

Human Rights Council
20th Session

**Panel on the promotion and protection of human rights in a
multicultural context, including through
combating xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance**

Date and Venue

Friday 29 June 2012 from 10:00 to 13:00 hours in Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Mandate

On 29 September 2011, the Human Rights Council at its 18th Session adopted resolution A/HRC/RES/18/20 entitled “Panel on the promotion and protection of human rights in a multicultural context, including through combating xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance”.¹ In paragraph 3 of that resolution, the Council ‘decid[ed] to convene, within existing resources, at its twentieth session, a panel discussion on the promotion and protection of human rights in a multicultural context, including through combating xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance.’

Background

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirms that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination is the principal international instrument to prevent, combat and eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, urged all Governments to take immediate measures and to develop strong policies to prevent and combat all forms and manifestations of racism, xenophobia or related intolerance, where necessary by enactment of appropriate legislation, including penal measures, and by the establishment of national institutions to combat such phenomena.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration also urged States to take measures to eliminate the increasing acts of racism and xenophobia in many societies and to promote greater harmony and tolerance in all societies.²

The concept of culture - and multiculturalism - in particular, has been considered by the United Nations. Culture has been broadly regarded by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as “the set of distinctive

¹A/HRC/RES/18/20.

² United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000.

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spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.”³

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity addresses, amongst other things, the “challenge” of cultural diversity: that is, ensuring harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as a willingness to live together.

In 2005, Member States of UNESCO adopted the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions⁴ which recalls that cultural diversity, flourishing within a framework of democracy, tolerance, social justice and mutual respect between peoples and cultures, is indispensable for peace and security at the local, national and international levels.

The UNESCO Convention celebrates the importance of cultural diversity for the full realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other universally recognized instruments. There is a link or interaction between cultural diversity or multiculturalism and human rights. There is awareness in the Convention that cultural diversity is strengthened by the free flow of ideas, and that it is nurtured by constant exchanges and interaction between cultures.

The importance of respect and understanding for religious and cultural diversity throughout the world has also been reaffirmed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome adopted by the General Assembly.⁵

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and the 2009 Durban Review Conference⁶ also considered issues of cultural rights, cultural diversity and multiculturalism and their link to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.⁷

Paragraph 5 of the Declaration “affirms the great importance...attach[ed] to the values of solidarity, respect, tolerance and multiculturalism, which constitute the moral ground and inspiration for ...[the] worldwide struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance...”

³ Preamble to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001.

⁴ Approved by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on 20 October 2005.

⁵ Resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005

⁶ See e.g. A/CONF.189/12, paras. 2, 8; Ibid. Programme of Action, paras. 14, 47, 79, 171-172; A/CONF.211/8, paras. 12-13.

⁷ The preamble to the Declaration reaffirms that “cultural diversity is a cherished asset for the advancement and welfare of humanity at large and should be valued, enjoyed, genuinely accepted and embraced as a permanent feature which enriches our societies.”

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These documents recognize the value and diverse cultural heritage of various victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and note their positive contributions to societies around the world.⁸

The Declaration urges States to recognize the challenges that people of different socially constructed races, colours, descent, national or ethnic origins, religions and languages experience in seeking to live together and to develop harmonious multiracial and multicultural societies.⁹

States are urged in the Programme of Action to ensure that their political and legal systems reflect the multicultural diversity within their societies and, where necessary, to improve democratic institutions so that they are more fully participatory and avoid marginalization, exclusion and discrimination against specific sectors of society.¹⁰

Awareness-raising campaigns, multicultural education, intercultural exchanges and dialogue are also emphasized, and the role and participation of civil society, non-governmental organizations, youth, and media in fighting racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are highlighted.¹¹

In implementing their thematic mandates, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief, and the Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, for example, invariably address issues of xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance facing multicultural societies or in a multicultural context.

The work of organizations such as the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations also focus on the challenges associated with cultural and religious diversity, multiculturalism and ensuring non-discrimination in contemporary societies around the world.

