

Racism: A Problem; Role of UN Human Right to Prevent It

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Racism, in general terms, consists of conduct or words or practices which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. Its more subtle forms are as damaging as its overt form. Institutionalised racism is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amounts to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages people from ethnic minorities. Racist incidents and harassment can take place in any institution, regardless of the numbers of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds within it. A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.

What kind of incidents may be considered racist?

The following list of actions may be considered to be racist incidents-

Physical harassment: comprises the more obvious examples of violent attacks or physical intimidation of both children and adults from minority groups, as well as incidents of "minor" intimidation which may be cumulative in effect.

Verbal harassment: name-calling directed at those from minority groups and any ridicule of a person's background or culture (e.g. music, dress or diet) may be the most obvious examples. There may be other forms of verbal abuse, which are less obvious, involving teachers, pupils or other adults, such as off-

the-cuff remarks of a racist nature, which cause offence.

Non co-operation and disrespect: refusal to co-operate with or show respect to minority pupils, students, teachers, trainers, youth leaders and others by people in the school/education community may constitute a racist incident if there is evidence of racist motivation or if the "victim" perceives racism to be a motive. Disrespect can also be inadvertent, for example if a teacher or trainer shows ignorance of a pupil's cultural practices in a way that makes the victim feel harassed or uncomfortable.

Other incidents: racist jokes and use of racist vocabulary, the wearing of racist insignia, badges, T shirts, etc., racist graffiti, the distribution of racist literature or posters, the presence of racist or fascist organisations in or around the school community, or stereotyping by adults which could lead to discrimination. Many racist incidents will be of a less obvious type. Such insidious actions which occur are often the most difficult to detect and deal with. Many racist incidents involving pupils or students will not occur in the presence of teachers or adults. It is therefore important that schools develop strategies to ensure that all members of the school community are sensitive to, and take responsibility for, reporting and dealing with incidents.

Some practical points for consideration in relation to developing an anti-racist policy

In dealing with racial harassment and racist incidents, a whole school (organisation) approach to policy development and implementation is required. It is important that approaches to racist incidents fit in with general school/organisational policy and

practice. The issues should be regarded as “special but not separate”. Some practical points for consideration are:

- A clear statement of policy needs to be made showing that no racist incidents or racial harassment will be tolerated.
- In the policy, the school should make a clear statement as to the procedures that should be followed when a racist incident occurs.
- The whole school approach, including processes and agreed actions for dealing with incidents, must extend to all members of the school community: governors, staff (teaching and non-teaching), parents, pupils, students and visitors.
- There must be clear understanding that everyone in the school community has a responsibility to monitor and tackle racial harassment and racist incidents.
- There should be a consistency of approach so that everyone involved is aware of what is expected of them.
- It should be understood that a response to an incident should be made at the time the incident occurs or is reported.
- Any follow up responses to an incident should be made within an agreed time-scale.

The modern sense of human rights can be traced to Renaissance Europe and the Protestant Reformation, alongside the disappearance of the feudal authoritarianism and religious conservatism that dominated the Middle Ages. Human rights were defined as a result of European scholars attempting to form a "secularized version of Judeo-Christian ethics". Although, ideas of rights and liberty have existed in some form for much of human history, they do not resemble the modern conception of human rights. Many groups and movements have achieved profound social changes over the course of the 20th century in the name of human rights. In Europe and North America, labour unions brought about laws granting workers the right to strike, establishing

minimum work conditions and forbidding or regulating child labour. The women's rights movement succeeded in gaining for many women the right to vote. National liberation movement in many countries succeeded in driving out colonial powers. One of the most influential was Mahatma Gandhi's movement to free his native India from British rule. Movements by long-oppressed racial and religious minorities succeeded in many parts of the world, among them the African American Civil Rights Movement African American Civil Right Movement, and more recent diverse identity politics movements, on behalf of women and minorities in the United States

At the 1945 Yalta Conference, the Allied Powers agreed to create a new body to supplant the League's role; this was to be the United Nations. The United Nations has played an important role in international human-rights law since its creation. Following the World Wars, the United Nations and its members developed much of the discourse and the bodies of law that now make up international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Globalization and Racism

