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

Summary of the high-level panel discussion to mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 45/23, in which the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to organize a high-level panel discussion to mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and to prepare a summary report on the outcome of the panel discussion. At its organizational meeting on 7 December 2020, the Human Rights Council decided that the annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming mandated by its resolution 16/21 would focus on the state of play in the fight against racism and discrimination 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the exacerbating effects the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had on those efforts, therefore replacing the high-level panel discussion requested in Council resolution 45/23. The report provides a summary of the high-level panel discussion held on 22 February 2021 at the forty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council.



I. Introduction

1. On 22 February 2021, pursuant to its resolution 16/21, the Human Rights Council held its annual high-level panel discussion on the mainstreaming of human rights. At its organizational meeting of 7 December 2020, the Council decided that the theme of the high-level panel discussion would be the state of play in the fight against racism and discrimination 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the exacerbating effects the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had on those efforts. It was also decided that that discussion would replace the high-level panel discussion mandated by Council resolution 45/23 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The present summary report was prepared pursuant to paragraph 9 of resolution 45/23, in which the Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a summary report on the outcome of the panel discussion.
2. The high-level panel discussion was chaired by the President of the Human Rights Council. The discussion was opened with statements by the President of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
3. The panellists were the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka; the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus; and the Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Gabriela Ramos. The concluding remarks were delivered on behalf of the panellists by the Director of the UN-Women Liaison Office in Geneva, Christine Löw; the Director of Health Emergency Interventions at WHO, Altaf Musani; and the Director for Policies and Programmes of the Social and Human Sciences Sector of UNESCO, Ângela Melo.
4. The high-level panel discussion provided an opportunity for high-level representatives of United Nations agencies and funds, high-level representatives of Member States and other relevant stakeholders to discuss progress made in efforts to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and to share their views on the fight against racism and discrimination, challenges encountered and good practices, including those related to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. Opening statements

5. The President of the General Assembly recalled that 75 years ago the United Nations came into being because each signatory to the Charter was guaranteed equality. The principle of non-discrimination between nations contained in the Charter of the United Nations was then applied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He noted that that spirit of community was at the core of the panel's discussion.
6. The President stressed that racism, xenophobia and intolerance persisted, and that no nation was free from discrimination. He observed that the COVID-19 pandemic had laid bare the pre-existing vulnerabilities facing the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Those vulnerabilities had been evident even in wealthier countries, where ethnic, religious, and racial minorities had experienced poorer outcomes than the rest of society. Moreover, in marginalized communities, women had fared worse than their male counterparts. He called upon the participants to the discussion to support the equal and fair distribution of vaccines for all, both within countries and among them.
7. The President regretted that, despite the approval of the landmark political declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage in 2019 and its subsequent adoption by the General Assembly in its resolution 74/2, universal health coverage had not yet been achieved and that 100 million people had been pushed into extreme poverty due to health-care costs. To end discrimination in health care, he insisted that it was everyone's

responsibility to remove barriers, take proactive prevention measures, collect data, and monitor the quality of and access to services.

8. The President noted that the twentieth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action was a moment of reckoning. He called for honesty when discussing shortcomings in the implementation of the commitments made in 2001. While many Member States had improved legal regimes that protected rights and provided avenues for effective remedy and redress, there was often a lack of political will to enforce and implement those laws. He regretted that discrimination was still entrenched in society.

9. To address long-standing forms of discrimination, the President highlighted the importance of listening to and learning from each other's experiences and recognizing that privilege had arisen as a result of past injustices. He stressed that acknowledging past actions was the first step to adopting concrete measures toward reparatory justice. He affirmed that the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would not be achieved while racism and discrimination persisted, as instability, economic disparities and social exclusion were fuelled by discrimination and xenophobia.

10. The President reiterated that there was no place for discrimination at the United Nations. He announced that he would convene a debate in the General Assembly on the midterm review of the International Decade for People of African Descent and that he would seek to finalize an agreement on the modalities and format of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent to facilitate the holding of its first session, in 2021. Finally, he called on Member States to provide their determination and the resources necessary to support the collective effort of the United Nations.

