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LEGISLATION NEEDED TO NEUTRALIZE RACIST IMPULSES, SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL AT INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

The following is the text of the statement delivered today by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali on the occasion of the observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination:

The decision to establish an International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was taken by the General Assembly in 1966, in an effort to give expression to the indignation which international public opinion had felt some years earlier over the Sharpeville tragedy in South Africa.

We have come a long way since that time, for today we see a heartening glimmer of hope in South Africa.

The elections to be held next month in South Africa will be the first elections to be held under the system of universal suffrage. The international community can therefore congratulate itself on having dismantled and brought to an end the apartheid regime which had long darkened that region of the world.

We are all aware of the difficulties of the process that is under way. The United Nations will not slacken its efforts, nor will it be sparing with its assistance to South Africa during this delicate transition period.

The Organization has sent a mission of civilian observers to South Africa. It has expanded the latter's mandate so that it may be an effective instrument of electoral assistance. Already, it has substantially increased the number of electoral observers; at the time of the elections there should be some 1,800 observers.

We all know now how fragile this electoral process is and to what extent violence and intolerance remain a constant threat. But we also know that the determination and courage of the leaders, the will of the vast majority of the South African people and the support of the international community should bring victory in the fight against discrimination and in the democratic process and the task of reconciliation.

(more)

We cannot forget that the establishment of a non-racial and pluralist democracy in South Africa will require massive international assistance in order to eliminate the substantial economic and social disparities that are the legacy of several decades of apartheid.

From this standpoint, I am grateful that the United Nations is able to make its valuable contribution to South Africa.

In this spirit, the International Donors Conference on Human Resource Development for a Post-Apartheid South Africa, to be held in Johannesburg in June, constitutes an important step in the long process of political and social normalization of the situation in the country.

On a deeper level, the developments which are occurring in this part of the world are also, on this day of celebration, a source of lessons for us.

It is because of democracy that racial discrimination is now under attack.

This should show us clearly to what degree the goal of an end to racial discrimination is inseparable from the demands of democracy.

Here again is an opportunity for us all to say that democracy is a guarantee of social peace and civil equality.

Here again is an opportunity to show how much the battle to eliminate racial discrimination has in common with the battle to promote democracy.

But it also means that our efforts must continue unflinchingly, for beyond the successes that we can observe, hotbeds of hatred and exclusivity persist throughout the world, and must be eradicated.

We must remain on the alert, for racial discrimination in various forms has spread everywhere, like gangrene. The persistence of assaults against human dignity and of racist and xenophobic acts and the rise of intolerance are among indications that we cannot relax our vigilance.

These phenomena are intolerable, and we must constantly learn to unmask them, for it is still the old demons of exclusivity and hatred which lurk behind the new forms they may take.

For the United Nations, the elimination of racial discrimination remains a long and exacting task that requires constantly renewed action.

We are all well aware of this.

The decision of the Commission on Human Rights to appoint a special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, as well as all related manifestations of intolerance, is to be welcomed in that connection.

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For its part, the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in June 1993, clearly reaffirmed the international community's concern to remain mobilized to fight racism and racial discrimination. The Vienna Declaration rightly invites "United Nations organs and agencies [to] strengthen their efforts to implement ... a programme of action related to the third decade to combat racism and racial discrimination".

The World Conference on Human Rights also rightly urged all Governments "to take immediate measures and to develop strong policies to prevent and combat all forms and manifestations of racism, xenophobia or related intolerance".

Governments must be in a position to enact appropriate legislation in order to neutralize racist impulses and temptations to discriminate.

As you see, in our fight against racial discrimination we have reached the crossroads.

On the one hand, the possibility of a democratic solution in South Africa and the prospect of national reconciliation are taking shape.

However, on the other hand, in many parts of the world the threat of intolerance exacerbated by growing micro-nationalism, which brings with it all forms of exclusivity, is looming.

May this International Day, therefore, be an occasion for us to mobilize more than ever against the stirring-up of hatred that can tear us apart.

And may this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination enable us to express, once again, our faith in the equality of men and women, and in the worth of the individual.

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