial power nor a maritime nation, but still deeply integrated at the far-reaching European network of finances and trade between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Europe as in Switzerland, the triangular trade was responsible for the arriving of a large range of new products. Swiss trade houses and families actively invested in the transatlantic slave trade or established colonies of settlement in America. Industrialization or the early textile industry in Switzerland are related to the rise of a global economic and trade system. Regarding the colonial knowledge system in Europe and in Switzerland, racist images, views and conceptions from non-European cultures arose that are still very present up to this day. Recent initiatives and actual research works prove how relevant this thematic is nowadays. However, the relation between Switzerland and the triangular trade, colonialism and colonial knowledge production is barely known or approached in Switzerland, neither in public consciousness nor in school material. Despite supporting the *Durban Declaration* and the program of action from the *World Conference against Racism*, political discourse in Switzerland often appeals to racist and xenophobic arguments. Discrimination and Anti-racism laws are insufficient and vulnerable public like migrants and asylum seekers do not receive enough support. Besides cases of racial profiling have been growing in the last years.<sup>1</sup>

For the inauguration of the international decade in Switzerland the following activities are planned:

- Reconnaissance: Open debates and expositions on post-/colonial Swiss history: Swiss implication in transatlantic slave and commercial trade // thematic guided tours through cities and monuments having a strong relation to colonialism, slavery or slave trade // Poster exhibition over the theme
- Justice: Empowerment workshops for the target communities // On the basis of a study on anti-black racism in Switzerland and its recommendations produce a position paper in form of a “commitment” that should be signed by politicians and relevant actors // Empowerment of the People of African Descent as active actors in migration and development process

<sup>1</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance - ECRI Report on Switzerland (fifth monitoring cycle) – Publish in 16 September 2014 - <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Switzerland/CHE-CbC-V-2014-039-ENG.pdf>