11. The Secretary-General of the United Nations emphasized that the rot of racism was corroding institutions, social structures and everyday life. He noted that far more had to be done to address that scourge and welcomed the efforts of the Human Rights Council in that regard.

12. The Secretary-General stated that racism was deeply rooted in centuries of colonialism and slavery. Racist and discriminatory dimensions were also evident in growing antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, violence against some minority Christian communities, and other forms of intolerance and xenophobia around the world. He stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic had further exposed the strong social and economic dimensions of racism and discrimination, noting that those left behind were being left even further behind.

13. The Secretary-General underscored that overcoming the challenge of racism demanded action every day and at every level. He called upon all Member States and all people to assert the values of equality, non-discrimination and mutual respect, which are deeply linked to the affirmation of human rights. Moreover, the Secretary-General called for a new social contract to be forged, based on inclusivity and sustainability. Noting that societies were becoming more multi-ethnic, multireligious and multicultural, he highlighted the need for greater investments in inclusivity and cohesion in order to harness the benefits of diversity rather than perceiving it as a threat. He noted that all groups needed to have their individual identities respected and to feel they were valued members of society.

14. The Secretary-General emphasized that advancing equality for all meant ensuring transparency, equal access to services, meaningful participation, including for the isolated and marginalized, and accountability and justice with no discrimination, as well as recognizing and addressing one's own underlying biases. He concluded by reiterating that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was a road map for promoting justice and dignity for all and combating racism in all its manifestations.

15. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recalled that 20 years ago, States had adopted a detailed and concrete action plan to end racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, namely, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. In the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action:

(a) It was acknowledged that past and contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance continued to victimize Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent, and indigenous peoples;

(b) States were urged to eliminate racial profiling and ensure accountability for misconduct by law enforcement that was motivated by racism and related forms of discrimination;

(c) States were required to address religious intolerance, including antisemitism and Islamophobia;

(d) Recognition of the multiple and aggravated forms of discrimination suffered by women and girls worldwide was demanded;

(e) A comprehensive framework was set up to advance change across all areas in which discrimination deprived people of their human rights, including new technologies, health care, education and employment.

16. The High Commissioner paid tribute to the civil society organizations that had demanded equality and the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, often in the face of threats, and emphasized the importance of ensuring their participation and supporting their efforts and activities. She noted that while some States had made incremental progress in the fight against racism and discrimination, there was still much to do.

17. The High Commissioner observed that the COVID-19 pandemic had disproportionately affected certain communities, once again demonstrating that racism, discrimination and poverty formed a vicious cycle. She added that, as racism constituted a major obstacle to development, combating racism and all other forms of discrimination was integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

18. The High Commissioner recalled that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action detailed actions that States had to take in collaboration with parliaments, national institutions, civil society and others, as well as strategies of enhanced international cooperation and mainstreaming, which involve all members of the United Nations system. She acknowledged the solidarity and moral power of the movement for equality over the past momentous year and called upon everyone to act for racial justice. She stated that showing leadership and manifesting commitment to equality and non-discrimination would be a start, but that there should also be more concerted action to address systemic discrimination. She added that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action could only be implemented through joint efforts by all.

19. The High Commissioner stressed the need to address the underlying and often structural causes of racism and related forms of discrimination and to focus on education and raising awareness. She also highlighted the need to take action to end discrimination's role in manufacturing poverty and to enhance accountability.

20. The High Commissioner expressed her hopes that the power of international bodies and States could be leveraged to ensure increased support for the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and greater cooperation and synergies toward carrying out the programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent. She noted that those efforts were central to the purpose of the United Nations and the Human Rights Council.

