

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 52nd SESSION

Debate in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

**Theme: The urgency of combating racism and racial discrimination 75 years after the
adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

29 March 2023

In his opening remarks, **Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**, affirmed that as the international community celebrates the **landmark vision of the Declaration and its 75th anniversary**, there is also an opportunity to reinvigorate it and to inject new urgency into the fundamental commitments to humanity that it contained. Around the world, many anti-racism movements are key to the human rights cause, including the struggles against apartheid, and more recent movements such as Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate. Yet, despite the many important steps forward, today, no country could claim to be free of racism. More needed to be done to combat systemic racism and discrimination that permeated social structures, institutions, and technologies. **Ms. Epsy Campbell Barr, Chair of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent**, affirmed that systemic racism is an unacceptable reality, but it is a reality that we have to confront with actions and commitments. Today is the time to make a new pact, to act, to add actions, and to move forward because the issue of racial equality is part of the agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals. She stressed that we will not be able to reach the SDGs in the year 2030 if we do not collectively commit to the eradication of racism. It is about having a new education in schools, in the media, and universities. It is about the States recognizing that the impact of racism is economic, social, and even cultural, but it is personal, it affects the mental health of millions of people who are placed in a declared disadvantaged condition. **Ms. Verene Shepherd, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**, affirmed that today, too many people's rights continue to be undermined by the prevalence of systemic racism and racial discrimination against Africans and people of African descent, Asians, and people of Asian descent, migrants, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities. **Xenophobia** has also increased around the globe. This means that the fight for justice, equity, equality and non-discrimination on the grounds is still a work in progress. She stressed the necessity to redouble the efforts as a global community to use the UDHR and the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as two critical roadmaps to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination. **Mr. Doudou Diène, Rapporteur of the Advisory Board of the Foundation for the Remembrance of Slavery and former Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance**, affirmed that **multiculturalism** is the central issue of contemporary manifestations of racism and xenophobia. The question of discrimination is articulated in the multicultural process around two major dimensions. The identity issue of the multicultural process is illustrated by the fight against discrimination in the fields of memory and the system of values. This dimension, often ignored by political leaders, reveals the need for a cultural and ethical strategy to eradicate racism and discrimination in multicultural societies. Multicultural societies are the result of long-term historical processes which have brought peoples, cultures, and religions into contact. The cultural, ethnic, or religious diversity of communities, groups and peoples brought into contact by various historical processes always results in a meeting of different identities. The context of the encounter, discovery, conquest, and domination determines the perception of this diversity: attraction, repulsion, fear, and hostility. The **intercultural encounter** consequently

generates an identity tension that constitutes the central core of the multilateralization process. **Identity tension** is inherent in cultural diversity. Identity tension is expressed in two major issues of the identities of groups and communities and therefore two sensitive areas of the multicultural process which, in-depth, structure racism and discriminatory practices: memory and values. Finally, **Ms. Saadia Mosbah, President of Mnemty Organization**, informed the Human Rights Council that, despite the progress made, **racial discrimination** remains an obstacle that hinders the implementation of human rights in many areas by creating exclusion based on race, color, descent and national origin. It has caused suffering and loss of life in many cases. The condition of racism in the MENA region remains murky and still faces a bit of denial in some countries. The region faces inequality in all its forms; women of different races and colors face daily challenges and discrimination in all aspects of life. There is a lack of disaggregated data and, more importantly, a lack of accountability. Affirming that the issue of racism and racial discrimination is urgent but **not a priority for those in power** in the region, she **appealed** to all States, the international community, and local and regional actors to end racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; to strength the capacities of people of African descent, other minorities residing in the MENA region to participate in the resolution of the challenges and problems that we have; and to strength accountability and racial justice for all without discrimination.

Interactive dialogue

22 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. The majority of the countries reaffirmed their commitment to the Durban Declaration and Program of Action, the adoption of which was an important step in defining comprehensive approaches to combat various manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia. As **Colombia** stated, the Declaration construction process must take place through inclusive and constructive dialogue, and its content must address essential aspects such as access to justice, collective memory, the link with the territories and the inclusion of a reparation component. However, they also mentioned the many major changes in the world, but racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance have not disappeared. **Russia Federation**, in particular, affirmed that this problem is rooted in the shameful colonial past of some states. The efforts of the international community to correct this blatant historical injustice have so far been unsuccessful. In some countries discrimination and intolerance have taken on a systemic character, hitting the entire system of state power.

NGOs stressed the important opportunity of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) for all States to implement the DDPA as an urgent action to combat racism across the world. They affirmed that racism has its roots in ethnonationalism, and pervades migration narratives, laws, and practices, leading to the exclusion, stigmatization, and criminalization of migrants. This population is frequently the victim of immigration raids, where they are imprisoned and expelled from their own country. They called attention to the urgency of dismantling systemic racism in migration governance., as well as seeking joint solutions that benefit the most vulnerable.

UNESCO, quoting Rosa Parks “to bring about change, we must not be afraid to take the first step. We will fail when we fail to try”, listed recent crises that allow for prejudices to thrive. It reported cases of racist hate speech online and hate crimes, and experiences of discrimination based on gender, disability, or sexual orientation. **UN Women** reported its efforts in tackling racial discrimination thought an intersectional lens, guided by the Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit and the initiative “Addressing stigma and discrimination experienced by women with disabilities”.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (22 country delegations):

Cote d'Ivoire (on behalf of African Group), Brazil (on behalf of a group of Countries), Iceland (on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic Countries), Barbados (on behalf of the CARICOM), European Union, Oman (on behalf of the GCC), Bolivia (Plurinational State of), United States, Tunisia, Colombia, Russia Federation, Holy See, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Portugal, Costa Rica, Armenia, China, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, Lesotho, Timor Leste, Namibia.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (6):

International Service for Human Rights, International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations, Friends World Committee for Consultation, World Jewish Congress, Rencontre Africaine pour la defense des droits de l'homme, Centre Zagros pour les Droits de l'Homme.

International organizations (3): UNESCO, UN Women, UNPF, UNICEF.

To watch the full meeting refer to UN Web TV, [here](#).