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Agenda item 70

**Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia
and related intolerance****Economic and Social Council
2021 session**

23 July 2020–22 July 2021

Agenda item 19 (f)

**Social and human rights questions:
human rights****Letter dated 4 February 2021 from the Permanent Representative
of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General**

Amidst the devastating impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the year 2020 also saw an unprecedented global outcry and demand for racial equality and social justice, in particular following the regrettable death of George Floyd.

It is without doubt that, in the 75 years since its founding, the United Nations has been at the forefront in championing the elimination of all forms of injustice and discrimination and should continue the important work to achieve human rights for all.

With a view to contributing to addressing the urgent need to engage in open and honest conversations at the United Nations on racism and racial discrimination, as well as other forms of intolerance, I have the honour, in my capacity as Chair of the African Group for the month of February, to transmit the attached position declaration statement for your kind attention (see annex).

The African Group, joined by the co-sponsoring Member States indicated in the annex, hopes that the statement will assist in your ongoing commitment to addressing this important matter within institutions associated with the United Nations itself.

The African Group takes this opportunity to request the circulation of the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 70, and of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 19 (f).

We would like to seize this opportunity to commend your attention to this matter and would appreciate that the requested follow-up actions be undertaken in collaboration with the President of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Kacou Houadja Léon Adom

Ambassador

Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire

Chair of the African Group

* Reissued for technical reasons on 23 September 2021.



Annex to the letter dated 4 February 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Position declaration statement by the African Group

Standing together to combat racism and racial discrimination, and all other forms of intolerance, at the United Nations

We, Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of the States members of the African Group at United Nations Headquarters in New York, in collaboration with the undersigned cross-regional co-sponsoring States Members of the United Nations,

Recalling the ideals, purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in particular Article 1 (3) regarding the Organization's declared commitment to promote and encourage "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion",

Recalling also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all related international conventions, agreements, treaties and mechanisms established by the General Assembly of the United Nations and other relevant intergovernmental bodies to facilitate and monitor implementation of the Declaration,

Recalling further, among other continental instruments, the African Union African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa,

Recalling several historic conferences and other high-level events convened under the auspices of the United Nations, including, among others, the third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, and welcoming the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which remains a solid basis and the only instructive outcome of the World Conference,

Recognizing the significant contribution that the United Nations has made during its 75 years of existence, and continues to make, in setting global norms to achieve universal human rights and eradicate racism and racial discrimination, as well as all other forms of intolerance;

Recalling the numerous resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, including resolution 1904 (XVIII) of November 1963 on the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, and other subsequent actions culminating into a series of observances and designation of specific days, weeks, years and decades to combat racism and racial discrimination as well as other forms of intolerance, including the declaration of 25 March annually as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and most recently the dedication of 2015–2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent,

Recalling also other relevant General Assembly resolutions under the agenda item on human resources management, in particular the inspection request once made in General Assembly resolution 55/258 of June 2001 and the subsequent related report issued by the Office of Internal Oversight Services dated July 2002 (A/56/956),

Cognizant of the rights and obligations of all international civil servants, as provided for in the Standards of conduct for the international civil service, especially the expectancy for all international civil servants to "respect the dignity, worth and equality of all people without any distinction whatsoever", as well as the Staff

Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, which require, among other things, all staff members to exhibit respect across cultures and “not discriminate against any individual or group of individuals”,

Noting the already existing significant resources in the United Nations system organizations devoted to advocacy, outreach and awareness-raising initiatives and programmes aimed at promoting dignity and respect among all international civil servants,

Noting also that the Secretary-General has promulgated relevant internal bulletins and administrative instructions and other guidance materials aimed at sensitizing all United Nations staff and managers alike on the importance of combating discrimination, harassment (including sexual harassment) and abuse of authority,

Taking into account the frequent complaints lodged directly to us by a number of United Nations staff, especially by nationals of States members of the African Group and other people of African descent, alleging the existence of widespread discrimination and other forms of intolerance in some entities in the United Nations system organizations which is also reportedly having a detrimental effect on staff recruitment, selection, performance appraisal, promotion and overall career progression,

Having come across circulating allegations of institutionalized racism and racial discrimination in the United Nations system organizations, in particular the recently widely disseminated United Nations People of African Descent perception survey and its alarming findings,

Guided by the long-standing principled position of the African Union on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination as expressed, among others, in the resolution adopted by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in May 1963, condemning racial discrimination in all its forms and the subsequent resolution adopted by the Organization of African Unity at the first ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in Cairo, Egypt, in July 1964, which reaffirmed the Organization’s (now the African Union’s) belief that the existence of discriminatory practices is a matter of deep concern to its member States,