III. Summary of the high-level panel discussion

A. Contribution of panellists

21. The Executive Director of UN-Women recalled that the World Conference against Racism, held in Durban, South Africa, 20 years ago, had been a historic event. In the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the intersection between race and gender was recognized, States were called upon to ensure that gender was integrated in the training of public and law enforcement officials, and there was call for the increased participation and leadership of women in human rights decision-making bodies. She congratulated the countries that, in the 20 years since the Conference was held, had taken steps to address inadequacies through the implementation of policies and programmes, but regretted that

other countries had not taken such steps. She affirmed that, in some countries, greater repression of people and of women, especially women of colour, had been registered. She also referred to the shrinking of democratic space, which had significantly affected women of colour, including the freedom they enjoyed, the progress they had made and their capacity to organize.

22. The Executive Director noted that the pandemic had disproportionately affected women of colour, and women in general, who had lost jobs in larger numbers and had experienced increased gender-based violence. Many women of colour, and girls in particular, still had no access to technology, missing out on their education. She stressed that building back better meant addressing those issues, building back greener, building back in an equitable manner that was gender-responsive and ensured no one was left behind. She affirmed that in many countries, Government-provided fiscal stimulus packages were not reaching women and communities left behind. Such packages should not further discriminate against those who need resources desperately.

23. The Executive Director said that women of colour were still underrepresented in decision-making bodies. She noted that International Women's Day, which would focus on women's leadership, would be an opportunity to address the issue of the participation and leadership of women of colour and to encourage stakeholders to take action. She added that the Commission on the Status of Women would also focus on women's leadership, providing another opportunity for Member States to address the exclusion of women of colour in a significant way. Finally, she referred to UN-Women's Generation Equality campaign, which was aimed at addressing the gaps identified in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, as another opportunity for Member States to take significant steps over the next five years. Doing so would also accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. The Executive Director concluded by stressing that no country could thrive and recover from the pandemic without respecting its women and the human rights of its people, and advancing gender and racial equality.

25. The Director-General of WHO noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed and exploited societies' inequalities. Where disaggregated data were available, higher rates of morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19 and a disproportionate social and economic impact had been observed among the poor, older persons, ethnic minorities and people of African descent. He added that women and girls had also been particularly affected, noting significant increases in rates of violence against women and children over the past year.

26. The Director-General noted the importance of equality and equity for WHO. He highlighted three key areas where WHO had been working on human rights mainstreaming relevant to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the pledge to leave no one behind contained in the Sustainable Development Goals. First, he said that, in order to support countries in achieving the health-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, WHO had placed a new focus on addressing the social determinants of health across the life cycle and on supporting data disaggregation to identify health inequalities and inequities. He added that WHO had developed an output scorecard that would be used to assess human rights, health equity and gender equality mainstreaming in the work of the organization, with a view to evaluating progress in the implementation of the pledge to leave no one behind.

27. Second, the Director-General recalled that, on 20 January 2021, WHO had coordinated, together with UNESCO, a frontier dialogue on addressing structural racial and ethnicity-based discrimination through COVID-19 recovery plans. He noted that that work would inform training and support provided to United Nations country and humanitarian teams to implement key elements of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Third, he recalled that WHO, as part of the United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities, was working on making progress in critical areas such as health equity.

28. The Director-General insisted that WHO was committed to equitable access to treatment and vaccines, both among and within countries. He also noted that, while vaccines would help to end the pandemic, there were no vaccines for poverty, hunger and inequality.

He concluded by stating that the Sustainable Development Goals would only be achieved through a renewed commitment to human rights and by ensuring that the pledge to leave no one behind remained central to recovery efforts.

29. The Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences of UNESCO observed that racism and discrimination compounded other disadvantages and inequalities, such as those linked to poverty and gender. She noted that people of African descent, ethnic groups experiencing discrimination, indigenous peoples, migrants, stateless persons and refugees were facing worse health outcomes, were more likely to lose their employment or some of their income, were unreachable by government programmes, and lacked access to online education, among others.

30. The Assistant Director-General stated that data showed how deep-rooted, structural and systemic racism and discrimination magnified the impacts of the current crisis. For instance, she indicated that more than 86 per cent of indigenous peoples globally worked in the informal economy, where they often lacked access to social protection or quality health services, and were likely to bear the brunt of employment losses. She noted that, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than three quarters of displaced and conflict-affected people had lost income and that Afrodescendent women in the United States of America were more likely to downshift their careers or leave the workforce, demonstrating the intersection between race and gender discrimination.

