



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 46th SESSION

Annual Debate on Racial Discrimination

Theme: The midterm review of the International Decade for People of African Descent - Commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (12 March 2021)

- The objectives of the debate included i) Assessing the situation of **global youth and the role of youth in combatting racial discrimination** and fostering dialogue and intergroup relations ii) Assessing the **prevalence of intersecting forms of discrimination** that can affect youth, including youth of African descent iii) Taking **stock of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education**, development and empowerment of youth and children, in particular of African descent, with a focus on racial discrimination
- Panel chair: **H.E Ms. Nazhat Shameen Khan**, President of the Human Rights Council

Opening Statement

Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights:

Two decades after **the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**, **systemic racial discrimination continues** to strangle the rights of people of African descent to **equal services, quality education, decent work and meaningful participation**. Harms inflicted by racism over generations have been **magnified by COVID-19** evidenced by **stark racial disparities** (for example, in the US death rates amongst people of African descent are double than those of white Americans). There has also been a rise in **racist threats, discrimination and attacks** through the **new movements for white supremacy** (amplified by pandemic conspiracy theories).

Reference was made to the **Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** which pointed out that there has been an increase in **stigmatization, labelling and scapegoating** towards people of African descent. This is why States **must address the root of systemic racial discrimination** through **deep reforms, promoting the contributions of everyone** and committing to equality and racial justice. The best allies for doing this are today's **young leaders** willing to help **determine new paths for their societies**.

Regarding young people, the **impact of COVID-19** has been truly adverse and has **denied them access to education**. However, new platforms are allowing them to forge mobilizing powerful forces of change (i.e. Black Lives Matter). This is the moment to step up the engagement of the 2001 [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#) emphasizing the role of youth in combatting racial discrimination. It is also key to harness the [Decade for People of African Descent](#) with Member States and the UN system engaging with young women and men, as well as the work of the [Annual Fellowship Programme for people of African descent](#), [UN Youth Strategy](#), [UNESCO's Master Class Series against Racism and Discriminations](#) and its [Youth As Researchers global initiative on COVID-19](#). Finally, it is important to highlight the work being done by the [United Nations Population Fund in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), and Afro-descendant youth leaders in training young Afro-descendant people in developing effective strategies for participation and political advocacy to advance the implementation of important population and development commitments.

Statements by the Panelists:

Mr. Pradip Pariyar, Executive Chairperson of the Samata Foundation and Young Global Leader at the World Economic Forum:

Racial discrimination and caste-based discrimination must be seen as parallels, as caste hierarchy is a tool for **slavery of the Hindu Brahmanical patriarch to perpetuate primarily the labor exploitation**. This means not being allowed to fetch or touch water from a public waterspout. This is how the lives have been carved out for ages for the **Dalits of South Asia**, who stand at the **intersection of socioeconomic and political**



oppression and are **deprived of basic human rights** in almost every walk of their lives due to wide-ranging discriminatory practices.

Within five months of the COVID-19 lockdowns in Nepal, 23 **Dalits had been murdered** as **structural discrimination** has become more explicit during the pandemic. A survey reveals that Dalits in Nepal **experienced discrimination and prejudice during the distribution of COVID-19 relief materials and medical supplies**. Thus, it is urgent need that the **post COVID-19 recovery efforts** pay careful and special attention to ensure the **most vulnerable are not left out**. This can be done by **mapping and identifying the vulnerability status** of people before making any post COVID-19 recovery efforts is important. Also, efforts should be directed towards the **engagement of the youth and empowering next-generation leaders**.

Finally, it is important to respond to **caste inequalities**. Also, all the stakeholders, **UN Agencies, donor agencies, academics, artists, youth, media and global leaders** should join the fight against the deeply rooted **systemic discrimination**.

Ms. Alicia Quevedos Canales, Specialist on Afro-Peruvian Policies, Ministry of Culture:

Peru is a country where 59% of the people perceived that people of African descent are **discriminated** and 82% believes that the **main cause for this is their skin color**. The main spaces where people experience discrimination and racism are **the public ones such as police stations, hospitals, and municipalities**. This pattern is similar across all other **Latin American** countries. In Peru, **most people of African descent are young** and amidst the pandemic, they are struggling even more with issues related to **climate change, forced migration and rapid technological changes**.

