## **Minutes**

## **Senior-Level Meeting: UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities**

## **Meeting, 4 November 2020, 9:00-10:00 AM (New York Time) – 15:00-16:00 (Geneva time)**

The UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (“Network”) convened its first meeting at ASG-level (or similar level of seniority) on 4 November 2020, with the objectives of hearing the views of senior UN officials as to the future action of the Network, as well as its relationship with other relevant parts of the UN System. The meeting was hosted by OHCHR and convened by Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, who also moderated the meeting. The final agenda of the meeting is Annexed below, as is the list of senior participants. The meeting was done in interactive discussion format.

**Summary of Points**

1. The senior level strongly endorsed the continued relevance of the Network, in particular in light of the various remarkable circumstances of 2020. Agencies commit to advancing the work of the Network, *inter alia* responding to the various calls by the Secretary General, including the Call to Action on Human Rights, and the letter to staff of June 2020, as well as in light of upcoming key anniversaries and processes 2021+, notably but not necessarily limited to mid-term review of the Decade of people of African Descent, 20th anniversary of the World Conference Against Racism, and the 30th anniversary of the 1992 UN Minorities Declaration.
2. Participants emphasized both the troubling developments of 2020 – including both global Black Lives Matter engagements, as well as the very serious impacts of COVID-19 seen in minority communities – and they emphasized that these create opportunities for action, as well as strong expectations on the part of the public-at-large for heightened, meaningful and effective UN engagement. There is a “strong wish from the social field” that the UN strengthen its engagement in these areas.
3. Participants recalled extensive histories of personal involvement in the common purpose of fighting against racial discrimination and strengthening the participation and protection of minorities. They urged common action to make the voiceless be better heard. They recalled that the current discussion is deeply relevant for ensuring the SDG promise to leave no one behind, and for the UN’s work in those area, as well as ongoing discussions on strengthening human rights based approaches (HRBA). Participants urged continuing efforts to work to integrating human rights into programming and to examine how to advance this work in our lives, in our work, and in our inter-agency engagement. They highlighted the key role of education and knowledge sharing, as well as documentation and dissemination of good practices. Participants noted the strong relevance of all of the agencies and entities for the Network’s mandate, as well as the strong value of inter-agency and inter-entity cooperation in this regard. Multiple participants noted new or reinvigorated attention to internal diversity going on within their agency or entity, and deemed that our efficacy and advances in these areas will depend inter alia on positive change internally, and on inter-linkages between internal and external action.
4. Participants suggested the importance of the Network inter alia in terms of mapping good practices in these area, including in the COVID-19 context, and sharing good practices. They offered views of the Network as supporting learning from good practices, providing effective tools and interventions. They noted institutional and legal gaps and weaknesses and called on network members to examine how to resolve these.
5. Participants stressed the need to address structural discrimination internally and externally, as well as linkages between these, and called on the Network to work on inter alia on gender, age and disability, as well as other intersectionality grounds as relevant.
6. With particular reference to advancing the UN’s own diversity at all levels and to talent retention including among national and international staff, participants noted data gaps and called for discussion as to how to overcome these.
7. The following recommendations presented to the meeting were fully endorsed, with the caveats and additions and amendments noted at points (4) and (6) below:

Recommendation 1: The Network to propose that an EC/DC discussion be considered to promote enhanced and coherent UN system wide efforts to combatting racial discrimination and to strengthening the protection and participation of minorities, noting several opportunities in 2021 (such as the 20th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action and the mid-year review of the Decade of People of African Descent), as well as the imminent 30th anniversary of the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that The UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities considers establishing a link to the UNSDG. The Network would report to the UNSDG on a biannual basis via the most appropriate mechanism established for this purpose, beginning with a report to be presented by 30 June 2021, and would be available on a standing basis for expertise in its relevant domains. This recommendation would not preclude the Network from working also in other areas, most notably as concerns pillars of the Secretary-General’s Call to Action dedicated to combatting gender discrimination; protection; and human rights defenders/civic space, as well as in other areas as relevant.

Recommendation 3: Beginning in 2021, the Network will add a rotating co-chair, to supplement OHCHR permanent chairing of the Network. The meeting left open the possibility of further discussion at a future date of a permanent rotating chair arrangement.

Recommendation 4: The UN Network will strengthen attention to the following areas in 2021 and beyond:

* + - 1. Providing practical guidance to UN Country Teams and other field-based entities on measures to combat racial discrimination and strengthen protection of minorities, including gender dimensions and intersectional aspects, in particular by documenting and highlighting practical examples, and with a view *inter alia* to complementing the forthcoming UNSDG operational Guide on LNOB. This material should particularly inform – and be attentive to -- COVID-19 response, as well as to the development of UN country frameworks and programming.
      2. Advancing attention to and action on combatting racial discrimination and strengthening protection of minorities in security, peacekeeping and the protection of civilians in conflict-affected settings, with Security Council resolution 2475 (2019) and affiliated work as a possible model in this regard.
      3. Deepening substantive understanding and engagement of law, policy, norms, facts and good practices in the areas of expertise of the UN Network as a whole, and its participating agencies and entities in particular. In 2021, this shall include attention to tackling racial discrimination and strengthening protection of minorities in areas including, but not necessarily limited to criminal justice and law enforcement, taking note in particular of the views and concerns expressed during the Human Rights Council’s June 2020 urgent debate, as well as advancing more broadly the minority protection agenda as per the SG’s February 2020 call to action on human rights.