31. The Assistant Director-General noted that the fight against discrimination had to be prioritized and that rebuilding had to be based on human rights and equality. She suggested that the international community capitalize on the global call against racism that was adopted by UNESCO in December 2020 and for which its member States had expressed strong support, and on the UNESCO road map against racism and discrimination that was under preparation.

32. The Assistant Director-General mentioned the importance of addressing the root causes of structural and systemic racism rather than merely reacting to crises. She added that doing so required evidence and that UNESCO was working on a scanning methodology to assess the role of institutional and legal frameworks in advancing the agenda for inclusion. She also said that, moving from evidence to action, UNESCO would offer a universal policy toolkit to combat racist ideologies and discriminatory systems, promote best practices and affirmative action policies, and offer strong incentives. Furthermore, she emphasized that UNESCO was developing a recommendation on the ethics of artificial intelligence, which would be the first global normative instrument to address discrimination, including gender bias and stereotyping, in the design, development and use of new artificial intelligence technologies.

33. The Assistant Director-General noted that in carrying out its work, UNESCO could count on the support of local actors through the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities. UNESCO also worked with teachers, media professionals, artists and activists, including young people, to change mindsets. She also mentioned the moral authority and expertise of UNESCO partners within the United Nations system, recalling the United Nations-wide dialogue on addressing racism and ethnicity-based discrimination through COVID-19 recovery plans, co-organized with WHO.

34. The Assistant Director-General stressed the importance of understanding the deep roots of problems to be able to address them. She insisted on preserving the memory of past atrocities and historical injustices, such as the holocaust, slavery and colonialism, not only as a duty to the past, but as a current practical guidance tool. She noted that was one of the goals of the “General History of Africa” and “Slave Route” projects of UNESCO. She concluded with an invitation to join the UNESCO Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination on 22 March 2021.

B. Interactive discussion

35. During the interactive discussion, interventions were made by the representatives of Angola; Armenia; Azerbaijan, in a joint statement on behalf of the Movement of Non-

Aligned Countries; Bahamas, in a joint statement on behalf of the Caribbean Community; Belgium; Brazil, in a joint statement on behalf of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries; Cameroon, in a joint statement on behalf of the Group of African States; Ecuador; Finland, in a joint statement also on behalf of Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden; Indonesia; Iraq; Morocco; Namibia; Nepal; Pakistan, in a joint statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation; the Philippines; Portugal; Qatar; the Russian Federation; Senegal; South Africa; Togo; and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). Interventions were also made by a representative of the European Union.

36. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations also took the floor: Action Canada for Population and Development, in a joint statement also on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative and the Coalition of African Lesbians; the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, in a joint statement also on behalf of Al-Haq, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Habitat International Coalition, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, and the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling; Franciscans International; International Association of Democratic Lawyers; International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations; and the National Commission on Human Rights of Indonesia.

37. Statements by the following Member States and observer States were not delivered owing to a lack of time: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Botswana, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gabon, Ghana, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kenya, Sierra Leone, State of Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and United States of America.¹

38. For the same reason, statements by the following intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations were not delivered: ABC Tamil Oli; Al-Haq; Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, Inc.; Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration; Elizka Relief Foundation; Geo Expertise Association; Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health; Global Welfare Association; Health and Environment Program; Imam Ali's Popular Students Relief Society; Ingénieurs du monde; Institut international pour les droits et le développement; Institute for NGO Research; International Catholic Child Bureau; International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic and Other Minorities; International Human Rights Association of American Minorities; International-Lawyers.org; International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Iuventum, eV; Liberation; Public Organization "Public Advocacy"; Touro Law Center – The Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust; United Nations Association of the United States of America; United Nations Population Fund; United Nations Watch; Villages unis; and World Jewish Congress.²

39. Speakers reaffirmed their commitment to eliminating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and stressed the importance of the principles of equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They welcomed the focus of the high-level panel discussion on the twentieth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and the efforts made to mainstream the anti-racism agenda in the United Nations system.

