

UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities

Meeting (Senior Level)

6 December 2021, 8:00-9:00 (EST) / 14:00-15:00 (CET)

Venue: MS Teams

Minutes

Meeting co-chaired by Ilze Brands Kehris and Gabriela Ramos

- 1. Opening and Introduction by Ilze Brands Kehris (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, OHCHR) and Gabriela Ramos (Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO)**
 - **Ilze Brands Kheris** welcomed all participants to the senior-level meeting and expressed enthusiasm for the continuation of the work on racial discrimination and protection of minorities.
 - Ilze Brands Kheris noted that the joint work of UN agencies and entities has revitalized the Network, despite the challenges ahead. Facing racism and discrimination against minorities, UN Human Rights bodies have advanced a transformative agenda that is a call to all UN entities to address racial discrimination and protection of minorities, including :
 - High Commissioner for Human Rights' report on systemic racism and its "Four-point Agenda towards Transformative Change for Racial Justice and Equality";
 - Human Rights Council's Resolution 47/21 on the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers through transformative change for racial justice and equality;
 - UNGA establishing the Permanent Forum of people of African descent (July 2021).
 - The Secretary General's recently launched Common Agenda renders the need to work together on these areas pressing. Ilze Brands Kheris recalled that next year will be the 30th anniversary of the 1992 Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to minorities, which is an opportunity for the Network and UN agencies to promote the protection of minorities. She pointed to the background documents to the meeting requesting to reaffirm six commitments (summarized below).
 - Ilze Brands Kehris recalled that the suggested commitments not aim to duplicate or replace any UN process or forum where OHCHR or others are engaged or leading. They are solely intended to enable the Network to continue to build on the momentum of the past 18 months, and to advance our work to new levels.

- **Gabriela Ramos** highlighted the importance of joint efforts and work with members to advance the Network's agenda and have concrete impacts. Expresses hopes that the Network's work will deliver concrete changes on the ground, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Gabriela Ramos recalled the strong commitment of UNESCO Member States to fight against racism, especially through the adoption of the Global Call against Racism, the Global Forum against Racism (March 2021), etc.
- Gabriela Ramos noted that joining forces will be a "game changer", with this Senior-level meeting providing a real opportunity to continue joint work and to capitalize on specific expertise and experience.

2. Brief overview of the Network Pillar Goals 2021-2025 by Claude Cahn (OHCHR)

- Claude Cahn presents the Network's Work Plan for 2021-2025 and summarizes the goals of each pillar:
 - (1) Leave No One Behind: WHO Pillar Lead;
 - (2) Criminal Justice: UNODC Pillar Lead;
 - (3) Times of Crisis: OHCHR Pillar Lead (provisional);
 - (4) Intersectionality: ILO (effective 1 January 2022);
 - (5) Communications: DGC and UNFPA Pillar Leads;
 - (6) Knowledge Hub: UNHCR Pillar Lead;
 - (7) UN Internal Diversity: to be launched upon the conclusion of the work of the Secretary General's Task Force on Addressing Racism at the UN;
 - (8) UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities Development Pillar: OHCHR and UNESCO Co-Chairs Pillar Leads.

3. Senior Level Discussion on Addressing Racial Discrimination and Strengthening Protection of Minorities: 2021 Work and 2022-2023 Planning

- **ASG Asako Okai (UNDP)** expressed UNDP's willingness to support the work of each pillar, especially the Criminal Justice pillar (UNODC Pillar Lead). Notes that UNDP can also support programming work in relation with discrimination. Expressed willingness to stay engaged with the pillar leads to find ways to support their work, since these activities relate to UNDP's next strategic plans to drive transformational change through a rights-based approach to development.
- **ADG Princess Nothemba Simelela (WHO)** expressed excitement about the Network's agenda and work. Notes that the focus and preciseness of the workplan will be helpful, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Expressed pride for what has been achieved so far and affirms WHO's commitment to continue working with the Network.
- **Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Gillian Triggs (UNHCR)** expressed excitement to be part of the Network and notes its revitalizing effects on UNHCR both internally and externally, in a context marked by the rise of forced displacements due to conflicts, COVID-19, xenophobia and hatred. Expresses strong support to the Network. Noted possible avenues for future work, including scaling up pilot work in relation with the protection of

displaced persons and strategically using NHRIs. Noted that UNHCR will continue supporting the Network, will chair the Pillar on capacity-building for 2022, and will step up their role for the LNOB pillar. Explained that UNHCR will be pleased to dedicate extra staff time and expertise to support the Network and other pillars' work, especially to develop leadership and push back against xenophobic language.

