Introduction

Throughout history, racism, xenophobia, and intolerance has manifested itself in various forms. Many of them have been eradicated, determined to be taboo, and/or are illegal. However, racism, intolerance, and xenophobia are still present and will require a permanent international mobilization to combat this scourge from our society. Perhaps, just as the practice of ancient slavery has become illegal and taboo throughout the world, so too, can the notion of ethnic and racial superiority and intolerance.

Racism and racial discrimination attack the core of a person’s dignity, for they seek to divide the human family, to which all people and individuals belong, into categories, some of which are considered more worthy than others. History has proved time and again that, when allowed to take root, discrimination, racism and intolerance shatter the very foundations of societies and damage them for generations. The road to a world free from racism is not an easy one. It requires political will and long-term commitments.

There is consensus within the UN that it has done too little, too slowly.1 But there is serious debate over which problems the UN should stress, and which members of the international community should bear the greatest burdens of reform.

The Third Committee has dealt with issues such as the protection of migrants, the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, the situation of human rights in specific countries (recently in Iran, Myanmar, DPRK), and specific issues like extrajudicial executions (killings by state authorities such as police).2

To address and change generations of norms, feelings, and prejudices it will require a comprehensive effort from the international community and a heartened effort from all national leaders to not just offer lip service to the issue of discrimination and racism but to enact and embrace national and international laws and show genuine sentiments that racism and discrimination are not the future of progress in our world.

Background

Discrimination – in all its possible forms and expressions – is one of the most common forms of human rights violations and abuse. It affects millions of people every day and it is one of the most difficult to recognize. Discrimination and intolerance are closely related concepts.

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1 UNHR. “United against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance”.

2 “Third Committee Draft Resolutions”
Intolerance is a lack of respect for practices or beliefs other than one's own. It also involves the rejection of people whom we perceive as different, for example members of a social or ethnic group other than ours, or people who are different in political or sexual orientation. Intolerance can manifest itself in a wide range of actions from avoidance through hate speech to physical injury or even murder.

Discrimination occurs when people are treated less favorably than other people are in a comparable situation only because they belong, or are perceived to belong to a certain group or category of people. People may be discriminated against because of their age, disability, ethnicity, origin, political belief, race, religion, sex or gender, sexual orientation, language, culture and on many other grounds. Discrimination, which is often the result of prejudices people hold, makes people powerless, impedes them from developing their skills and, in many situations, from accessing work, health services, education or accommodation.

Discrimination has direct consequences on those people and groups being discriminated against, but it has also indirect and deep consequences on society as a whole. A society where discrimination is allowed or tolerated is a society where people are deprived from freely exercising their full potential for themselves and for society.

Xenophobia

The Oxford English Dictionary defines xenophobia as "a morbid fear of foreigners or foreign countries". In other words, it means an irrational aversion to strangers or foreigners; it is irrational because it is not necessarily based on any direct concrete experiences of threat posed by foreigners. Xenophobia is a prejudice related to the false notion that people from other countries, groups, cultures, or speaking other languages are a threat.

Xenophobia is closely related to racism: the more "different" the other is perceived, the stronger the fears and negative feelings tend to be. Xenophobia is one of the most common forms of and grounds for discrimination and it is for this that it is a challenge to human rights. Slavery, particularly the Transatlantic slave trade was the worst manifestation of racism, xenophobia, and intolerance throughout human history. It is a stain on the human race. More recently racism, xenophobia, and intolerance have manifested themselves via colonialism.

Racism

Some prejudices may transform into ideologies and feed hatred. One such ideology is racism. Racism involves discriminatory or abusive behaviour towards people because of their imagined "inferiority". There has been widespread belief that there are human races within the human species, distinguishable on the basis of physical differences. Scientific research shows, however, that "human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups" and that race is an imagined entity or social construct. All humans belong to the same species and, therefore, it makes no sense to talk of "races".

The impact of racist ideologies has been devastating to humanity; it has justified slavery, colonialism, apartheid, forced sterilizations and annihilations of peoples. It has been the basis of the Nazi ideologies and of the programs to exterminate Jews and other "inferior peoples".