40. Speakers stressed that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action constituted a landmark and comprehensive framework to combat racism and other forms of racial discrimination that was still relevant 20 years after its adoption. Some speakers called for further efforts to disseminate and implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, including by educating people about its content, and for renewed support for the follow-up mechanisms established to monitor its implementation. Additionally, some speakers mentioned the importance of assessing efforts undertaken under the International Decade for People of African Descent.

¹ Statements received by the Secretariat are available on the extranet of the Human Rights Council.

² Ibid.

41. Speakers regretted the perpetuation of racism two decades after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, noting that racial discrimination was exacerbated by extreme poverty, disparities, populism and nationalism. They expressed deep concern about the prevalence of racist attitudes and statements, and growing prejudices and intolerance, which functioned both as causes and consequences of racism and racial discrimination. Some speakers pointed to the continued invisibility of people of African descent in certain parts of the world, where they faced discrimination and marginalization owing to lack of recognition, justice and development. They noted that that situation was the legacy of historical injustices that remained without reparation, including the slave trade.

42. Many speakers acknowledged the systemic nature of racism, noting that racism was not only perpetuated by individuals but also social and institutional structures and that it was imperative to fight against both visible forms of racism and its underlying causes. They highlighted that systemic racism occurred in all kinds of settings and was intersectional in nature. They emphasized that responses had to address the root causes of racism, including through dialogue, policies and education, and not only its manifestations. They added that responses to racial discrimination also had to be intersectional in nature, taking into account not only race, but also gender, ethnic and social origins, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status and disability, among other compounding factors.

43. Some speakers noted that the global protests against racism of 2020 had demonstrated that racial discrimination was still a major issue. Many speakers stressed that States had to critically assess their efforts to combat racism and related intolerance and not just assume that progressive laws and/or policies had had the desired effect. They underlined that it was important for States to identify the main obstacles and setbacks encountered over the past two decades.

44. All speakers acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed and exacerbated racial discrimination and underlying inequalities, including in access to health care, education and employment. In some cases, efforts undertaken to combat racism and related intolerance had been reversed. Some speakers added that the pandemic had shed light on the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including systemic and structural racism. They expressed deep concern at the recent rise of nationalism and at how the pandemic had made manifest deepening and widening levels of poverty, inequality and other forms of social injustices. Some speakers underscored the reality of racial discrimination in areas such as access to health care, noting the particularly worrying statistics concerning persons of African descent. Other speakers noted that the pandemic had also dramatically increased the stigmatization of certain groups, in particular of Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent, and of other vulnerable groups such as migrants and indigenous peoples.

45. Many speakers expressed deep concern about what they called a nationalist approach to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, noting such an approach was reinforcing inequalities between States. They called upon the international community to ensure that COVID-19 vaccines be considered global public goods and be made available to all. They also called upon more developed States and international organizations to invest in improving access to health care in less developed countries.

46. A number of speakers insisted on the importance of taking inequalities and all forms of discrimination into account in post-pandemic recovery plans to guarantee equal access to all, noting that building back better meant reconstructing societies with a greater level of equality and justice. Some speakers noted that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action contained 48 references to health and health care and urged States to provide effective mechanisms for monitoring and eliminating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in the health-care system.

47. Many speakers also expressed serious concern about increased hate speech, incitement to racial hatred and disinformation, both online and offline, and the negative consequences for targeted groups, including the resurgence of hate crimes. They called upon all States and stakeholders to condemn and address those specific issues, including by reviewing their legislation. Reference was made to the Rabat Plan of Action on the

prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

48. 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 actions to address ongoing challenges. They highlighted the need for political will, including at the international level, and the importance of promoting international cooperation. A number of speakers also called upon States to adopt sustainable national action plans to address racism and related intolerance, often referring to their own plans.

