



General Assembly

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8th plenary meeting
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Official Records

President: Mr. Shahid (Maldives)

The meeting was called to order at 6.10 p.m.

High-level Meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Agenda item 72 (continued)

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

(b) Comprehensive implementation of and follow- up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

The President: As previously announced, the Assembly will first hear the presentations of the summaries of the discussions by the Chairs of the two round tables of the high-level meeting.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Naledi Pandor, Minister for International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa and Chair of round table 1, to present the summary of round table 1.

Mrs. Pandor (South Africa): I express my most heartfelt gratitude for this opportunity. I will provide a brief summary of round table 1, whose theme was “Reparations, racial justice and equality for people of African descent — where do we stand 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action?”

I had the privilege to chair round table 1, where speakers were invited to discuss the progress made,

challenges encountered and lessons learned in efforts to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. I, of course, had the opportunity to remove myself temporarily from the Chair to deliver the statement of my Government and then invited Member States to follow up by sharing their views on the state of play in the fight against racism, in particular through the lens of the situation of people of African descent as the overarching theme conveyed by the General Assembly. I conform to the task entrusted to me and here present to the Member States the summary of the round table.

The round table convened with interventions by various Heads of State — the Heads of State of Cuba, Malawi, the Seychelles, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, the Comoros, Guyana, Zimbabwe and Maldives. High dignitaries included Heads and deputy Heads of Government; ministers also took the floor, including ministers from Costa Rica, Barbados, Fiji, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, China, Namibia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Algeria, Peru, Côte d’Ivoire, South Africa, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mauritius, Bangladesh, Mozambique, Tunisia, Lesotho and Senegal, as well as the State of Palestine.

Participants from the stakeholders’ groups that are enumerated in resolution 75/320, paragraph 7(c), also took the floor. The following representatives of entities and experts of the United Nations system took part: the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, the Chairperson of the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Implementation of the Durban

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Declaration and Programme of Action, and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Finally, the executive director of the Congressional Black Caucus Political Education and Leadership Institute delivered her remarks.

All speakers reaffirmed their Governments' and institutions' commitment to eliminating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The majority of speakers stressed that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action is a landmark instrument that creates an authoritative and comprehensive framework to combat racism and other forms of racial discrimination and that is still relevant 20 years after its adoption.

The thematic focus of the high-level meeting and round tables was welcomed by many speakers, and the role of the co-facilitators appointed to lead the negotiations on the political declaration on the twentieth anniversary, the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations of Portugal and South Africa, were acknowledged in positive terms by a number of speakers. Several speakers reiterated their support for the agreed political declaration. Other speakers considered unfortunate the fact that some Member States chose not to take part in the commemoration, while one speaker wished that a more forceful rejection of anti-Semitism could have been agreed upon in the declaration.

Many speakers made reference to several milestones reflecting the progress made through dialogue and agreements reached by the United Nations, such as the establishment of the International Year for People of African Descent, the establishment of the International Decade for People of African Descent, and the most recent establishment of the International Day for People of African Descent.

Additionally, other speakers highlighted the importance of having established the Working Group of Experts of People of African Descent as a follow-up mechanism to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the importance of supporting it through voluntary funds, and some highlighted the most recent establishment of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent. One of the speakers also called for the Human Rights Council to play a role in monitoring progress on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

A number of speakers regretted the perpetuation of racism and discrimination two decades after the adoption of the Durban declaration and programme of action. They noted that the situation was indissolubly linked to and derived from the legacy of historical injustices, including colonialism, slavery and the slave trade, which remained unaddressed and required reparation, while other speakers acknowledge the systemic nature of racism, noting that racism was ingrained in social and institutional structures.

Many speakers called for concerted global efforts to ensure the effecting of reparations, in line with the theme of the high-level meeting. They believed that this should happen given the past legacies of slavery, which some speakers indicated have robbed African nations and peoples of African descent of a full array of rights, and they called for a comprehensive approach in the national and international agenda starting with an acknowledgement and apologies from former colonial Powers.

Many speakers also called for an end to impunity regarding discrimination. One speaker called for the organizing of an international summit on reparations for the slave trade. Another speaker underscored the goals of international reparative justice, which would require packages of development support programmes and debt cancellation to be multilaterally discussed and called for a reparative restructuring of international institutions, which was seen as critical for giving equity and opportunity to those who were exploited as colonies at the time of the establishment of said international institutions.

One other speaker made a special call to forge a global coalition against discrimination and noted that the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent indicated excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law-enforcement officers and that that report sheds additional light on the dire reality of discrimination.