Unfortunately, racism continues to be present in contemporary European societies and politics. Although race is no longer accepted as a biological category and only few people believe now in "superior races" with an inherent right to exercise power over those considered "inferior", the impact of racism lingers on and takes on different forms, such as cultural racism or

3 “Discrimination and Intolerance”
ethnocentrism, the belief that some cultures, usually their own, are superior or that other cultures, traditions, customs and histories are incompatible with theirs.

**UN Action**

During the last fifty years since the adoption in 1948 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), the international community has made some important advances in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. While the UDHR does not address racism or xenophobia by name, they are explicitly implied and the elimination of any form of overt and practiced discrimination and racism is the tacit goal of the UDHR. In article 1 of the UDHR states that

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.\(^4\)

Article 7 of the UDHR addresses discrimination specifically: “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.”\(^5\)

National and international laws have been enacted and numerous international human rights instruments, particularly a treaty to ban racial discrimination, have been adopted. Progress has been made—witness the defeat of apartheid in South Africa. Yet, the dream of a world free of racial hatred and bias remains only partially fulfilled, the reality of a world free of racial and bias is even less so realized.

At its twentieth session, in 1965, the General Assembly adopted the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and requested the Secretary-General to submit to it reports concerning the state of ratifications of the Convention, which would be considered by the Assembly at its future sessions (resolution 2106 A (XX)). The Convention entered into force on 4 January 1969. At its fifty-third session,179 the General Assembly urged those States that had not yet become parties to the Convention to ratify it or accede thereto, and decided to consider at its fifty-fifth session the report of the Secretary-General concerning the status of the Convention (resolution 53/131, sect. III). As at 1 May 2000, 156 States had ratified or acceded to the Convention.\(^6\)

The most controversial resolution on racism came in 1975, when the General Assembly passed *United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379*, by a vote of 72 to 35, with 32 abstentions. This resolutions—with support from the Member States of the Arab League and some Member States of the Non-Aligned Movements (NAM), famously stated that, "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination". Since Zionism is the official doctrine justifying the return of Jews to Israel, the resolution was an explicit attack on the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state. Thirty-three years later, the resolution was officially repealed by the General Assembly.\(^7\)

In 1997, the General Assembly decided, in resolution 52/111, to hold the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The World

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\(^4\) Universal Declaration of Human Rights

\(^5\) Ibid.

Conference which will be held in Durban, South Africa from 31 August to 7 September 2001, will be a landmark in the struggle to eradicate all forms of racism "requiring a strong follow-up mechanism to examine whether Governments have delivered on their promises made," according to the High Commissioner. She promised "to make it a conference of actions not just words." The World Conference is a unique opportunity to create a new world vision for the fight against racism in the twenty-first century.\(^{8}\)

UN Resolutions, 66th UN General Assembly, 19 December 2011, 89th Meeting 2011:

The Assembly also adopted a new text on combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, and incitement to violence against persons, based on religion or belief, which was tabled by the United Arab Emirates, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). By that text, it strongly deplored all acts of violence against persons on the basis of their religion or belief, as well as all attacks on and in religious places, sites and shrines in violation of international law.\(^{9}\)

The 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was a historic opportunity to acknowledge the ongoing challenges faced by people of African descent as a result of the legacies of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism.

Despite efforts to mobilize political will at the national, regional and international levels, 13 years after the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, Related Intolerance, discrimination faced by people of African Descent continue to manifest in situations of insufficient access to quality education, employment, and security as well as vulnerability to violence based on colour, nationality or ethnicity. These challenges are also caused by social and economic inequalities and lack of national legislation and specific public policies on combating these scourges.\(^{10}\)

Map of the most racist countries in Europe\(^{11}\)

As technology brings the peoples of the world closer together and political barriers tumble, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance continue to ravage our societies. Horrors such as "ethnic cleansing" have emerged in recent years, while ideas of racial superiority have spread to new media like the Internet. Even globalization carries risks that can lead to exclusion and increased inequality, very often along racial and ethnic lines.\(^{12}\)

As racial discrimination and ethnic violence grow in complexity, they become more of a challenge for the international community. As a result, new tools to deal with racism are called for. "This World Conference has the potential to be among the most significant gatherings at the start of this century," the Secretary-General of the Conference and High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, stated. "It can be more: it can shape and embody the spirit of the new century, based on the shared conviction that we are all members of one human family."\(^{13}\)

