



Photo: ISHR

Impact story: Maria José Menezes from Brazil

My name is Maria José Menezes, an Afro-descendant Brazilian woman born in a quilombo community, in the state of Bahia, Brazil. Quilombos are communities formed by Black people who escaped slavery and resisted Brazil's slavery regime for over 300 years. As a human rights activist, I am dedicated to advocating for the rights of Afro-descendant communities.

Together with fellow activists, we denounce the deep-rooted oppression Afro-diasporic population in Brazil continues to experience and the systematic violation of their fundamental rights. We want to get the international community involved in condemning these injustices and press the Brazilian government to adopt policies that promote racial equity, historical reparations, and dignified living conditions for Black people.

The United Nations Antiracism Coalition (UNARC) has helped us to progress on these objectives by facilitating our engagement with the UN and especially with EMLER, a group of independent experts appointed by the UN that deals with the killing of Black people at the hands of law enforcement as well as the root causes of such oppression. We believe the UN can be a crucial tool in the anti-racist struggle. Our hope is that EMLER can push for accountability and redress for

victims and contribute to advance racial justice and equality.

I first interacted with EMLER during their visit to Brazil in 2023. UNARC contacted and provided essential support - including through the assistance of Afro-descendant psychologists - to facilitate the testimonies of individuals directly affected, family members of victims, and human rights organisations. Then, in October 2024, as EMLER presented the report of their visit to the Human Rights Council, UNARC invited me to travel to Geneva alongside two mothers of victims of police violence in Brazil. This presentation by the experts is key, because it is when the State must publicly answer for its actions in front of its peers. During the visit, we met with diplomats and UN officials and participated in public events to tell our stories and talk about the reality of injustices faced by Black people in Brazil.

We need to deepen our understanding of the entire UN system and the opportunities available for civil society engagement. We are fighting for more Afro-descendant voices to enter the corridors of the United Nations buildings and reach the international community, until they take meaningful action. UNARC, with support from ISHR, are key allies in achieving this.