Several speakers referred to their efforts or those of their country to combat racism and related intolerance through a number of domestic norms, including at the constitutional level. They underlined the importance of having created national institutions mandated to combat racial discrimination. This included speakers who added that educational institutions such as the

Intercontinental Slavery Museum and the Gorée Memorial and Museum and the important roles that they play.

Many speakers stressed that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had exposed and exacerbated racial discrimination. They expressed deep concern about what they called vaccine nationalism, noting that such an approach was reinforcing inequalities among States. One speaker highlighted how the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action provided for a comprehensive handling of the pandemic. They called upon the international community to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines are accessible without discrimination and made available to all. Another speaker underscored the reality of racial discrimination in areas such as access to health care, which existed even before the pandemic, while another pointed out the discrimination endured by peoples in extremely vulnerable situations, such as the Rohingya and the Palestinians.

Others pointed out the challenges posed by the multi-ethnic and pluricultural makeup of their societies, while others mentioned how they found strength in their diversity. Speakers also expressed serious concern about increases in hate speech, incitement to racial hatred and disinformation, both online and offline.

One speaker warned against instances in which discrimination is used as an excuse to take up the fight against terrorism, and another speaker called for holding accountable giant multinational digital technology businesses that give unrestrained platforms to proponents of hate speech and racial propaganda.

Many speakers called for renewed efforts and measures to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. They pointed to the importance of working together and taking collective action to address ongoing challenges. Many referred to the need for political will, including at the international level, and one speaker stressed the importance of special measures, including increased representation of peoples of African descent in global leadership positions.

States were also called upon to adopt sustainable national action plans to address racism and related intolerance. Some speakers highlighted international good practice in relation to the fight against racism and discrimination. Examples included the African Union declaration of 2020-2030 as the Decade of the African Diaspora; the establishment of the Caribbean

Community (CARICOM) Reparations Commission and its 10-point plan; and the recent African Union-CARICOM summit.

Speakers also stressed that combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance was essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and keeping the promise of leaving no one behind. Remarks by participants invited under the scope of resolution 75/320, paragraph 7(c), also stated the groundbreaking importance of the declaration as a road map and as a tool for denouncing, combating and dismantling structural discrimination, noting that women and girls bear the heavy burden of sexism and racism, which is often blurred by the lack of disaggregated data, which renders women invisible. They stressed that peoples and nations continued to suffer from racism, but that hope must never be lost. They called for revitalizing the alliances that made the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action possible in order to tackle the issue of reparations as a priority and reminded us of the thematic special procedures report on the matter.

Today's discussions were insightful, constructive and forward-looking. I am hopeful that this commemoration will not remain pure rhetoric but that we will move together towards ending racism, redoubling our efforts to correct the wrongs of the past, and that we will ensure that we move together with practical actions.

As set out in the political declaration that we agreed to this morning, we shall proclaim together our strong determination to make the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance a priority for all our countries. These are the key elements that emerged from the deliberations we held in the round table, and I sincerely thank you, Mr. President, for this privilege.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Pacôme Moubelet Boubeya, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon and Chair of round table 2, to present the summary of round table 2.

Mr. Boubeya (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to present the outcome of round table 2, which I will do in English because we do not yet have the definitive French version. I shall therefore ask everyone for their indulgence as I read out the document in English.

(spoke in English)

I had the honour to chair round table 2, entitled “Reparations, racial justice and equality for people of African descent — how to address the past to move forward?”

In this round table, speakers were invited to discuss how addressing past racial discrimination and considering reparations can contribute to moving the fight against racism forward. They were also invited to speak about the relevance and pertinence of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in addressing new and emerging trends in the fight against discrimination.

I should like to thank Member States, observers, experts of the United Nations system and representatives of academia and non-governmental organizations for their active engagement and contributions during today’s discussion.

I am pleased to present to Member States and other participants the summary of round table 2. All speakers representing the States Members of the United Nations reaffirmed the commitment of their Governments to preventing, combating and eradicating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Many speakers underscored the full relevance and pertinence of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, together with the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, to tackle racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance 20 years after its adoption.

Several speakers noted that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action remains the most comprehensive and action-oriented framework to combat those scourges. Many speakers explicitly reiterated the commitment of their Governments to the full and effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and its follow-up process.

Several speakers welcomed the adoption by this high-level meeting of the political declaration. One speaker regretted the absence of references to the issue of reparations in the adopted political declaration, while another speaker welcomed the explicit reference to anti-Semitism in the same document.