Mindful of the above background,

1. *Welcome* the recent commitment and leadership shown by the Secretary-General to address racism and racial discrimination as well as all other forms of intolerance within the United Nations, and also note his pledge during the Staff Union town hall held in June 2020 indicating that he is willing to engage in an honest and open conversation on racism;

2. *Acknowledge* indication that there is currently ongoing internal work initiated by the Secretary-General involving the United Nations Office of the Ombudsman and the United Nations Ethics Office and other entities to ascertain the extent of and design adequate mechanisms to effectively address all concerns on racism and racial discrimination as well as other forms of intolerance in the United Nations system organizations, and look forward to obtaining more information in this regard;

3. *Commend* the role played by all offices in the United Nations system organizations that have a mandate to address racism, racial discrimination and all other forms of intolerance in the United Nations work environment, and the contribution in this regard by independent experts, research centres and institutions that are actively involved in this important and sensitive matter;

4. *Also commend* the important contribution by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in maintaining reliable references on the work of the Organization and its relevant bodies on the issue of racism, racial discrimination and all other forms of intolerance, including a trail of all General Assembly resolutions, reports, declarations and treaties as well as information on other resources such as books, journals and articles by independent authors on this important and sensitive issue;

5. *Strongly encourage* the Secretary-General, as the Chief Executive Officer of the Organization, and also in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, to build upon progress achieved so far and intensify his efforts to rigorously and decisively implement all necessary measures to detect, deter and eliminate any room for racism and racial discrimination, as well as any other forms of intolerance, across the United Nations system organizations;

6. *Note with concern* the prevalent reports frequently brought to our attention on possible ongoing discrimination and, if this is so established, categorically reject any racism and racial discrimination, as well as other forms of intolerance in the United Nations system organizations, as it runs contrary to the above-indicated ideals, principles and purposes including those enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

7. *Expect* that the Secretary-General and all heads of organizations in the United Nations system will ensure that in the context of the zero-tolerance policy all reports on allegations of racism and racial discrimination, as well as all other forms of intolerance, are treated seriously and swiftly investigated in a fair and transparent manner, and where such reports are substantiated that stringent accountability and other appropriate measures are implemented without exception, with full assurance for due process and guarantees on whistle-blower protection for retaliation against United Nations staff members who report inappropriate conduct;

8. *Call upon* the successive Presidents of the General Assembly, starting with the ongoing seventy-fifth session, and the President of the Economic and Social Council, also starting with the ongoing session, as part of the United Nations overall work in promoting and defending human rights, to work closely with the Secretary-General to ensure that adequate attention is paid by all principal organs and their subsidiary bodies to this sensitive issue which has also recently caused a global outcry for racial equality and social justice, and to jointly create regular informal platforms for open and honest dialogue among the States Members of the United Nations;

9. *Resolve* to avail ourselves of all future opportunities to engage further on this important issue in the context of relevant agenda items before the intergovernmental bodies, with a view to ensuring that the Member States, the President of the General Assembly, the President of Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General and all heads of organizations in the United Nations system stand firmly together to decisively act against racism and racial discrimination, as well as all other forms of intolerance, in order for the United Nations to lead by good example as a credible guarantor and defender of human rights, harmony and tolerance among nations globally and in the United Nations work environment;

10. *Firmly believe* that the United Nations, and all institutions associated with it, must practice what the Organization preaches, and not be seen to engage in or condone any discriminatory conduct among its multinational and diverse international civil service, as this could potentially degrade the Organization's own moral standing in the eyes of those it serves around the world;

11. *Request* that the present statement be widely disseminated among the members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination so that, as the leaders, they are aware of where the African Group in New York, (in

collaboration with the undersigned Member States) unanimously stands on the need to effectively combat racism and racial discrimination, as well as other forms of intolerance, and urge the members of the Board to set the right leadership tone at the top by joining the Secretary-General in engaging in open conversations on combating any discriminatory practices in the United Nations system organizations;

12. *Also request* the President of the Economic and Social Council, in line with the commitment already expressed on this important issue, to ensure that the Council and its relevant subsidiary bodies are made aware of the present statement with a view to engaging in open conversations on the imperative to combat any discriminatory practices in the United Nations system organizations;

13. *Further request* that the present statement be issued as a document of both the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and be brought to the attention of all members of these principal organs and their subsidiary bodies, including the Third Committee and the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, to become part of ongoing references under the relevant agenda items.

*The present statement is co-sponsored by the following Permanent Missions to the United Nations:

- Argentina
- Azerbaijan
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Canada
- Colombia
- Cuba
- El Salvador
- Fiji
- Grenada
- India
- Lebanon
- Maldives
- Nicaragua
- Oman
- Pakistan
- Panama
- Paraguay
- Philippines
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Singapore
- Suriname

- Turkey
- Venezuela
- Yemen

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