

66th session of the General Assembly: High-Level Meeting to Commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Summary of Roundtables 1 and 2 to address the theme of “Victims of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Recognition, Justice and Development”

I am pleased to present to you the summary of the fruitful discussion that was held today during the two roundtables on the theme of ‘victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance: recognition, justice and development’.

The first roundtable was co-chaired by myself as well as H.E. Mr. Arvin Boolell, G.O.S.K., Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade of Mauritius.

The second roundtable was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Mohamed Mouldi Kefi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tunisia and H.E. Mr. Ricardo Bucio, President of National Council to Prevent Discrimination of Mexico.

The following experts made presentations during the roundtables:

1. Mr. Anwar Kemal, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination;
2. Dr. Edna Maria Santos Roland, Member of the Eminent Expert’s Group on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;
3. H.E. Mohamed Siad Douale, Chair of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;
4. Ms. Verene Shepherd, Member of the Working Group on Experts on People on African Descent.

The participation and engagement of representatives of civil society during the discussions was greatly appreciated.

During the discussion, many speakers pointed out that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), together with the outcome document of the 2009 Durban Review Conference, provide a very comprehensive and solid framework for combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Today there are still millions of victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance around the world. Victims do not have access, for example, to

education, employment and housing. Migrants and refugees are mistreated just for being different. The internet is used to disseminate racist ideas amongst youth and such sites promoting racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance should be eliminated.

It was noted that the DDPA provides useful guidance to Governments, non-governmental organizations and other institutions in their efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. However, it is important to ensure its implementation.

The importance of ratification of the ICERD and the work of CERD, which was focused on the needs of vulnerable groups, such as indigenous peoples, immigrants, migrant workers, Afro-descendants, Roma and other minorities was emphasized. It was stated that in 2001, the international community focused, for the first time, on victims including people of African descent, indigenous peoples, and people of Asian descent, Roma, migrants, refugees, displaced people, asylum seekers, national and religious minorities, women, youth and children, and victims of trafficking.

The 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance acknowledged that slavery and the slave trade were crimes against humanity, and also included a gender perspective. Policies are being developed in many countries in the areas of education, health, labor, access to land and housing. Despite achievements, serious problems remain worldwide. The misuse of technologies to disseminate hate and racist ideas is one example. The need for data collection was highlighted and an appeal for the proclamation of United Nations decade for People of African descent was made.

Many speakers reaffirmed the importance of commitment and political will to realize all human rights for all without discrimination. Speakers also welcomed the adoption by consensus of the Political Declaration – the outcome of the high-level event commemorating the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the DDPA.

Speakers also stated that the theme of this event rightfully focuses on victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the need for their recognition and access to justice. A speaker noted that achieving justice is often the first step to achieving equality. Some speakers also stated that the global response to racism should not be clouded by politics and that it is an obligation and responsibility for the international community – including civil society - to collectively work together to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

They also referred to measures taken at the national level, including legislation, policies, specialized institutions and programs to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The importance of human rights education, awareness-raising campaigns, continued dialogue on anti-discrimination issues, including inter-religious dialogue, and cooperation with civil society was noted by a number of speakers. The importance of the media to promote a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity was also noted. The fight against racism should not be used to curtail or limit other rights and should not be an excuse for repression. The need to share best practices and to provide targeted technical assistance, including with the support of the United Nations, in the area of combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance was emphasized by speakers.

The importance of fighting poverty, particularly as articulated in the Millennium Development Goals was stated. The need to integrate the right to development in anti-discrimination efforts was also stated, as well as the importance of a human rights based approach for sustainable development.

Prominent in the discussion was the issue of discrimination against migrants. It was stated that migrants experience racial abuse, xenophobia, discriminatory labour practices, harsh living conditions, and trafficking, for example. Concern was expressed about the situation of groups in vulnerable situations, such as women, children, refugees and indigenous peoples in various statements. Concern was also expressed with respect to discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The issue of discrimination against religious minorities and the need to foster harmony and peaceful co-existence of different religions in societies were emphasized. The rise of right wing or nationalist movements, xenophobic statements by politicians and other public figures, and the dissemination of such sentiments were highlighted as another important area of concern. Several speakers referred to people under foreign occupation and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The importance of not singling out a specific region or country was also emphasized.

It was noted that progress has been made but gaps persist. It was emphasized that countering discrimination is a global issue that needs to be tackled by joint efforts. The importance of economic, social and cultural rights for the lives of victims was also noted.

It was also emphasized that in order to guarantee the right against discrimination within a society, the creation and strengthening of specialized national bodies, in accordance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action is fundamental. This requires that

specialized organizations have a broad legal mandate, funds and appropriate infrastructure that would allow them to effectively promote equal opportunities and treatment among persons of different societal group. It was stressed that today's work should help us reflect on the necessity of establishing specialized national bodies in the fight against racial discrimination, xenophobia and all other forms of discrimination and intolerance.

The need to apologize and to provide reparations to victims of Trans-Atlantic slave trade was highlighted as well as the recommendation to establish a permanent forum for Africans and people of African descent. The proposal to erect a memorial for the victims of the Trans Atlantic slave trade was welcomed by several speakers.

A speaker encouraged Member States to provide innovative and effective reparations, including such as resources to support social programs to assist people of African descent. Monitoring of acts of racist discrimination is important in order to prevent further abuses.

It was further emphasized that the theme of the event accurately reflects the essence of the DDPA. It was also noted that the adopted political declaration during this commemorative event will bolster the morale of the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance around the world. Countering the mainstreaming of hate speech was defined as imperative in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

A number of speakers expressed appreciation of the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the leadership of the High Commissioner in the domain of anti-discrimination efforts.

Many speakers noted that States should continue combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and called for both national and regional processes to be strengthened. They called for reinvigorated political will.

The 10th anniversary of the DDPA represent for many an opportunity to scale up the efforts and to exchange ideas on how to prevent racism and discrimination and share good practices. Several speakers emphasized that the 10th anniversary coincides with the International year of People of African Descent. In that respect, some suggested that a decade on People of African Descent be proclaimed in 2012, some called for establishing of a permanent forum and other called for proclaiming an international day for people of African descent. A number of speakers also expressed concerns about the trend of incitement to hatred.

A number of speakers emphasized that an effective system of protection requires improved coordination among human rights mechanisms. There is also a need to enhance the performance of the DDPA follow up mechanisms and ensure commensurate funding for their activities.

Several speakers underscored the primary responsibility of states for combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. They also stated that institutional changes and affirmative actions have been implemented to improve the life of victims and groups in vulnerable situations, but a lot remains to be done. The importance of countering corruption and ensuring the rule of law was further emphasized.

Today's discussion was thoughtful, constructive and forward-looking. Hopefully this Commemoration will not remain simply rhetoric and we will all move together toward practical actions. Indeed as contained in the Political Declaration that we adopted by consensus this morning, we shall proclaim together our strong determination to make the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and the protection of the victims thereof, a high priority for all of us and for our countries. I thank you for your attention.