Hence, **three pillars are key for social justice and should be taken in mind when designing public policy: recognition, redistribution and representation**. **Recognition** has improved as there are now many “influencers”, platforms and commemoration dates in recognition of people of African descent. However, there is still a **long way to go in the other two pillars**: with regards to **redistribution**, there are still deep social inequalities including less access to education and job opportunities (Migrant Venezuelan people of African descent face severe unemployment, are underpaid and face racism and xenophobia). With regards to **representation**, people of African descent are included in papers and in the picture for the news, but little is made in **public policy implementation** to have real tangible results.

Ms. Marie-Sarah Seeberger, Member of the World Jewish Congress Jewish Diplomatic Corps:

Several decades after the Holocaust, **the lesson of ‘Never Again’ goes unheeded as genocide, ethnic cleansing, and discrimination continue to take place in various parts of the world**. Racism and antisemitism are as present as ever, with **increasing verbal and physical attacks around the world**. Antisemitism, much like racism, **should not be considered an issue that only impacts “minorities”**.

The WJC Jewish Diplomatic Corps has proposed numerous initiatives in this direction, especially through leadership **programs**, including **conferences like “United Against Racism”** where members have met **minority communities and established connections for exchange and dialogue**. Also, through **social media platforms** raising awareness about **hateful content and online hate**.

It is important to call out **companies**, so they **ban products** that promote **white supremacy, racism, Holocaust denial or any type of hate**. Also, it is important to **promote and encourage diversity programs, help communities to better understand and work together against racial discrimination** and provide **restorative justice for victims** of hate crimes, hate speech or racial violence.

Prof. Rozena Maart, Director of the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa):

In 1976 we had the largest protest in South Africa of young people as 20,000 youth took the streets on the morning of June 16th. We took to the streets because it was important to show our **disapproval of Apartheid education**. The **Apartheid government** fired against the youth and they were forcibly removed from District



Six declared a Whites-only area. In that moment, what changed my life were the words of **Stephen Bantu Biko** referring to **my ability to participate and transform the world that I live in**. In the **United States of America**, this same event is happening today, **police brutality has tried to silence the voices of young people**.

The youth of my generation played an important part in the national liberation of the country because **we talked to everyone**. If not for young Steve Biko, who at High School, began to think about the role he would play in a country **despite the conditions**, there would not have been the kind of **insurgence, and resistance to apartheid that youth of my generation brought to the country's liberation**.

Oral Interventions from States, Group of States and Observers:

States (Joint Statements): Cameroon (on behalf of the Group of African States), Haiti (on behalf of CARICOM), Pakistan (on behalf of the OIC), Argentina (on behalf of Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay). **States (Statements made in the State's individual capacity):** South Africa, Brazil, European Union, Ghana, United States of America, Peru, Mauritius, Indonesia, Senegal, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mauritania, Marshall Islands, Portugal, Ecuador, India, Cameroon. **Other Observers:** UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women. **NGOs:** Friends World Committee for Consultation, Sikh Human Rights Group, Action Canada for Population and Development, World Jewish Congress, International Council Supporting Fair Trial and Human Rights, International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious Linguistic & Other Minorities,

States: All countries highlighted their solid commitment in their fight against racism, as well as the importance of empowering young people who have been at the frontline of this global movement against racism. Also, emphasis was made on the harsh impact of COVID-19 on young people of African Descent lives regarding lack of access to education and health services. In this sense, States demanded more efforts should be put towards **ensuring the equal enjoyment of rights and non-discrimination** of children of African descent, including in national policy making strategies. Moreover, countries condemned **hate speech, racial profiling and violence** which have served as root causes in **historically entrenched structural and systemic racism**. Brazil encouraged actions like the Decade of People of African Descent and adopted its Program of Action, and the possible **UN Declaration on the Rights of People of African Descent**. The United States of America expressed that **President Biden** has already established a **whole-of-government process** to assess and end **systemic racism in government policy**, programs, and institutions, taking into account that black lives ended at the hands of **law enforcement** in the latest protests. Cameroon established that State's should urge African young people to take the **necessary steps to combat violence**, not just through speech but also through concrete actions. Also, that racism is the result of **domination by one elite, one class over other classes**. Pakistan emphasized that **widening inequalities, emerging trends of populism and hyper nationalism** have further exacerbated the violence and **extrajudicial killings** of youth from African Descent, even in the **so-called progressive and developed societies**. India mentioned there is a glaring disparity in **accessibility of vaccines globally** and that guaranteeing **equal access to vaccine** is important for mitigating the impact of pandemic on the marginalized people. Finally, South Africa and Cuba maintained that there cannot be an abuse of **Agenda Item 4 for political gains** with double standards as it runs counter to the founding principles of the HRC.