Some speakers regretted the decision of some States not to attend today’s meeting. The establishment of the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent was welcomed by a number of speakers as an important

step forward in providing justice and improving the livelihood of people of African descent. Several speakers acknowledged the importance of several commemorations, including the recent proclamation of the International Day for People of African Descent, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition and the fact that it is a crime against humanity, and International Holocaust Remembrance Day in order to ensure that those crimes of the past never happen again.

Several speakers also acknowledged the relevance of the International Decade for People of African Descent and the pledge of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind in order to eradicate inequalities and discrimination against people of African descent, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups. One speaker mentioned the discriminatory effects of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights by citizens in several States.

All the speakers expressed concerns about the resurgence of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in various forms. Several of them raised concern about the increase in racial hatred, hate speech, xenophobia, intolerance, supremacist ideologies and violent nationalism. Some speakers stressed the need to eradicate all forms of intolerance faced by Asians and people of Asian descent. Others drew attention to the rise in manifestations of intolerance, violence and discrimination against religious groups, including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and anti-Christian attitudes. Several speakers condemned anti-Semitic messages.

Several speakers also drew attention to the situation of migrants, who continue to be subjected to negative stereotypes, verbal and physical abuse and discriminatory citizenship laws, as well as inequalities in access to economic and health services in many countries.

One speaker pointed out the human rights violations and discrimination to which Palestinians and Rohingyas are subjected. Several speakers acknowledged systemic racism. They expressed concern that racial/ethnic minorities, especially people of African descent, continue to face institutional and structural discrimination, which manifests itself in unequal access to quality education, housing, health

care, employment and discrimination in the criminal justice system. The prevalence of racial profiling and the excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies against people of African descent were also highlighted as important concerns.

Many speakers acknowledged that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had further exposed and exacerbated racism, racial discrimination and the underlying inequalities. Some of them noted the detrimental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on impoverished societies and communities that are struggling with the legacies of slavery and colonialism.

All the speakers noted the impacts of the pandemic in increasing the stigmatization of certain groups, in particular Asians and people of Asian descent, and other vulnerable groups, such as migrants. Several speakers also raised concerns about what they called “vaccine nationalism”, which has resulted in reinforcing inequalities in access to COVID-19 vaccines among States. Some speakers stressed the need to include people of African descent, including women, in emergency and health responses, as well as in decision-making regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some speakers acknowledged that the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 had prompted the international community to look at the legacies of slavery and colonialism and to take serious action for the elimination of racism.

Several speakers recalled that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action recognized that racism was a consequence of the legacy of colonialism and the slave trade. They also recalled that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action acknowledged that slavery and the slave trade were a crime against humanity, and should always have been so. Concern was expressed that 20 years later not enough had been done to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Speakers noted that it was important to confront the past and to move forward.

Many speakers acknowledged the need to address the legacies of the slave trade, colonialism and apartheid to move the fight against racism forward. Several speakers noted that recognition of the injustices and discrimination suffered by people of African descent and reparation and redress for historical wrongful acts were required to demonstrate accountability and the commitment to fight against racial discrimination. One speaker noted that redress for slavery and colonialism

also entailed transforming the contemporary structures of racial injustice, inequality and discrimination inherent in the global financial and economic order.

One expert delivered a keynote speech in which he recalled that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action had provided a sense of hope for the reparatory justice movement. He stressed that the struggle for reparatory justice was of significance to sustaining democracy in the twenty-first century as the logical continuation of the historical process that had started two centuries ago with the abolition of slavery. He further noted that reparatory justice was contributing to the end-making of the colonial ethos, the racial structures of which it was built, the economic principles of exploiting labour within the context of slavery and for putting an end to the use of racism as an ideology of division and hatred. He said that the question was not if, but how best to do it for the mutual benefit of everyone. He emphasized the urgency of finding solutions to the questions raised in Durban 20 years ago.

Several experts noted that the movement for reparatory justice was ongoing and called for the establishment of a reparatory justice global framework. They referred to several initiatives taken at the governmental and regional levels, such as the Reparations Commission of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and its 10-point agenda and CARICOM's call to African States to join together in developing a global framework for reparatory justice. One speaker welcomed the convergence of civil society movements with Governments that has placed on the agenda the need to address the issue of reparatory justice. He also referred to numerous initiatives from private and public institutions, including universities, corporations and museums, to reflect on their participation in slavery and the slave trade and on ways to offer reparatory justice.

