

Building Peace – Ending Racism

Concept Note, Online Panel event, 21 September 2022, Geneva

In 2001, the General Assembly voted unanimously that the International Day of Peace, established in 1981 and commemorated on the 21st of September, would be designated as a period of non-violence and cease-fire. All nations and people are invited to honor a cessation of hostilities and to otherwise commemorate the Day through education, public awareness, and strengthening the ideals of peace within and among all nations and peoples.¹ In March 2022, on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres affirmed that racism continues to poison institutions, social structures, and everyday life in every society. It results in persistent inequality and denial of people of their fundamental human rights. Racism also destabilizes societies, undermines democracies, and erodes the legitimacy of governments.²

Today, the most common forms of social inequality are related to gender, class, and ethnic background. The concepts of race and racism have a relatively recent origin and historically, their conceptualization has also varied³. Although there does not exist a universal definition of racism; racism, as a system of social inequality, implies that certain groups do not have equal access to and control over material and immaterial social resources based on their race or ethnicity. It is not only a system of prejudice, but systemic and effecting individuals through societal structures. Contemporary forms of racism are defined as racism without race. Practices or ideas are characterized as racist if they are oriented in intention or effect toward the production, reproduction, or affirmation of unequal relations. Problematization, marginalization, and exclusion are important effects of everyday racism.⁴

The **Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue** believes that it is of paramount importance to place the fight against racism and racial discrimination as a key element in the protection of fundamental human rights. Contemporary forms of prejudice and intolerance, discrimination, and systemic racism are countering endeavors to move towards a more just and peaceful world. Manifestations of systemic, unnoticed, and internalized racism affect the targeted in almost all walks of life, including education, employment, housing, access to justice and health care. During the Covid-19 pandemic, increased hate speech, stigmatization, incitement to discrimination, and xenophobia have led to a rise in violence and discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities⁵. Hate speech incites violence, undermines diversity and social cohesion, and threatens the common values and principles that bind us together.⁶ Systemic racism is further fueled by disparities in the

¹ International Day of Peace. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly ([A/RES/55/282](#)).

² UN (2022) *Secretary-General's Remarks to General Assembly event on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2022-03-18/secretary-generals-remarks-general-assembly-event-the-international-day-for-the-elimination-of-racial-discrimination-bilingual-delivered-follows-scroll-further-down-for>

³ The Atlantic (2020) *The Evolution of Racism*. <http://www.gooriweb.org/news/2000s/2020/sept/atlantic5sept2020.pdf>

⁴ Ineke van der Valk (2001) *Racism, a Threat to Global Peace*. The International Journal of Peace Studies, Volume 6, Number 2. https://www3.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol8_2/valk.htm

⁵ European Network Against Racism (2020) *Evidence of the impact of Covid-19 on racialised communities exposes need to address persistent inequalities and racism*. <https://www.enar-eu.org/evidence-of-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-racialised-communities-exposes-need-to/>

⁶ UN (2022) *Secretary General's Message for 2022*. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/countering-hate-speech/messages>

enforcement of national and international policies and the absence of accountability. Its mechanism builds on an existing and generalized culture of mistrust.

The **Geneva Centre** believes that local communities are drivers of sustainable peace. Local peacebuilders are leaders in decision-making for peace, security, and development, and in the forefront of tackling racism and racial discrimination. Armed conflicts continue to erupt across the globe, causing people fleeing face race-based discrimination at country borders. Racism continues to be a major obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations among peoples and nations. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance are often among the root causes of internal and international conflicts, due to the marginalization, discrimination, and sometimes even dehumanization that they foster within societies and between populations groups. Similarly, the absence of democratic structures, the weakness of the rule of law and political institutions which are not representative of the entire population, may in the long run contribute to triggering conflicts between societal groups if mistrust is allowed to foster. There is an immense opportunity for the peacebuilding community to reflect critically on their approaches to armed conflict prevention and humanitarian responses.⁷

The international community has a key role in fostering peace and tackling racism and racial discrimination, supporting global movements for equality and human rights. The fight against racism and intolerance demands prompt and sustained action, undertaken with a sense of unflinching purpose. Governments and civil society need to unite their efforts to enforce all rights and duties of people based on their role as rights-holders while preserving ethnic and cultural diversity. Relevant actors should pay attention to early warning signs of racism, hate speech, xenophobia, intolerance, and racial discrimination that may ultimately lead to conflict. They have a crucial role to play in producing transformative changes, prosperity, and enjoyment of human rights. Compassion, inclusiveness, respect, and solidarity are the true gateways to just and peaceful societies. Good governance, democracy, respect for the rule of law, and meaningful participation of minorities in political institutions are also essential to prevent and defuse tensions that may lead to situations of conflict. Justice, truth, and reconciliation mechanisms to deal with the legacies of the grave human rights violations committed during conflicts are also crucial.⁸

⁷ UN HRC (2012) *United Nations experts say racism is still igniting and fuelling violence and conflict.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Panel objectives

- promote equality and raise awareness of the multiple forms of racism experienced by racial and ethnic minorities and how to tackle it
- identifying ways to tackle hate speech, and fear of the other to foster peaceful and just societies with racial equality
- identify best practices to support anti-racist action from individual to grassroots and structural levels
- provide an opportunity for dialogue and information sharing

Topics of discussion can include

- How to foster living together in peace in multicultural societies?
- How to combat hate speech, discrimination and prejudice in societies, from structural levels to individual and often unnoticed biases?
- In context of peacebuilding, how have considerations of race and ethnicity been traditionally incorporated and what can be done to enhance it?
- How could peacebuilding practice change with a deep consideration of racism, xenophobia, intolerance, and racial discrimination?
- What can be the role of civil society, individuals, policy makers and international community in contributing to a world without racial discrimination, and what are the biggest obstacles in fostering peace in this regard?
- Significance of data and research to tackle discrimination and inequalities
- Action Plans against racism in national policy frameworks
- Advocacy work for addressing structural racism
- Addressing questions of structural racism, stigmatization and exclusion, including Afrophobia, Islamophobia, Antisemitism

Panel Format

The 1 hour panel discussion will be held as an online event on ZOOM. The panel will begin with opening remarks from the moderator followed by the panel discussion. A Q&A session will close the discussion.

Expected outcome

A follow-up publication, containing summaries of the panel proceedings, the Q&A sessions, an analytical think-piece on the lessons learned and ways forward, and the full statements of the panelists, will be issued and distributed widely online, with hard copies to the panelists and the Permanent Missions in Geneva. The publication will also be announced on social media platforms, with a link to the publication on the Geneva Centre's website.

About the organizer

The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue is an independent, human rights think-tank and advocacy institution, established in 2013 with its headquarters in Geneva. The Centre is dedicated to promoting a universal, value-driven human rights system anchored in the principles of equity, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, and solidarity. The Centre was granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2017. The Centre's principal activities consist of research and publications, training in human rights, reporting on human rights conferences, and organization of thematic panel debates and international advocacy to further the promotion of human rights.