



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 46th SESSION

Annual High-Level Panel Discussion on Human Rights Mainstreaming (22 February 2021)

*Theme: The state of play in the fight against racism and discrimination
20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action
and the exacerbating effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these efforts*

The panel has been held pursuant to [Resolution A/HRC/RES/45/23](#) adopted by the Council on 6 October 2020.

H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan, President of the Human Rights Council, chaired the high-level panel.

Opening Statements:

H.E. Mr Volkan Bozkir, President of the 75th session of the General Assembly (*video message*)

Discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and intolerance persist worldwide. The widening chasm within and between nations is being exacerbated by **armed conflict** and **climate change**. The **COVID-19 pandemic** has laid bare the pre-existing vulnerabilities facing the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups. To end discrimination in healthcare, there is a **need** to remove barriers, take proactive measures to prevent discrimination, collect data, and monitor the quality of, and access to, services. The 20th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and its Program of Action (DDPA) is a moment of reckoning. Although many Member States have improved their legal regimes, there is often a **lack of political will** to enforce and implement the laws that provide effective remedy and redress. Acknowledging past actions is essential for **reparatory justice**. The General Assembly will convene a **debate on the Mid-Term Review** of the International Decade for People of African Descent. An agreement on the modalities and format of the **Permanent Forum** for People of African Descent will be finalized in order to facilitate its first session this year.

H.E. Mr António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (*video message*)

Racist or discriminatory dimensions can be seen in **growing anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred**, violence against some **minority Christian communities** and other forms of intolerance and xenophobia around the world. The **COVID-19** pandemic has further exposed the strong social and economic dimension to racism and discrimination. Overcoming the challenge calls on us to assert our **common values** of equality, non-discrimination, mutual respect. As societies become ever more **multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural**, we need greater investments in inclusivity and cohesion, to harness the benefits of diversity rather than perceiving it as a threat. **Advancing equality** for all also means transparency, equal access to services and meaningful participation, accountability and justice with no discrimination, leaving the comfort zones and recognising and addressing the underlying biases.

Ms Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (*video message*)

The DDPA set up a **comprehensive framework** that demanded change. It acknowledged that past and contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance continue to **victimise Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples**. It urged States and law enforcement agencies to eliminate **racial profiling** and ensure **accountability for misconduct** by law enforcement personnel motivated by racism. It required States to address religious intolerance, including **anti-Semitism and Islamophobia**. It is important to strengthen the important efforts and activities **of the civil society**. The DDPA details actions that States should take in collaboration with parliaments, national institutions, civil society and others – as well as strategies of enhanced international cooperation and mainstreaming. There is a need for **concerted action** – from the grassroots to Parliaments, corporate boardrooms, schools, streets, sports areas, hospitals and more – to seriously address systemic discrimination. The OHCHR will work with all our partners to advance these efforts.



Statements by Panellists:

Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) (*video message*)

Building back better is **building back greener**, building back in an **equitable, gender-responsive manner**. The **fiscal stimulus** being made available by governments must not further discriminate against those who need those resources desperately. The issue of participation and **leadership of women of colour** should also be addressed. **International Women's Day** this year will focus on women's leadership. This is an opportunity to deliberate, discuss and to encourage many stakeholders to deal with these issues in a responsible manner. The **Commission on the Status of Women** will also focus on women's leadership. This is an opportunity for Member States to adopt bold, forward-looking Agreed Conclusions that will ensure the inclusion of women of colour in a significant way. **Generation Equality** will address the gaps that have been identified in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) (*video message*)

Where disaggregated data is available, we see significantly higher **rates of morbidity and mortality** due to **COVID-19** among the poor, older people, ethnic minorities and people of African descent. The crisis has also had a disproportionate social and economic impact on these populations. **Three key areas** where WHO has been working on human rights mainstreaming relevant to the DDPA, and the Leave No One Behind pledge:

1. To support countries to achieve the **health-related SDG targets**, WHO has brought a new focus to addressing the **social determinants** of health across the life course, and to supporting **data disaggregation** to identify health inequalities and inequities. To assess progress in implementing the **Leave No One Behind pledge**, WHO has developed an **output scorecard** that will assess human rights, health equity and gender equality mainstreaming.
2. In collaboration with UNESCO, WHO led a **Frontier Dialogue consultation** to identify key interventions aimed at addressing systemic racial and ethnicity-based discrimination in **COVID-19 recovery plans**. This work will inform training and support to UN Country and Humanitarian Teams to implement key elements of the DDPA.
3. WHO is working as part of the **UN Network on Racial Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities** to advance progress in critical areas such as health equity. WHO remains steadfastly committed to ensuring **equitable access to treatment and vaccines**, among and within countries.

