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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.

[31 May 2021]

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



A Declaration on Diversity to End Systemic Racism

The Sikh Human Rights Group believes that Systemic Racism exists because there is no Systemic Diversity. There is yet to be a declaration or convention on diversity that represents those who need their voices heard. In the past 18 months discrimination around the globe has been fought against in the millions. While the fear of a global pandemic has spread across all corners of the world, it has not stopped people of colour, variable lifestyles, gender, social-economic backgrounds, and religious belief to protest for their right to equality and voices to be heard. While there was a race to find a vaccine for COVID-19, the real pandemic of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination has been around for centuries and there is still no vaccine for it. We have been living with the pandemic of discrimination for centuries. It is time to find an effective cure.

The World Conference Against Racism 2001 covered several issues, including redress for transatlantic slavery and the Second-class citizenry issues. Yet, as we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, we still see rife concerns of Second-class citizenry issues in some countries around the world and systemic racism towards the African- American community at an alarming level unmistakably seen in the police brutality towards the community.

Another example of systemic racism in United States of America is the repeated targeting of the Sikh community that was witnessed on the 27th May 2021. Surjit Singh, a 64-year-old Sikh Indian immigrant, was forced to go against his beliefs and shave his beard during the intake process in Arizona's corrections system. This is in clear breach of Para 67 of the Durban Declaration which was aimed at stopping this form of discriminatory practices.

We at SHRG strongly believe the existing Durban Declaration and Programme of Action is not being implemented either in spirit or in practice to achieve the aims it has set out.

While strengthening the law and anti-discriminatory policies are essential to address discriminatory attitude towards the 'other' or the minority groups of the world, SHRG feel we need to go further than the law. We need to encourage a culture of accepting diversity as natural and enacting policies to help people be comfortable with diversity and eventually feel enriched by the diversity this world offers. This in turn will complement the existing approaches.

While we recognise many countries have adopted policies of promoting diversity across the many sectors of the State, and comparatively, there are many countries where individuals have to fight for basic respect, dignity, and equality through political campaigns and legal challenges; no country has come close to curing the discriminatory pandemic. SHRG believes measures to improve and create a positive approach towards diversity will compliment to end discrimination and can best be achieved through the United Nations. We propose that a Declaration on Diversity is the appropriate step.

A Declaration on Diversity will encourage States to adopt policies, learn from best practices and reduce discrimination against minorities and underrepresented groups. This will show solidarity around the globe when we need it most, show that voices have been heard, and that no one died in vain while protesting for their human rights.

A Declaration on Diversity will emphasis and embody pluralism, where societies worldwide are encouraged to live in peaceful coexistence with one another, regardless of one's community, lifestyle, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, or background. We, as a world, need to do more than just tolerate one another's differences and give more than just civil rights. We need to inspire people to embrace diversity and not only feel comfortable with it but value it. We need to educate ourselves on the different struggles people around the globe and down the street from us have faced.

A Declaration on Diversity will also be incorporating respect for biodiversity. It will promote a better understanding of the ecosystems sustained by diversity. Respecting diversity in nature and human life compliments each other. The Sikh Human Rights Group that bases most of its views on the Guru Nanak's philosophy promotes his sentiment that diversity is one of the greatest gifts of nature.

The UN is made up of people from all walks of life and should represent mutual coexistence between people of different backgrounds. We strongly believe a Declaration on Diversity is long overdue and will be the mere start to an overarching list of monumental frameworks for all countries to work from and improve on.

A Declaration on Diversity will show to the world, a world that is still hurting and feeling angry and silenced from 2020, that the UN has listened, stands in solidarity, and is making a difference. From there an annual UN Diversity Day could be introduced, celebrating the beauty of diversity within this wonderful planet and how no longer living with hate or fear of someone different to you should be how we live our life. When you share human rights with people from all walks of life that does not mean you lose any of your human rights or quality of life, but rather your life will only become enriched as you admire the variety of people this world, we all share, has to offer.

We understand not all states will agree to all aspects of a Declaration on Diversity. However, we believe a glass ceiling needs to be broken, and now is the time to break it. Now should be the time of change or encouraging challenging and uncomfortable conversations to stand up for people who are still fighting for basic human rights, dignity, and respect in some states. A slow and gradual acceptance and adoption of the principal articles within such a Declaration will be a success in itself as an initial charter for a positive action plan on fulfilling the sentiments and ambitions of the Durban Declaration.

We urge all states to consider a Declaration on Diversity as a way of making small and positive steps towards a planet that celebrates human diversity ecosystems and biodiversity.

We, SHRG propose the need for a Declaration on Diversity. We do not feel enough voices are being heard.