The former Commission on Human Rights and its successor Human Rights Council have also addressed issues of discrimination, including on the basis of religion or belief. Between 1999 and 2010, a series of resolutions entitled “Combating defamation of religions” focused on issues of hatred, discrimination, intolerance and acts of violence motivated by religious intolerance as well as means of encouraging “understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief”.

In March 2011, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution A/HRC/RES/16/18 entitled “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief”. It calls for strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a culture of tolerance and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs. The resolution also emphasizes measures such as increasing inter-faith and inter-cultural efforts, including the open

⁸See e.g. A/CONF.189/12, paras. 32, 33, 34, 37, 40, 41, 42, 46...67.

⁹Ibid., para. 171.

¹⁰Ibid., para. 61.

¹¹Ibid, paras. 88 and 217.

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public debate of ideas, as well as inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue, at the local, national and international levels.

Focus and objectives

Resolution 18/20 recalls that cultural diversity, flourishing within a framework of democracy, tolerance, social justice and mutual respect between peoples and cultures is indispensable for peace and security at the local, national and international levels.

It also recognizes the importance of cultural diversity for the full realization of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other universally recognized instruments and the associated contribution that diverse cultures have been making to the development and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Human Rights Council in this resolution states that multiculturalism, solidarity, respect and tolerance can play an important role in the promotion and protection of human rights by combating xenophobia, violence and discrimination. In particular, the promotion and upholding of tolerance, respect, pluralism and diversity are essential for the promotion and protection of human rights in multicultural contexts and for combating racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination.

Resolution 18/20 emphasizes that the universal promotion and protection of human rights, including cultural rights, and that mutual respect for cultural diversity should reinforce each other. It also stresses the importance of adopting policies that ensure non-discrimination and equitable access to social, political and economic rights, thus reducing disadvantage and inequality.

The panel aims to provide for an informative and engaging exchange of views on the promotion and protection of human rights in a multicultural context, including through combating xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance. Panelists will be invited to present their views and experiences on multiculturalism and how to address different cultural differences and accommodate diverse cultures at both the national and international level.

In keeping with United Nations practice, the panel will also strive to achieve a gender balance and cultural/regional/geographic representation with regard to invited panelists.

Speakers

Chairperson: **Ms. Laura Dupuy Lasserre**, President of the Human Rights Council

Opening Statement: **Ms. Kyung-wha Kang**, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights (tbc)

Moderator: **H.E. Ambassador Hisham Badr**, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Egypt to the United Nations Office at Geneva

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Panelists:

Mr. Doudou Diène (Senegal) Independent Expert on the situation in Côte d'Ivoire and former United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Mr. Alain Godonou, Director of the Division of Thematic Programmes for Diversity, Development and Dialogue at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris

Mr. Mario Marazziti (Italy) Journalist and Spokesperson and Member of the International Board of the Community of Sant'Egidio

Mr. Gurharpal Singh (United Kingdom) Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and Professor of Inter-Religious Relations and Development at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Ms. Mona Zulficar (Egypt) Member of the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council and Member of the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights

Modalities and format

Panelists shall make presentations of approximately 10 minutes each. These presentations will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots of 60 minutes each (45 minutes for comments and questions from the floor, followed by 15 minutes for comments and replies by panelists).

Representatives of Member States shall have 3 minutes for interventions while observers shall have 2 minutes. Priority will be given to regional and group statements in accordance with the practice of the Human Rights Council.

Time will also be allocated so that the moderator can make concluding remarks.

International organizations, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGO) are encouraged to participate in the discussion and contribute to the debate, subject to the modalities and the practice of the Council. NGO coordination is strongly encouraged to maximize the use of time.

Outcome

The panel discussion is aimed at raising awareness and understanding among stakeholders of the Human Rights Council and the international community at large. It is an opportunity to exchange views and discuss policies and measures to promote and protect human rights in a multicultural context, including through combating xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance.

A summary of the panel discussion will be prepared and submitted to a future session of the Human Rights Council.

18.06.2012