One expert welcomed the recent adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 47/21, entitled “Promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers through towards transformative change for racial justice and equality”. They also acknowledged the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on racial justice and equality (A/HRC/47/53) and its four-point agenda (A/HRC/47/53, annex) for providing recommendations on concrete steps to be taken for confronting the

legacies of the slave trade and colonialism, including through accountability and redress.

(spoke in French)

That is the summary of round table 2, and I had the pleasure and privilege to present it.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, who will deliver a statement on behalf of the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Ms. Brands Kehris: We have gathered today to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and to renew our commitments to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Racism and racial discrimination attack the very core of a person's dignity. History has proved time and again that, when allowed to take root, racism, discrimination and intolerance shatter the very foundations of societies and damage them for generations. The road to a world free from racism is long and arduous. It requires persistence by all stakeholders, but the resolve that we heard today affirms the urgent need to accelerate our action and deepen our determination.

Racism exists everywhere — a fact that has been recalled on many occasions by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. As a truly global concern, we need to continue discussing racism at the global level, complementing national and regional measures, as well as the numerous recommendations made by the different human rights mechanisms.

As we continue to pledge to never forget past atrocities and human rights violations rooted in racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, we should seize and build on the new momentum of global public engagement.

Today Member States reaffirmed that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference, as well as the political declaration of the tenth anniversary of its adoption, together provide a comprehensive United Nations framework and solid foundation for combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

We hope that this outcome (resolution 76/1) will boost our efforts towards the better, full and universal implementation of the Durban Declaration and

Programme of Action. To achieve that, the enhanced cooperation and participation of Governments, local authorities, victims' groups, grass-roots organizations, national human rights institutions and international and regional organizations are crucial.

Part and parcel of our renewed efforts is the need to continue our constructive dialogue on reparations. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights pointed out in her report (A/HRC/47/53) to the Human Rights Council in July this year, reparations are essential for transforming relationships of discrimination and inequity and for investing jointly in a stronger, more resilient future of dignity, equality and non-discrimination for all.

As underscored today, we need to acknowledge, and continue to analyse, the systemic nature of racism, with a closer look at how it impacts specific groups, including Africans and people of African descent, indigenous peoples, Asians and people of Asian descent. When doing that, attention to intersecting forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender and religion, is imperative.

To effectively uproot systemic racism, it is imperative to address existing power structures and institutional practices and remove discriminatory legislation, rules and practices that have exacerbated and perpetuated an inequality of opportunities and of results.

As the Secretary-General emphasized here this morning (see A/76/PV.5), racism penetrates all areas of society. Therefore, we need to address racism not only in the criminal justice system but also beyond, including in health, education, employment, housing and social security. The causes and consequences of racism in all areas are interrelated, generating significant economic, social and educational inequalities.

There is therefore a pressing need for a holistic, multifaceted and comprehensive approach to addressing and eliminating racism and all forms of racial discrimination. The coronavirus disease pandemic has made evident the urgency of living up to the commitments of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in order to deliver the promise of equal rights for all, at all times.

Building forward better, we must work towards ensuring that no one is left behind, that universal health coverage and social protection schemes are extended

to all and that all marginalized groups participate fully and have equal access to new information and communication technologies. Any impediments in that regard could increase the scope and magnitude of racial discrimination.

I also wish to underline the need to adhere to the victims-oriented approach of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and to enhance it even further by listening more carefully to victims. Only by better understanding their needs can we respond promptly and effectively so that their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

Our journey ahead is full of challenges, but also of new hopes and opportunities. As highlighted today, the international anti-racism architecture has been enhanced. We look forward to supporting the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, the new mechanism to advance racial justice in law enforcement and the implementation of the four-point agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality (A/HRC/47/53, annex), recently launched by the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In addition to those important new initiatives, we should not forget our commitments to advancing the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent and to continuing to support the work of the Durban follow-up mechanisms.

The United Nations system remains the steadfast supporter and partner of Member States in achieving our common goal of ending racism. The United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of

minorities is stepping up its actions at Headquarters and in the field. As emphasized in the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights, only by eliminating all forms of discrimination and addressing inequality in all its dimensions can we achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

We can make progress only if we stay united against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. That is our common responsibility and duty to past, present and future generations.

The President: I would like to thank delegations for their engaged discussion on the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, in particular concerning reparations, racial justice and equality for people of African descent. The views and recommendations that Member States have raised during this important meeting should serve as our guide to forge ahead in delivering on our obligations to build societies of inclusivity and equality. That is essential if we wish to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I thank all those present for their contributions.

The high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action is now concluded.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 72.

The meeting rose at 6.50 p.m.