**Addressing the Challenges of Racism from a Right to Development Framework**

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**Excellencies and distinguished delegates,**

I am pleased to join you today in these important conversations. As we reflect on strategies for the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration, I want to begin by recognising the work of several UN organs, experts and mechanisms that have worked over the past decades to highlight the problem of racism and the need for international action to combat it in all its manifestations. Together, they have placed the problem of racism and racial discrimination firmly on the international human rights agenda.

However, despite 75 years of the UN’s anti-racism engagement, racism and racial discrimination persist today as pervasive and destructive to national and global forces. This underscores the need for renewed commitment by States and civil society, and concerted action by the international community to address the disparities and inequalities in human development due to racism and racial discrimination.

The current global movement for racial justice has called into question the historical and contemporary structures of racial discrimination. Across the world, marginalized racialized groups are demanding racial equality and anti-racist interventions from states and from regional, and international organizations. These demands call for renewed focus on international efforts to combat racism.

Another imperative for renewed attention to combatting racism is the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on racialized communities which has intensified poverty and reduced the quality of life in these communities. In many countries, maps of the pandemic reveal its disproportionate impact on racialized communities economically, socially, and in terms of general wellbeing. Racial disparities have become especially apparent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We see how marginalized racialized communities suffer from intergenerational inequalities in access to healthcare and other social determinants of health. This affects most of the population groups that face racial discrimination including indigenous peoples, African and people of African descent, migrants, refugees, Latinex, Asian and Asian descent, Jewish and Muslim populations, Roma, Dalits, and many others. This reality falls short of the resolve of the Durban Declaration to free every person from the abject and dehumanizing conditions.

In my interventions today, I will address two key questions:

1. What are the main challenges our world face today to combat racism?
2. Why is the right to development an important framework for combating racism and for the promotion of racial equality and justice?

Let me begin with what I consider the main challenges that we face today in combatting racism.

**Challenges to combatting racism**

The principal challenge that I see today in combating racism is the **lack of political will** across several sectors of political leadership to give the problem of racism the serious attention that it deserves. In her 2021 report, “Agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, issued an urgent call for States to adopt a transformative agenda to uproot systemic racism. The report noted that the “worldwide mobilization of people calling for racial justice has forced a *long-delayed reckoning with racism* and shifted debates towards a focus on the systemic nature of racism and the institutions that perpetrate it.”The High Commissioner called on States to *stop denying, and start dismantling*, racism; to end impunity and build trust; and to confront past legacies and deliver redress.

I want to emphasize two key phrases in the High Commissioner’s statement - “long delayed reckoning” and “stop denying and start dismantling.” Efforts to combat racism have been delayed, and even obstructed, by the lack of political will and also an attitude of denial in many states and societies. This is an attitude which denies the reality of racism. Even when racism as a societal problem is acknowledged, there is a tendency by some political leaders to minimise its impact on racialised communities. Yet we know from several studies, including the one that my Expert Mechanism is currently conducting on the impact of racism on the right to development, that racism has far reaching negative impacts on the lives and wellbeing of millions of people around the world. Racism also affects the overall wellbeing of societies as it creates social tensions and conflicts.

Our study establishes that racism is indeed a major obstacle to the operationalization of the right to development, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Racism as an obstacle to development has been recognized by several international and regional organizations. The Organization of African Unity (the precursor organization to the African Union) passed a resolution in 1964 calling for the “total elimination of all forms of discrimination based on race, colour, or ethnic origin.” In the Havana Declaration of 2016, State members of the Association of Caribbean States reaffirmed their “deep aversion to racism and all forms of discrimination, xenophobia, and intolerance of any other guise, in our Caribbean and globally.” The Association of Southeast Asian Nation has called for economic cooperation and international partnerships aimed at promoting tolerance of racial diversity in the region. The *European Commission Action Plan against Racism* (2020) acknowledges that high levels of inequality arising from racism represent an obstacle to the achievement of 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Inadequacy of political will to address the problem of racism is founded on apathy and denialism. While some progress has been made in some States, much remains to be done. At an international level, the problem of racism as an obstacle to human development and human security have not been given the attention that it deserves even within the international human rights agendas. For example, recent studies have shown that inequalities based on race have not received the same attention as other forms of inequality in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their targets, and the global indicators developed to monitor progress on implementation.

In some States, non-discrimination and equal opportunity laws in the employment sector are either non-existent or inadequately enforced. In other countries, well-meaning affirmative action measures aimed at addressing racial disparities in employment face stiff political opposition from dominant groups, thereby hindering social and economic inclusion. Race-based employment and economic opportunity discrimination undermines the principle of the equality of opportunity for development and remains a major obstacle to fulfilling the RTD globally.

Another major challenge to combating racism is the **absence or inadequacy of mechanisms and tools for measurement, assessment and accountability**. We cannot tackle a problem that we cannot properly identify, document, or measure.Research and racially disaggregated information are vital to anti-racism policies, and assessment mechanisms are essential to identifying and remedying incidents of racial discrimination. Despite calls by several UN human rights experts for disaggregated data for groups protected by international law, only limited attention has been focused on collecting and disaggregating data on discrimination affecting racial and ethnic populations.