Country and Bloc Positions

**China:** Racism is reported to be rampant in China. Racism is not just a Western problem, it is a problem in China too. In many ways, China

\(^{10}\) Statement on behalf of the group of 77 and China by H.E. Amb. Sacha Llorenty.
\(^{11}\) [http://metro.co.uk/2017/05/03/this-map-shows-the-most-racist-countries-in-europe-and-how-britain-ranks-6612608/](http://metro.co.uk/2017/05/03/this-map-shows-the-most-racist-countries-in-europe-and-how-britain-ranks-6612608/)
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
can be viewed as racist. From ancient times, racism has been part of the construction of the Chinese Han population. Perceptions about their standing in the international realm has provided their course of development and fueled their ideologies that embed racial context. The concept of unity provided a flow throughout the essay as the concept itself stood behind all justifications of racial processes that led to the outcome of one Han Chinese race. The development of the Han race was centered on the Chinese perception that they are the most advanced and superior race in the world and any other culture that came to China had to be either eliminated or adapted into Chinese culture in order to stimulate civilization.  

**European Union (EU):** The 28 Member States of EU are united in opposition to all forms of racism and intolerance. The EU leads or supports most efforts to eliminate discrimination. The EU is especially supportive of measures to create opportunities for repressed ethnic groups and women. Many EU states have a colonial past, and are especially interested in affairs within their former colonies. The EU stresses restrictions of the ability of states to use their government institutions in ways that hurt particular groups, and insists that governments treat all their citizens equally.

The EU also supports measures to require higher levels of participation by repressed groups in government, business and education, such as requiring that half the members of all private corporate board or members or parliament be women, and that members of under-performing minorities be assured access to education and employment.

**Non-Aligned Movement (NAM):** for the 120 Member States of the largest UN voting bloc, racism and intolerance are very sensitive issues. They lead UN efforts to combat all forms of racism and discrimination, especially discrimination against their people at the hands of their form imperialist and colonial rulers. For the UN Member States of the NAM, efforts to combat racism are viewed above all as part of the anti-colonial struggle. They expect resolutions to place the greatest responsibilities on former colonial and imperialist states. And they expect the financial cost of efforts to redress the painful legacies of the past to borne by them also.

The Member States of NAM are less enthusiastic about measures under the topic of racism or intolerance that focus on their domestic affairs. They generally regard their domestic affairs as sovereign from international interference.

**United States:** There is a certain expectation, a certain image that comes to mind of the country that receives a rebuke from the United Nations on human rights. One expects that country to be in the south or the east, with a military dictatorship perhaps – a country that has a large oppressed religious or ethnic minority, or has a poor record of treating women as second-class citizens. Earlier this week, the US joined those countries; that publicly shamed stable of those that have incurred the wrath of the global human rights ombudsman. Inevitably, it was due to race.

A UN committee charged with tackling racism has issued an “early warning” over conditions in the US and urged the Trump administration to “unequivocally and unconditionally” reject discrimination. The warning specifically refers to events in Charlottesville, Virginia, where the civil rights activist Heather Heyer was killed when a car crashed into a group of people protesting against a white nationalist rally. Such statements are usually issued by the UN committee on the elimination of racial discrimination (Cerd) over fears of ethnic or religious conflict. In the past decade, the committee has only issued six warnings. Those

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admonishments went to Burundi, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Kyrgyzstan and Nigeria.  

One could argue that racism is on the rise in the United States. Following a series of events in the United States, a United Nations official visited several racial flashpoints in Louisiana, Missouri, and Maryland. The official observed the following: “There are serious tensions between police and communities.” A Kenyan human rights lawyer, Maini Kiai is the U.N.’s special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. Partly, Kai added, it’s about how police operate. One of the most interesting events I attended was in Philadelphia.

There was a civil rights activist at a forum; he was white and a lawyer. He said, “I drive badly. I don't indicate when I’m turning; I speed. But in 40 years I have never been stopped.” Then a black community member talked about how he always gets stopped. That’s one problem with how police are policing. It's what is getting people angry.”

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
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Bibliography