UNICEF: Racism denies the full enjoyment of children of African descent' rights and jeopardizes their opportunities for life. Children of African descent are more likely to be **poor, face multidimensional poverty**, experience **higher risks of malnutrition** and have **lower school attendance**. **Inequalities** have intensified amidst COVID-19 as schools have closed, children **do not have access to internet**, and they face the **risk of not returning to school**. Hence, a **right-based approach in recovery policies** should be implemented as well as **limiting laws that discriminate children**. **UNFPA:** The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unequal effect on people of African descent, as young people health's is being severely affected and specially in Latin American and Caribbean there has been an increase in adolescent pregnancies resulting in a five-year setback. States must develop **equal sustainable development models** that **address the exclusion** of women, girls and young people in health and education services and invest in the participation of Afro-descendants in **political advocacy and human rights**. **UN Women:** States must provide **technical assistance for women and girls of**



African descent and address racial inequalities. There is a need for **gender-responsive recovery policies** to leave no one behind as, amidst the pandemic, women and girls are encountering **higher unemployment rates, experiencing teenage pregnancy, having lower rates of school attendance** and facing **systematic violence**.

NGOs: Representatives referred to the relationship between **racial discrimination and migration governance** and the **multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by migrants, including youth**. NGOs called on States to make these connections at home in **national policy making and for the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration**. Moreover, an emphasis was made on the **adverse effects of COVID-19** on youth of African descent including **high rates of unemployment, school disruption** and the toll that **online socializing has had on their mental health**. Also, they highlighted the importance of **intersectionality** and the role of **young people in pushing back against white supremacy and leading the struggle for change**. They also regretted that the **OHCHR** has not, seven years into the Decade, published the **Programme of Activities** as without **public knowledge** about it there is little chance for its **successful implementation**.

Some NGOs mentioned systematic **hatred against Jews and the grave discrimination faced by Sikh people**.

Questions to the Panelists:

European Union: It is only by mobilizing forces at all levels, including institutions, civil society and the private sector, that we will make progress in tackling the scourge of racism in our society. What is the experience of the members of the panels in this regard? **Senegal:** In conclusion, can you share successful examples of good practice in the fight against racial discrimination? **Portugal:** How can we ensure that their voices are heard and that they can also have an active role in the implementation and monitoring phases of the decade? What is the experience of the members of the panel in this regard?

Final Remarks by the Panelists:

Ms. Rozena Maart: No student in **South Africa** wants to **remember Apartheid** as it continues to be **unleashed in many ways and forms**. From 2016 to now there's still students' protests being restricted by **police brutality**. **Systemic structural racism** is still **entrenched in many universities in South Africa**. **Free education** has not been met and students are being charged exorbitant fees (90% of South African people are of African descent). The **youth is being treated as an enemy of the State**. The remaining **colonial and Apartheid practices** have to be recognized and reckoned with, in order for there to be **equitable education**.

Ms. Alicia Quevedos Canales: Exclusion of people of African descent is widespread. It remains important to work on the three pillars of **social inclusion: recognition, representation and redistribution**. Also, **young people** need **public policies with measurable results**.

Mr. Pradip Pariyar: **Dalits** are being **discriminated and excluded in Nepal especially during the pandemic**. It is important to urge young people to **challenge their own privileges**, think about **marginalized young people and question color biases**. Also, it is imperative to recognize **cast and race issues** and engage with the **most marginalize people**.

Ms. Marie-Sarah Seeberger: It's important that people **exchange with minorities** to better understand the history and with that, be able to combat **xenophobia and racial discrimination**. Racism can be effectively combated if we do so **together and united**. **Young people** play a fundamental role in combatting racism. This is why is important to **implement youth lead projects**.

To watch the full Annual Debate on Racial Discrimination, refer to [UN Web TV](#).