Racism has always been both an instrument of discrimination and a tool of exploitation. But it manifests itself as a cultural phenomenon, susceptible to cultural solutions, such as multicultural education and the promotion of ethnic identities. Tackling the problem of cultural inequality, however, does not by itself redress the problem of economic inequality. Racism is conditioned by economic imperatives, but negotiated through culture: religion, literature, art, science and the media. With expanding globalization, the demands for more skilled workers, especially in North America, Europe and elsewhere (while they cut back on education spending themselves, little by little), has led to increased efforts to attract foreign workers — but filtered, based on skill. At the same time, this increases resentment by those in those nations who are not benefitting from globalization Immigrants face numerous criticisms and challenges; It is difficult

enough often, to get into another nation as mentioned above. If one succeeds, then additional struggles (some to naturally be expected, of course) are faced. Living in a new country can be daunting, especially when the cultural differences are great. As a result, it can be expected that an immigrant would try to maintain some semblance of their own culture in their new country of stay. Or, due to fears of racism or due to the culture shock it would be expected that immigrant communities would form as a way to deal with this and as a means to help each other through. By doing this, sometimes they face criticism of not integrating and of “sticking with their own kind. Yet, on the other hand, if they do integrate in some way, they face critique from certain types of environmentalists and others of contributing to environmental degradation by increasing their consumption to the high levels typical of the host nation. And if environmental degradation is the concern, then it would make sense that one of the main issues at hand to address would be the consumption itself and its roots, regardless of who is doing it — in this context That is, if the host nation had different modes of consumptions, immigrants would likely follow those too. Hence, singling out immigrants for being a factor in environmental degradation is often unfair, and itself hints of prejudice and of attitudes — intentional or not — almost like “stay out; we want to maintain and not share our lifestyle and standards of living; we recognize it is wasteful but if not too many are doing it, then it is ok” etc.) into 2010 and problems of racism in Italy continue. For example, a wave of violence against African Farm workers in southern Italy left some 70 people injured. This resulted in police having to evacuate over 300 workers from the region. The workers were easy targets being exploited as fruit pickers living in difficult conditions. They earn “starvation wages” according to a BBC reporter, doing “backbreaking work which Italians do not want” in a labour market controlled by the local mafia.

UN human rights system key to implementation of anti-racism

The United Nations human rights system plays an important role in combating racism and ensuring effective implementation of the final outcome document of the anti-racism Durban Review Conference. Independent experts of UN human rights treaty bodies, special procedures under the UN Human Rights Council, and follow-up mechanisms established by the 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) on 23 April voiced their unequivocal support to effectively implement the final outcome of the Review Conference. “The framework set up by the DDPA has affected in a lasting and positive way the work of international human rights mechanisms,” “It has provided us with a robust blueprint for carrying out our work.” However, the DDPA was not fully implemented, “racism is well alive all around the world.” “a renewed international engagement against racism is as urgent as it has ever been. As we face a multitude of crises that will dearly affect our standards of living, the risks of renewed racism and xenophobia are too evident for us to ignore.” “It invites the Human Rights Council, its special procedures and mechanisms, as well as relevant treaty bodies” to take into account the DDPA in their work and urges all governments to “cooperate fully” with the UN human rights mechanisms in the fight against racism. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which provides secretariat and substantive support to the UN human rights mechanisms, is also requested to continue its support to this end. The outcome document further calls on governments to ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and other instruments adopted after the 2001 anti-racism conference, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

International treaties

In 1966, the international Convention on Civil and Political Rights (**ICCPR**) and the international Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (**ICESCR**) were adopted by the United Nations, between them making the rights contained in the UDHR binding on all states that have signed this treaty, creating human-rights law. Since then numerous other treaties (pieces of legislation) have been offered at the international level. They are generally known as *human rights instruments*. Some of the most significant, referred to (with ICCPR and ICESCR) as "the seven core treaties", are:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (**CERD**) (adopted 1966, entry into force: 1969)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Against Women (**CEDAW**) (adopted 1979, entry into force: 1981)
- United Nations Convention against Torture (**CAT**) (adopted 1984, entry into force: 1984)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (**CRC**) (adopted 1989, entry into force: 1989)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**CRPD**) (adopted 2006, entry into force: 2008)
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (**ICRMW** or more often **MWC**) (adopted 1990, entry into force: 2003)

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