

*Check against delivery*

**17<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council**

**PANEL DISCUSSION ON BEST PRACTICES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST  
RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED  
INTOLERANCE**



OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Opening address by

Ms. Navi Pillay  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Mr. President,  
Distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council,  
Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to open this panel discussion on best practices in the struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We are here to share expertise and examples of good practices on some important aspects of countering these wrongs.

The importance of information sharing at the national, regional and international levels was highlighted both by the Durban Declaration and the Programme of Action and the Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference. This exchange of inspiring experiences can assist Governments, parliaments, the judiciary, social partners and civil society in their efforts to promote racial equality by replicating or adapting practices to local conditions anywhere in the world.

Equality and non-discrimination are basic legal norms that must be respected. All human rights treaties rest on those fundamental principles. Yet, racial discrimination in its many guises persists. In recent years, in many regions of the world there has been a general increase in racial violence. Hate speech, prejudice, and stereotyping are features of everyday life. Groups defined by their race or ethnicity remain disproportionately disadvantaged, and minority cultures are silenced and excluded.

As mentioned in my opening statement to this Human Rights Council session, the recent events in North Africa once more demonstrate the continuing vulnerability of migrants. The effects of the economic crisis on the human rights situation of vulnerable groups are of great concern. This is compounded by increasing xenophobic sentiment and even violence which foment public opinion against immigrants, refugees and outsiders in general.

In many regions, indigenous peoples bear the burden of the social and human costs of resource-intensive and resource-extractive industries. They are deprived of their traditional land, and face forced eviction, displacement and violence.

Poverty, unemployment, discrimination in the administration of justice, unequal access to health care, education and housing are among the problems that many people of African descent experience across the world today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Implementation of the DDPA has already contributed to important developments in the battle against racism and racial discrimination at all levels. Various reports of the Secretary-General on global efforts for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action show that concrete steps are effectively being taken by Member States, United Nations bodies, national institutions and civil society.

In certain national and regional systems racial equality legislation has evolved in the last few decades. This body of law contains concepts, definitions, and approaches that have increased protection against racial discrimination. The realization of racial equality requires the adoption of laws that are comprehensive and sufficiently detailed and specific to address the different forms and manifestations of racial discrimination. Further, to put the law into practice and protect the rights of victims, it is necessary to create appropriate national bodies, policies and programs, as well as strengthen the justice system.

Indeed, progress is still too limited and patchy, as most countries in the world have yet to adopt adequate measures to promote racial equality. Even where national anti-discrimination legislation exists, its effective application lags behind. To fill this gap, it is imperative that courts are sensitized to the importance of enforcing equality and non-discrimination laws. Encouraging decisions have been handed down with wide reaching impact to prevent and punish acts of racial discrimination. These developments must be replicated everywhere so that victims receive both justice and adequate remedy for violations.

Dear Colleagues,

National specialized bodies, commissions, ombudsmen or other institutions, whose mandates address racism and racial discrimination, play an extremely important role in combating racism and intolerance at the national level. I welcome the fact that several countries are setting up such institutions. I would like to underscore the importance of giving specialized bodies the independence and powers they need to be able to function effectively.

Lasting improvements to counter racial discrimination at the national level require a sustained and comprehensive approach. National action plans can be effective mechanisms to that end. States' growing demand for technical assistance from my Office for the development of national action plans against racial discrimination confirms this positive development. My Office will continue assisting Member States in this endeavour.

Some Member States have recognized the need to collect and publicize data, including relevant statistics, in order to give full effect to racial equality, to identify, monitor and measure inequalities, discriminatory practices and patterns, as well as to analyze the effectiveness of measures to promote racial equality. Such personal data must be used in accordance with international human rights law which protects the privacy of individuals. While many States are reluctant to engage in data collection, some have adopted data collection systems that incorporate adequate safeguards and have been used in the design and implementation of equality policies and programs.

Moreover, steps taken in several countries by government and civil society that promote dialogue and multiculturalism and awareness-raising activities within and among communities are to be commended. These measures constitute important tools which, combined with legal protection and safeguards, could create real paths towards equal treatment, mutual respect and fairness in perceptions and actions.

I wish to draw your attention to the fact that my Office is elaborating practical policy tools for combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. These tools build on best practices from around the world and focus on legislative measures, national action plans against racial discrimination and on national bodies against racism and racial discrimination.

I hope that our discussion today will inspire Member States to strengthen their efforts and continue to adopt and implement necessary measures. We must continue to seek creative, actionable, and innovative ways to stem the scourge of racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination.

I wish you a productive discussion.

Thank you.