1. As concerns the EC/DC meeting request proposed in recommendation 1, this should be ideally around one or more concrete asks and request for guidance. The Network should identify in further details one or more substantive items for possible presentation at EC/DC and request for views and guidance.
2. In addition to matters set out in the recommendations, the senior officials:
   * + 1. Urged that linkages be drawn between attention to racism, discrimination and diversity matters internally (in many cases the subject of ongoing scrutiny and processes in-agency now), and the external policy work. In line with its original 2012 mandate, the Network focusses on both the external policy field and processes to advance the diversity of the UN at all levels, and to tackle internal racism, discrimination and related intolerance, as well as interlinkages between internal and external.
   1. Requested linkages to other diversity vectors, including age, gender and disability.
   2. Added to proposed policy areas for attention:
      * In addition to SDG-relevant focus, Network matters should be reflected in and aligned with the Agenda for Protection; Network is requested and authorized to work also on peace, security, prevention and protection matters, with the Peacebuilding Fund a possible tool in this regard.
      * There should be systematic attention to and action on racial discrimination and minority protection and participation matters in RMRs (in addition to CCA, CF and COVID-19 response work ongoing);
      * United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (Kyoto 2021), particularly relevant as concerns the issues of: (1) excessive use of incarceration in a criminal justice context; and (2) structural discrimination in criminal justice.
3. The Network should also align with other relevant processes, including all relevant areas of follow-up of the Secretary General’s Call to Action.

**Action Points**

* + - 1. The Network Chair will circulate the final minutes of the 4 November meeting, together with the endorsed recommendations, for making public on Network website.
      2. The Network meets at Technical Level on 7 December, at 15:00, *inter alia* to finalize a Work Programme 2021+, which would *inter alia* build on discussions in this forum.
      3. Noting the timeframes included here, Network Members are urged to pursue internal, bilateral and multilateral discussions at earliest with a view to inclusion in the Network 2021+ Work Plan. It is recalled that a 15 November 2020 deadline has been set at the Technical Level meeting for inputs into the draft 2021+ Work Plan. This is herewith extended to c.o.b. 25 November 2020, to allow time for further consultations internally, bilaterally and multi-laterally in this regard. **Please kindly use the attached draft framework included here as Annex 3, rather than the one circulated previously.**
      4. The Network should complete its outstanding work for 2020, including adoption of the 2021+ Work Plan and the draft checklist for UNCTs, by not later than year close.
      5. In the run-up to and at the 7 December meeting, Agencies and Entities are requested to present ideas for more concrete asks and request for EC/DC guidance.
      6. In the run-up to and at the 7 December meeting, Agencies and Entities are requested to present ideas for moving forward on Recommendation 2, including roles and responsibilities in this regard.
      7. Expressions of interest in 2021 co-chair role are welcome, ideally by c.o.b. 25 November 2020, to Claude Cahn (ccahn@ohchr.org).
      8. The draft Agenda for the 7 December Technical address the points above, in addition to holding a thematic discussion on follow-up to Human Rights Council resolution 43/1. If necessary, the December meeting will be an extended meeting. Provisionally, the 7 December meeting is 15:00-18:00 Geneva time, with the first hour dedicated to the thematic discussion.

**Annex 1: Agenda (as adopted): UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities** **Meeting (Senior Level Format), 4 November 2020, 9:00-10:00 AM (New York Time) – 15:00-16:00 (Geneva time)**

1. Introduction (5’)

1. Senior Level Discussion: Addressing Racial Discrimination and Strengthening Protection of Minorities, including in COVID-19 response: How to Embed Combatting Racial Discrimination and Strengthening Protection of Minorities More Deeply in the Work of the United Nations? (30’)
2. Discussion and Adoption of Recommendations (20’)
3. A.O.B., Conclusions and Next Steps (5’)

**Annex 2: Participants**

Senior and delegated officials participating were:

OHCHR Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, UN Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights

Ms. Mona Rishmawi, Chief, Rule of Law, Equality and Non-Discrimination Branch

UNFPA:          Ms. Diene Keita, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme)

WHO:             Dr. Princess Nothemba (Nono) Simelela, Assistant Director-General for Family, Women, Children and Adolescents

UNESCO:       Ms. Gabriela Ramos, Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences

DPPA:             Ms. Teresa Whitfield, Director of the Policy and Mediation Division

UNHCR:         Ms. Ruven Menikdiwela, Director, UNHCR Office in New York

UN Women:    Dr. Sabine Freizer, Director of the Leadership and Governance Section

PBSO:             Ms. Barrie Freeman, Director and Deputy Head of PBSO

UNICEF:        Mr. Sanjay Wijesekera, Director, UNICEF Programme Division

UNODC:        Ms. Miwa Kato, Director of the Division for Operations

IFAD:             Mr. Mattia Prayer Galletti, Lead Technical Specialist – Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Issues, Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division

OSAPG:          Mr. Castro Wesamba, Chief of Office

In addition, 22 technical staff – regular agency and entity delegates to the Network -- took part in the meeting, including from other agencies and entities including UNDP and DCO.

**Annex 3: Draft Network Work Plan 2021+**