49. Some speakers highlighted good practices in relation to the fight against racism and discrimination. Examples included the collaboration of UNESCO and the Caribbean Community secretariat to facilitate knowledge-exchange and policy dialogue on the impact of the pandemic in the Caribbean and to organize joint activities, and the recent adoption of the first European Union anti-racism action plan for the period 2020–2025.

50. Many speakers concluded by affirming that racism undermined the achievement and enjoyment of human rights for all. Some speakers called for the universal ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and finalization of the work on complementary standards to the Convention. Speakers also stressed that combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance was essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and keep the promise of leaving no one behind.

51. Speakers raised a number of specific questions for the panellists. They included:

(a) What needs to be done to combat incitement to violence or hatred and disinformation, and to promote safe digital spaces, in order to enable everyone to make their voices heard online, without threats of violence or hatred?;

(b) What role can digital technologies play in addressing racial discrimination in the health sector, and how can we ensure that the data on which it relies do not perpetuate racial discrimination and bias?;

(c) What innovative and mutually reinforcing responses could be employed to counter the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

C. Concluding remarks

52. At the end of the interactive discussion, the President of the Human Rights Council gave the panellists the opportunity to make concluding remarks.

53. The Director of the UN-Women Liaison Office in Geneva echoed the observations made by many speakers, indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that required intersectional solutions in every area. She noted that most essential front-line workers were women, many of which were from ethnically and racially marginalized groups and at the bottom of the economic ladder. She added that evidence from some countries had shown that the colour of a person's skin could determine their risk of dying from COVID-19.

54. The Director stressed that women faced an increased burden of care and that violence against women and girls in all its forms had skyrocketed, including hate speech and violence online. She noted that when one combined the risks a woman might face because of her gender and race during the pandemic, the negative impact of COVID-19 was multiplied.

55. The Director highlighted that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action reasserted the principles of equality and non-discrimination as human rights and listed steps to combat discrimination in every area, including health. It also called upon Governments to integrate a gender perspective in all efforts against racism, to involve women in decision-making and to end impunity for violence against women. She noted that UN-Women was encouraged by the many actions taken by Member States and other stakeholders during the International Decade for People of African Descent and that those actions might inspire

further efforts to address racism and sexism in all their manifestations. UN-Women was also encouraged by the growing support for racial justice, a movement which started at the grass-roots level.

56. In closing, the Director emphasized that UN-Women, together with many partners, was supporting women activists in all their diversity through the Generation Equality Forum, a multi-stakeholder global gathering bringing together a variety of actors, including governments, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society and youth organizations and movements, to take stock of the gains made since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to take ambitious actions toward gender equality through five year-long, multi-stakeholder-led action coalitions. She added that combating racism would be part of those efforts and actions.

57. The Director of Health Emergency Interventions at WHO thanked the speakers who had universally and categorically addressed the negative and adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. He stressed the importance of working together to ensure that the availability of vaccines, therapeutics and, equally important, health care was equitable and accessible for all. He emphasized that vaccination plans and their rollout had to be equitable and accessible to all populations of concern as defined by the recommendations of the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on immunization.

58. The Director noted that vaccinations began with countries, specifically with the establishment of national development and vaccine plans. He affirmed that WHO would continue to support member States to ensure that those vaccination plans address populations of concern: specifically, refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, persons living in hard to reach areas and those who are most vulnerable. He added that WHO and its partners would continue to actively monitor the rollout of vaccination plans with the aim of addressing gaps.

59. The Assistant Director-General stressed that vaccination was a humanitarian, public health and human right imperative. She concluded that it was time to live up to the commitments of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action to deliver the promise of universal health coverage and, with an equitable exit from the COVID-19 pandemic for all, to build back better together.

60. The Director for Policies and Programmes of the Social and Human Sciences Sector of UNESCO observed that the discussion had shown a strong commitment from States to address the issue of racism and racial discrimination, that it was an opportune moment and that there was political consensus, which she welcomed.

