



## Fact Sheet

# INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION 21 MARCH 2006

## "FIGHTING EVERYDAY RACISM"

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### Background

Forty-six years ago, on 21 March 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people in the township of Sharpeville, South Africa, who were peacefully demonstrating against apartheid's "pass laws." The United Nations General Assembly subsequently declared that day -- 21 March -- the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (resolution 2142 (XXI)). The Assembly called on the international community not only to commemorate that tragedy, but also to work together to combat racism and racial discrimination wherever they exist.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in a recent report on global efforts for the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, stated that: "The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination remains a rallying point all around the world." (document A/60/307 of 29 August 2005). The theme for this year's commemoration of the International Day is "**Fighting everyday racism**".

### Past actions against racism by the international community

Since its creation, the United Nations has struggled to find measures to combat racial discrimination and ethnic violence. Article 1 of the United Nations Charter cites the promotion and encouragement "of respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion" as one of the purposes of the UN. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, states that "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (Article 2).

**The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination** was adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965. It is the oldest and most widely ratified United Nations human rights convention. Although the Convention has been signed and ratified by 170 States and has been in force since 1969, racial discrimination remains a widespread problem in many countries worldwide. No country can claim to be free of racism and racial discrimination.

The commitment by the international community to human dignity and equality is reflected in its adoption of a number of resolutions, conventions and declarations, which not only reject racism, xenophobia and discrimination, but also outline comprehensive programmes of action. In 2001, the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance adopted the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action as a road map for further action toward the implementation of the principles of non-discrimination and equality.

The convening of the Durban World Conference was preceded by 50 years of activity by the United Nations in its efforts to eradicate all racism and racial discrimination. Included among these efforts were the adoption in 1963 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1965; the designation of 1971 as International Year for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination; the designation of three Decades for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (1973-1982, 1983-1992 and 1993-2002); and the appointment in 1993 of a Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

#### Current efforts to eliminate racial discrimination

Governments, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations are acting against racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance, using the platform of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. There is also growing cooperation and mutual assistance between different stakeholders. New forms of racism are receiving increasing attention. Governments are reacting more often against cyber-crime and the dissemination of racist ideologies via the Internet. At the same time, Governments, intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations are using the Internet to inform the public about their work and to spread positive messages of equality and non-discrimination. Slowly, a trend is developing towards reporting and monitoring -- often using statistics -- of racist crimes and incidents.

The United Nations continues to do its part as well in the fight against racism and racial discrimination, including through the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance; the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and the Commission on Human Rights. Three bodies have been created to follow up on the effective implementation of the World Conference -- the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, and a group of eminent persons on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Other UN entities undertaking efforts to eliminate racial discrimination include: the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Volunteers (UNV), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the UN

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the UN Department of Public Information (DPI), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

"We are not short of evidence that racism and xenophobia continue to be present and direct threats to human dignity. Such practices have an immediate negative impact on our individual and community life. Worse still, they poison the future." *Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in her address to the third session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, Geneva, 11 October 2004.*

### Activities to promote the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

**At UN Headquarters:** On 16 March, the UN Department of Public Information will hold a briefing for non-governmental organizations in observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium. The briefing, which is being organized in cooperation with the NGO Committee on Human Rights, will look at the status of ratification and compliance with implementation of the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; provide an update on progress in the follow-up to the 2001 Durban Declaration and Program for Action, with a focus on recent developments; explore prospects for a Durban + 5 review by the General Assembly at its 61st session in the fall of 2006; and look at innovative initiatives for the elimination of racism and how the impact of these initiatives might be broadened. Invited speakers include Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye, Director of the New York office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; Ambassador Stafford O. Neil, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations; and Ms. Gay J. McDougall, Executive Director of the Global Rights organization based in Washington D.C. and an independent UN Expert on Minority Issues.

**At the UN Office in Geneva:** The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will mark the International Day through a series of events and outreach materials. From 15-20 March, a series of "every day" events at the Palais des Nations will concentrate on thematic settings, including "Everyday racism at the workplace", "Everyday racism in school" and a forum "Giving voice to the victims of racial discrimination". An exhibit of works against racism entitled "Racial discrimination through the eyes of young people" will be inaugurated at the Palais on 15 March. On 21 March, the High Commissioner, Louise Arbour, will open a high-level panel on "Fighting Everyday Racism", and deliver a keynote speech. The Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mr. Sergei A. Ordzhonikidze, will present the message of the Secretary-General on the International Day. Guest speakers will include Ambassador Manuel Rodriguez-Cuadros, Chairperson of the 62nd session of the Commission on Human Rights and Mr. Doudou Diène, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism. Ambassador Juan Martabit, Chairperson of the Inter-Governmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action will chair the panel. Within the high-level panel, the winners of a Geneva school competition on the theme "The Difference? What is that? Racism, exclusion, prejudices" will present their works, and the High Commissioner will present a special prize to the winners of the competition. For further information, please visit: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/events/racism/>.

**At UNESCO in Paris:** A series of activities is being organized at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. On 20 March, in partnership with "Le Pari(s) du vivre-ensemble", an award ceremony will be held for the winners of a photo contest and a private viewing of the photograph exhibition "Vivre ensemble aujourd'hui" ("Living together today"). A series of round tables on 21 March will address the following themes: "How to overcome obstacles and give minorities the means for social and economic development: The role of the private sector"; "The media and the fight against discrimination"; "The role of schools and universities in countering discrimination"; and "Slavery, colonialism and genocide: Which school programmes for which collective memory?". Also on 21 March, Mr. Maurice Quénet, Rector of the Academy of Paris, will present awards to the prize winners of a literature contest for secondary school students on: "My friend, my neighbour, the Other: French or foreigner, white, Roma, black or Asian, Christian, Jewish, Moslem, believer or not". For further information, please visit: <http://www.unesco.org/shs/21march>

**At the field level:** The worldwide network of United Nations Information Centres, Services and Offices undertake a wide variety of activities to promote International Days, including the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Such activities in the past have included media outreach, translation and dissemination of UN system press releases; the organization of special events; translation of UN publications into local languages; production of radio and television programmes; preparation of newsletters and bulletins; briefings to the public; lectures and speeches; and screening of videos and films. OHCHR field presences will also be marking the Day through various initiatives, from seminars and workshops, to public events such as exhibitions or concerts.

Other activities have included placing the message by the Secretary-General for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in local newspapers, radio stations and TV; organizing round tables and seminars; giving radio and TV interviews on the subject of racial discrimination and other human rights issues; organizing photo exhibits and poster and essay contests on issues related to racial discrimination; and participating in radio and television programmes, explaining the importance of eliminating racial discrimination.

For further information about the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, please visit the following website: <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/racial/>.

For detailed information about UN efforts to eliminate racial discrimination, please visit the following website: [www.ohchr.org/english/issues/](http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/).

**French:** [www.ohchr.org/french/issues/](http://www.ohchr.org/french/issues/)

**Spanish:** [www.ohchr.org/spanish/issues/](http://www.ohchr.org/spanish/issues/)