- **Nanette Braun (Chief, Communications Campaigns Service, Strategic Communications Division, UN Department of Global Communications)** noted that DGC stands ready to support OHCHR next year, in relation with the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the 1992 Declaration. Expressed support to the pillar on communications in 2022. Noted that, next year, DGC will continue their work on fighting racism (campaign for the Anniversary of the Durban Declaration), especially on social media platforms. Noted that DGC will inform and engage Network colleagues on the Internal Strategic Action Plan of the Secretary-General's Task Force on Addressing Racism.
- **Teresa Whitfield (Director, Policy and Mediation Division, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs)** expressed appreciation for the Network's important work. Reflected on the opportunities and challenges regarding DPPA participation in the Times of Crisis Pillar. Explained that the RMR mechanism, which DPPA co-chairs with UNDP, continues to be a good platform to engage on issues related to racial discrimination and protection of minorities. Mentioned that Special Political Missions, backstopped by DPPA, make an important contribution to protection outcomes, including through their human rights components. Lastly, highlighted that hate speech is a cross pillar effort and it is vitally related to the Network's work.
- **Jean-Luc Lemahieu (Mr. Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Director, Division of Policy Analysis and Public Affairs, UNODC)** congratulated the co-chairs for the leadership of the Network and commits to continue working with the Network, especially by leading the Criminal justice pillar. Welcomes other members of the Network to join the work of the criminal justice pillar. Highlighted that the High Commissioner's Agenda for Racial Justice and Equality represents a momentum for the Network.
- **Sanjay Wijesekera (Director, Programme Group Leadership Team, UNICEF)** thanked the co-chairs for their leadership and expresses support for the Network's plan for 2022. Highlights the need to ensure adequate focus on the minorities protection agenda, which is also a central commitment of UNICEF strategic plan. Called for increased attention and investment in learning, knowledge-exchange, and capacity-building – *e.g.*, identify and learn from good examples on the ground. Highlights the importance of continuing engagement with intersectionality and of addressing digital environment and the impact of social media in relation with the protection of minorities.
- **Ben Majekodunmi (Chief of Staff, UNRWA)** noted that UNRWA has a lot to learn from the Network and to contribute to. Suggested cross-cutting efforts to understand certain issues, considering the risk of losing coherence and a holistic vision – *i.e.* the Network could consider working on a concept, a narrative and/or a notion that would keep the pillars together and ensure a coherent vision for the Network (*e.g.* why is it that certain people use or react to hate speech?).

4. Discussion and Adoption of Commitments

Ilze Brands Kehris presented the 5 commitments for adoption:

- *Commitment 1:* Agencies and entities commit to redoubling efforts to support dedicating resources to the work of the Network, including by providing support to own staff engaged with Network work.
- *Commitment 2:* Agencies and entities commit to mobilizing resources toward the work of the Network. These efforts would include organising a high-level event at the UN in NY to raise visibility for the Network and fundraise for its work.
- *Commitment 3:* Agencies and entities commit to identifying a dedicated Pillar Lead to the “Times of Crisis” Pillar.
- *Commitment 4:* Agencies and entities agree that (1) the co-Chair of the Network remains an annual rotating arrangement, with OHCHR acting as permanent co-chair, annually with one other agency acting as annual rotating co-Chair; and (2) that the current open offer to take on the role of 2022 rotating co-Chair will remain open until 21 December 2021, after which the current co-Chairs may approach agencies bilaterally, or alternately request that UNESCO stay on for a second year as 2022 rotating co-chair.
- *Commitment 5:* Agencies and entities commit to working toward having a mandatory training module on racial discrimination and minority inclusion for all UN staff.
- **Martin Ejidike, Senior Political Affairs Officer (OSAPG)** congratulated the co-chairs and noted that OSAPG will continue contributing to the Network, especially with LNOB and Times of Crisis Pillars.
 - Commitment 1: Explained that the OSAPG can commit to support the Network, but is unable to commit a full-time staff.
 - Commitment 2: Noted that OSAPG can support the efforts of the Network where possible and the organization of a high-level event, based on their limited resources.
 - Commitment 3: Highlighted that OSAPG may consider taking the lead of “Times of Crisis” Pillar considering its importance.
 - Commitment 4: Agreed with the proposal.
 - Commitment 5: Noted that OSAPG will continue support the development of training module and highlighted that OSAPG is also developing a training on the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on hate speech which may be complementary.
- **Beate Andrees (Director of the ILO Office for the United Nations in New York)** congratulated the co-chairs and confirms ILO’s willingness to support the Network, especially as the Lead of the intersectionality pillar.

5. A.O.B., Conclusions and Next Steps

- **Gabriela Ramos** thanked the participants for sharing insights and endorsing the commitments. Called for a reflection on the possibilities of aligning the Network’s work with the efforts of their own agencies. Called for candidates for co-chairing the Network.
- **Ilze Brands Kehris** thanked all participants, in particular UNESCO and Gabriela Ramos; WHO for leading the LNOB pillar; UNAIDS for leading the intersectionality pillar; ILO and UNHCR

for expanding their roles; UNODC, DGC, UNFPA for continuing their lead work on their respective pillars.