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## EUROPE'S BLACK POLITICIANS STAND BY KYENGE IN SALVINI RACE TRIAL

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Black politicians and community leaders from across Europe have backed Italian MEP Cécile Kyenge, who faces a controversial defamation trial brought by Matteo Salvini, the far-right leader of the League party, for calling his party racist.

40 officials from the UK, Germany, Sweden, Hungary, France and Belgium stated that they fully support Cécile and were deeply troubled by the decision by a Piacenza court to bring the case to trial, in a letter published in the Guardian on Friday (12 October)

A former Minister for Integration in Enrico Lettas centre-left government and now an MEP in the Socialist and Democrat group, Kyenge will face trial in the northern city of Piacenza over comments made in an interview in 2014 during the Festa de l'Unità.

Kyenge was responding to a picture posted on social media by Pablo Rainieri, then the League party secretary in the Emilia-Romagna region, which depicted her as an orangutan.

As an MEP, Kyenge is entitled to parliamentary immunity but has agreed to waive it to fight the case. She is also bringing cases against a series of League officials.

Kyenge, who was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but has lived in Italy since 1983, was her countrys first black minister and has been repeatedly subject to racist abuse from League party officials.

Roberto Calderoli, a League senator, told a party rally that whenever he saw pictures of Kyenge, I cannot but think of the features of an orangutan. Meanwhile, League MEP Mario Borghezio, was last year fined €10,000 after describing Lettas government as the bongo-bongo government, in reference to Kyenge.

The letter added that Céciles case represents a wider problem across Europe where we are witnessing the rise of populist, far-right parties in government who are pushing their nationalist agenda and spreading fear and hate against minorities.

Salvini, who has declared his intention to be part of Steve Bannons The Movement, is seeking to unite far-right parties ahead of next Mays European elections.

During a meeting of EU ministers on migration and security in September, he described African migrants as slaves during a meeting of EU ministers on migration and security, prompting Luxembourg's Jean Asselborn to swear at him in frustration.

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