A key theme that has emerged in our Mechanism’s study on racism and the right to development is the absence, or inadequacy, of indicators for assessing racial discrimination and the effectiveness of national and international anti-racism laws, policies, and programs. For example, our understanding of the links between race and health status, race and vulnerability to disease, race and gender, and race and poverty remains limited by the lack of disaggregated information on race. According to the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, “[t]he primary impediment to understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the right to adequate housing has been the lack of disaggregated data to show the impact in terms of gender, race and caste or along other lines.” While available disaggregated data highlights the racial disparities present in prevention, infection, and treatment of COVID-19 in many States, the lack of uniform, universal disaggregated data also compounds the impact on marginalized racialized communities.

To address this information deficit States must collect and publish disaggregated data that considers race and other social determinants to highlight existing disparities. States must also encourage international cooperation and strategies for preventing and combatting systemic social discrimination. States and international organizations must do more to adopt robust accountability measures such as Race Disparity Audits (RDAs) and Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) at national and local levels. Information and data from such assessments should be easily assessable and widely available for use by all levels of government, civil society, and international actors.

**The right to development as framework for combating racism**

I will now address the second question about the right to development as an important framework for combating racism and for the promotion of racial equality and justice.

Anti-racism, non-discrimination, and equality of opportunity for development are central pillars of the right to development. The Declaration on the Right to Development (DRTD) enjoins states to take resolute steps to eradicate the violations of human rights of peoples affected by *racism* and *racial discrimination*. The elimination of racism through the principle of equality of opportunity for development is therefore recognized as essential to fulfilling the RTD and achieving the SDGs.

The Declaration on the Right to Development, and the Right to Development Agenda emerged in the context of the “global United Nations” as formerly colonized nations became independent and gained representation at UN and other international organizations. These new voices, mostly from the Global South and formerly colonized countries, played a transformative role in expanding the economic, social, and cultural rights provisions in international human rights law. They called for the transformation of the global economic order which they believed was not conducive for their development. These debates over these “second generation” rights were characterized by demands for economic and social justice.

Anti-racism and self-determination were central to these demands. Provisions to address racial discrimination and the obstacles it poses to global social and economic development have figured prominently in several development-related instruments including the Declaration on the Establishment of a New Economic Order (DENEO, 1974), the Charter on the Economic Rights and Duties of States (CERDS, 1974) and the DRTD. The DENEO recognized racial discrimination as one the “greatest obstacles to the full emancipation and progress of the developing countries and all the peoples involved.” Similarly, CERDS proclaimed the right and duty of all States, individually and collectively, to eliminate racial discrimination in all forms as a prerequisite for development.

The Declaration on the Right to Development therefore provides a road map for promoting justice and dignity for all, and for combating racism in all its manifestations through the principle of the equality of opportunity for development. The DRTD affirms that “equality of opportunity for development is a prerogative both of nations and of individuals who make up nations.”

Racism and racial discrimination are barriers to the operationalization of the RTD in the context of state obligations and international cooperation as outlined in the DRTD. At a *national* level, racism fractures the social cohesion of the society and impacts the wellbeing of vulnerable groups. Racial prejudices and systemic racial discrimination affect the wellbeing of racialized or ethnic groups by denying them equitable access to social services (health, education, social protection, etc.), economic opportunities, justice, safety, and security. These effects of racism exacerbate poverty and inequalities. On an *international* level, racism and racial discrimination can result in the deprivation of transnational economic opportunities for individuals and of foreign direct investment and relief from debt for poor countries. Discrimination based on national origin, ethnicity or religion limits the freedom of individuals to emigrate or access better educational or economic opportunities outside of their country of origin.

Racial inequalities and disparities are evident in many developmental areas including access to quality education, employment, justice, health, housing, social security, access to political participation, access to basic needs such as food, safe drinking water, and equal protection against the ravages of climate disasters. Minoritized racial and ethnic groups are generally further behind advantaged racial and ethnic groups in poverty, economic growth, and access to clean water and food, thus, an intersectional lens is necessary for exposing compound discrimination. The discussion below outlines some of these racial disparities and their implications for the RTD.

In our forthcoming study, the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development addresses six areas where racism has direct impact on the rights to developments and offer contract recommendations to States on how to address these challenges. These areas of impact include *Health and COVID-19, Housing, Employment, Education, Policing and Administration of Justice, Political Exclusion and Alienation,* International Cooperation and Global Partnerships.

**Concluding Remarks**

Despite the challenges that I have outlined, there are also promising signs that this moment of global racial reckoning offers momentum and new opportunities for combatting racism. In these efforts Civil Society Organizations play a crucial role of holding governments and international organizations accountable to their human rights obligations and commitments to non-discrimination and equality of opportunity for development using UN mechanisms including treaty body mechanisms and the special procedures. “As societies become ever more multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural, we need greater investments in inclusivity and cohesion to harness the benefits of diversity for all humanity rather than perceiving it as a threat.” The international community must reaffirm commitments to universal human rights and common values that enshrine equality and dignity for all.

I thank you for listening