Ms Gabriela Ramos, Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (*video message*)

The data show how deep-rooted, structural and systemic racism and discrimination **magnify the impacts** of the current crisis. More than 86% of **indigenous peoples** globally work in the informal economy where they often lack access to social protection or quality health services. More than three quarters of **displaced and conflict-affected people** have lost income over the course of the pandemic. **Afro-descendant women** in the US are more likely to downshift their careers or leave the workforce due to COVID-19. Strong support of UNESCO Member States was expressed in December 2020 through the adoption of a "**Global Call against Racism**" and the request for a **dedicated UNESCO roadmap**. UNESCO is working on a **scanning methodology** to assess the role of institutional and legal frameworks in advancing our agenda for inclusion. Agenda- and standard setting on frontier issues is a key area of action for UNESCO and it is elaborating a **Recommendation on the of Ethics of Artificial Intelligence**. It will be the first global normative instrument to address discrimination, including gender bias and stereotyping, in the design, development and use of new AI technologies. UNESCO counts on local actors through our **500-strong International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities – ICCAR**. We can and must preserve the memory of past atrocities and historical injustices such as the holocaust, slavery and colonialism, and this is not just as a duty to the past, but as a practical tool to enlighten and guide us today. This is one of the goals of the **General History of Africa initiative** and **the Slave Route Project**. On 22 March 2021, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, UNESCO will be organizing this multi-stakeholder **Global Forum** to build a real global partnership to fight these social ills.



Discussion:

States: Minister of State and Foreign Affairs of Portugal, Minister of Justice of Namibia, Minister of Foreign Relations of Angola, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa; Finland (on behalf of Nordic and Baltic States), Bahamas (on behalf of CARICOM), Cameroon (on behalf of the African Group), Pakistan (on behalf of the OIC), European Union, Brazil (on behalf of the CPLP), Azerbaijan (on behalf of NAM), Qatar, Ecuador, Russian Federation, Philippines, Togo, Indonesia, Senegal, Armenia, Morocco, Iraq, Belgium, Venezuela, Nepal.

NHRs: National Commission on Human Rights of Indonesia

NGOs: Franciscans International, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, Action Canada for Population and Development, International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations.

In their statements, the speakers called to recommit to the fight against racism, xenophobia and related intolerances and intensify multilateral efforts. A strong need for accountability and reparations has been expressed by several delegations. Several delegations said that when it was right to celebrate the anniversaries of common achievements, the stakeholders should also take stock of the failures. *South Africa* welcomed the holding of the High-Level Meeting on the margins of UNGA 76. A number of speakers, such as *Namibia*, *Philippines*, *Qatar* and *NHRI of Indonesia*, spoke about the need for equitable approach to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. *Pakistan*, on behalf of the OIC, member states expressed particular concern on the raised religious discrimination and intolerance. *The European Union* underlined that the racism is often structural, systemic and intersectional. *Azerbaijan*, on behalf of the NAM, stressed the importance they attached to finalizing the elaboration of the Complimentary Standards to the CERD.

A **few questions** were raised. A representative of *Finland* asked what needed to be done to combat incitement to violence or hatred and disinformation and to promote safe digital spaces. Further on the digital technology, *Bahamas* inquired on its role in addressing racial discrimination in the health sector. *Senegal* asked what the lessons and challenges to be learned after 20 years of existence of the DDPA are.

Additionally, a number of states focused on their **national efforts**. Among others,

- *Portugal* said that a dedicated Working Group has been created to assess the national situation and prepare a set of proposals to be included in the national plan to fight racism. Also, a high-level conference on how to improve protection from racial discrimination is scheduled for 2021.
- *Belgium* said their national action plan, currently being drafted, will include measures on combating racism in all fields shaping the society, such as education, media, housing or employment.
- *Morocco* will host the International seminar on the follow-up to the Rabat Plan on the prohibition of hatred, as well as the World Summit on the Alliance of Civilizations as soon as the sanitary conditions allow.

Several **civil society organizations** took the floor. *Franciscans International* said that the indigenous people and migrants were not only victims of discrimination and disproportionate impact, but also key actors in the solutions to the multiple crises the world is facing. A representative of *Action Canada* stressed that there were no justice without reparations. *International Youth and Student Movement for the UN* called on the Council to act on the request by the General Assembly to adopt a multiyear outreach programme for DDPA advocacy and information.

Concluding Remarks

Ms Christine Löw, Director of the UN Women Liaison Office in Geneva

Racism and sexism should be equally addressed. UN Women expresses its strong support to racial justice movement, started at the grassroots. The Generation Equality forum in Mexico will be an important milestone.

Mr Altaf Musani, Director, Health Emergency Interventions, WHO

Vaccination and its rollout should be available and accessible to all people. National Vaccinations Plans should address the vulnerable populations, including the refugees, and IDPs, migrants.

Ms Ângela Melo, Director for Policies and Programmes, Social and Human Sciences Sector, UNESCO

We have seen a strong commitment by the Member States expressed today, there is a wide-spread consensus around the world. The deep-seated structural causes of the discrimination should be addressed; the structural gap should be remedied; the policies should be reformed and become more inclusive – in all segments of the society.

To watch full Panel Discussion on the right to development, refer to [UN Web TV](#)