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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by Sikh Human Rights Group, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



A declaration on diversity and UN Diversity Day

With racism and marginalisation of minorities rising again, even in developed countries, the hopes and commitments made at the 2001 Durban World Conference Against Racism seem to be ebbing. The world had come together in 2001 with determination to get rid of racism, a scourge that gained strength during colonialism. Perhaps the recourse to law may not be sufficient enough measure to achieve the declarations made in 2001 Durban. There is a need to look at complimentary approaches that encourage society to change its attitudes.

Sikh Human Rights Group is proposing Declaration on Diversity, a set of positive action commitments that will enhance acceptance of diversity and that can assist people to be comfortable with diversity.

This year also marks the 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh worldview. Guru Nanak emphasised diversity as a natural phenomenon that should be celebrated. Guru Nanak promoted both acceptance of diversity and pluralism. Guru Nanak's approach was to encourage people, communities and cultures to take a broader and pluralistic perspective on diversity.

We believe that besides legal instruments, there needs to be a shift in the culture of people towards diversity in all its forms to reduce discriminations, marginalisation and racism.

A Declaration will foster better coexistence between people of all backgrounds, lifestyles and beliefs and promote beliefs to be more respectful towards people of alternative beliefs.

By making a commitment to introduce policies and programmes on greater awareness and acceptance of diversity, States will be strengthening the ambitions of the Durban Declaration as well as many other conventions fighting discrimination that have been enacted over the years.

States can benefit from best practices from other States and the UN can also hold an annual Diversity Day celebrating our vast diversity in the globe.

We believe that the immense diversity among human beings and nature needs to be protected and nurtured through a combination of approaches.

Reference is made to para 6 of the 2001 Durban Declaration of the World Conference Against Racism, 'We further affirm that all peoples and individuals constitute one human family, rich in diversity. They have contributed to the progress of civilizations and cultures that form the common heritage of humanity. Preservation and promotion of tolerance, pluralism and respect for diversity can produce more inclusive societies.'

A Declaration on Diversity will promote inclusive societies. Inclusive societies are happier, more productive and at peace. There need to be positive programmes of actions by States to reduce marginalisation, to strengthen minority communities, to change attitudes and enhance cohesion between groups and sections of communities.

Diversity also includes biodiversity in nature and other forms of life. There is now general acknowledgment that biodiversity is not only the essence of nature but necessary in maintaining eco systems.

A Declaration on Diversity can be wide enough to encourage acceptance and coexistence of civilisations, cultures, ethnicities, belief systems, lifestyles and ecosystems.

By signing up to a Declaration, States can develop their own approaches in promoting diversity within their own countries but also benefit from adopting best practices from experiences of other States.

A Declaration on Diversity is consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 16.7: 'Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels'.

We hope member States will consider this proposal and support this initiative as well as take up the proposal for a UN led annual Diversity Day in the world. It will be a remarkable affirmation of the teachings of Guru Nanak if consideration of this could begin during this 550th anniversary.