UK STATEMENT TO THE WORKING GROUP OF EXPERTS ON PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT – 24 SEPTEMBER 2013

Mr President,

The UK welcomes this opportunity to comment on the report on the UK by the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. We note the contents of the report and our response is attached as an addendum to the report.

The UK is a diverse and tolerant country with some 14% of the population identifying as belonging to an ethnic minority. Evidence from surveys shows that the vast majority of people in the UK believe that people from different backgrounds get along well with each other in their local area, and this is a consistent finding across all major ethnic groups. However, it is worth noting that in the UK, “people of African descent” is not a category in which people from ethnic minorities tend to self-identify with.

Members of Britain’s ethnic minority communities have made an enormous contribution to the UK’s social, economic and cultural life with many pursuing highly successful careers in business and public life. But despite having many cohesive and successful communities, we know that this is not the case everywhere. The British government is determined to give everyone the opportunity to prosper and to break down barriers to social mobility.

The UK’s approach to tackling the challenges posed by racial inequality and discrimination is therefore not based on singling out individual ethnic groups, but instead on promoting social and economic integration with support from our equality and social mobility strategies.

In February 2012, the British Government published a paper setting out its approach to integration: Creating the Conditions for Integration. In this paper, the UK makes clear that it sees integration as the process by which millions of individuals come together around common values, aspirations and interests. It is these shared legal and social norms, such as respect and equality, which provide the foundation for society. The UK is clear that integration means everyone playing a full part in local and national life, and this requires a society which is fair, open and equal to all.
The British government’s response to the Working Group report sets out some of the ways we are addressing inequality and improving social mobility in areas like education, employment, health and the criminal justice system. As the Working Group reported on their visit to Liverpool, our response also describes some of the important programmes and policies undertaken in Liverpool to build an inclusive and integrated society at the local level.

Some of the issues raised in the report are similar to ones raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in their 2011 Concluding Observations on the UK. We look forward to continuing our dialogue with the Committee on these and other issues in the coming years.

Thank you