

**SIERRA LEONE**

**Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

**THEMATIC DISCUSSION**

**Racial Discrimination in today's World**

**Introductory Remarks**

**Ambassador Yvette Stevens**

**Chairperson Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Follow-Up of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Madame Chairperson,

Distinguished Participants,

It is pleasure for me to make some introductory remarks at the thematic discussions on this important topic.

Manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance have been increasing all over the world. The question is asked, are racism, racial discrimination xenophobia and related intolerance increasing, or is it that such feelings have been dormant and only being rekindled because current conditions are favorable? Is the rise of extremist political parties, movements and groups that seek to normalize racism and discrimination to blame? Are Member States giving these phenomena the attention they deserve through, *inter alia*, the development of targeted policies and measures to counter these parties, movements and groups. These are questions that we should be asking ourselves.

Even though racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance have been identified as root causes of violent extremism, terrorism, conflicts and war, the efforts at addressing them have not been concerted, even as the international community is speaking about prevention.

Structural racism and discrimination occurs at all stages and levels of the administration of justice, including in legislation, law enforcement, courts and tribunals, and in detention facilities. It leaves some groups vulnerable to social and racial profiling, consequently resulting in their over-representation in the criminal justice system.

The worst manifestations of racism exists today in the form of ethnic cleansing. Even as we are speaking, there are on-going cases of ethnic cleansing. This is a crime against humanity and the international justice system should ensure that atrocities committed are brought before the law and perpetrators brought to justice. There should be no impunity.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda promises that “no one should be left behind”, and yet victims of racism are already behind and will get further behind, unless racism in all its forms is tackled. How should we address racism in the various countries action plans for the implementation of the Agenda?

There exists a high prevalence of racist and xenophobic hate speech in all regions of the world and these represent a significant contemporary challenge for human rights. The use of new information technologies, such as the Internet, for purposes contrary to respect for human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, respect for others and tolerance, including to propagate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. Children and youth, in particular, having access to such material are negatively influenced by it.

Hate speech manifests itself under different forms. Due to the compound nature of hate speech and hate crime, there continues to be a lack of statistical data, as well as under-reporting, on the numbers of victims of hate speech or on the numbers of people provoking hate speech. victims of hate speech and hate crime are not always fully aware of how to assert their rights in the administrative, civil or criminal procedures, and that a lack of information on their rights prevents victims from reporting on hate speech offences;

The victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance can suffer multiple, aggravated or intersecting forms of discrimination based on other related grounds, such as age, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Many contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are related to the legacy of slavery and colonialism, and the effects and persistence of these structures and practices continue to be among the factors contributing to lasting social, economic and political inequalities in many parts of the world today. And yet, the some Member States are reluctant to address discrimination against People of African Descent and have refused to launch the Programme of Activities of the Decade for People of African Descent. Some high level personalities are even openly advocating that the trans-Atlantic slave trade is a thing of the past that should be forgotten. The recent events in Libya, show that blacks are still under threat and the atrocities committed to the slave trade, as all other atrocities committed in the name of racism should be kept alive, “lest we forget.”

The United Nations have in place a number of instruments that provide the blueprint for action to address racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance: International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference and the Political Declaration from the tenth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. And yet these are not being embraced by all States. Even the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination has not been ratified/acceded to by all UN Member States.

Member States should fully and effectively implement their obligations arising under international law, particularly the non-discrimination clauses in the Charter of the United Nations; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Those States that have not yet done so are urged to consider ratifying the Covenants and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.