61. Noting that many speakers, including States, had referred to systemic and structural racism and discrimination, the Director reaffirmed that racial discrimination continued to be a global scourge that took multiple forms. She stressed that the deep-seated structural causes of racism and related intolerance had to be addressed. In order to do so, she emphasized the importance of acknowledging the many current power structures and institutional practices, along with discriminatory legislation, rules and practices, that exacerbated or perpetuated inequality of opportunities and of results. She added that, since racism and racial discrimination had generated and continued to generate significant economic inequalities, one recommendation should be to address that structural gap so as to improve the living conditions of men and women, in particular those affected by the scourge of racism. She noted that the discussion also addressed the situation of people of African and Asian descent and indigenous peoples.

62. The Director highlighted that public policies had to be reviewed and reformed in order to be more inclusive of all segments of society. She was in agreement with many speakers when she noted that racism and racial discrimination, which affect and exclude important segments of the population, would prevent the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

63. In closing, she stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had amplified already existing discrimination, exclusion and inequalities in society, the most blatant of which were those based on race and ethnicity. She noted that special attention had to be paid to women facing intersecting forms of discrimination and urged States and political decision makers to

promote women's empowerment within the framework of the struggle against racism and racial discrimination.

64. Following the concluding remarks, the President of the Human Rights Council closed the discussion.

IV. Recommendations

65. During the high-level panel discussion, the speakers made a number of recommendations. In summary, speakers:

(a) Called upon all States and stakeholders to show leadership and reassert the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

(b) Called for renewed efforts and actions to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and also called for increased support to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, while noting that combating racism and racial discrimination was essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Urged States and stakeholders to further disseminate the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, including through media campaigns, and to educate people about its content;

(d) Also urged States and stakeholders to promote women's participation and empowerment in the fight against racism and racial discrimination, and to ensure the participation of and support to civil society organizations, and called for further support of the racial justice movement;

(e) Called for renewed support for the mechanisms established to follow up on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, i.e., the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent;

(f) Also called for the universal ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and for the finalization of the work on complementary standards to the Convention;

(g) Called upon States and other stakeholders to assess the efforts undertaken under the International Decade for People of African Descent, and called for greater cooperation and synergies to implement its programme of activities;

(h) Called upon States to finalize an agreement on the modalities and format of the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent;

(i) Called for renewed political will, including at the international level, to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, implement international programmes of action and activities, and enforce laws;

(j) Urged States and stakeholders to critically assess their efforts to combat racism, to work together on addressing the challenges encountered, including by lending their support and resources to the collective efforts of the United Nations, and to invest more in actions fostering inclusivity and cohesion;

(k) Called upon States to review and reform their legislation and policies to be more inclusive of all segments of society, and called for more efforts to implement existing legislation and policies;

(l) Called upon States and stakeholders to preserve the memory of past atrocities and historical injustices and to take concrete measures towards reparatory justice;

(m) Called upon States to adopt sustainable national action plans to address racism and related intolerance;

(n) Urged States and stakeholders to condemn and address hate speech, incitement to racial hatred and disinformation, both online and offline, and the negative consequences for targeted groups, including by reviewing their legislation;

(o) Also urged States and stakeholders to address the underlying causes of systemic and structural racism and related forms of intolerance, not only their manifestations, and called for responses that were intersectional in nature, taking into account not only race, but also other compounding factors, such as gender, ethnic and social origins, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status and disability;

(p) Called for actions to focus on dialogue, education and awareness-raising;

(q) Highlighted that COVID-19 recovery plans should be inclusive and sustainable and should integrate human rights, should specifically address the multiple forms of discrimination and the inequalities exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic, and emphasized that to build back better, recovery plans had to prioritize the fight against discrimination to guarantee equal access to all and reconstruct societies that had greater levels of equality and justice;

(r) Urged States and the international community to work together to ensure the equal and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, both within and among countries, and its accessibility to all, especially populations of concern;

(s) Called upon States and stakeholders to take proactive measures, including removing barriers in access to health care, collecting disaggregated data, and monitoring the quality and accessibility of health services, with a view to ending discrimination in health care and preventing its reoccurrence, and also called upon more developed States and international organizations to invest in improving access to health care in less developed countries.
