

# National Action Plans against Racial Discrimination

**“Despite our best efforts in the name and for the sake of human rights, despite guarantees in international and national law, discrimination and inequality continue to affect countless human beings in all regions of the world. In too many countries a failure to understand or accommodate diversity and change often leads to ostracism and even violence against groups and individuals deemed to be outsiders, or culturally, or ethnically, or socially, or even biologically inferior.”**

*Ms. Navi Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

## The prohibition of racial discrimination

Non-discrimination and equality before the law and of the law constitute fundamental principles of international human rights law.

The prohibition of racial discrimination is enshrined in all core international human rights instruments and, according to the International Court of Justice, constitutes an *erga omnes* obligation.

At the 2001 World Conference against Racism, States declared that the fight against racism is an international priority for *all* nations in this third millennium.

Nevertheless, racial and ethnic discrimination occur on a daily basis, hindering progress for millions of people around the world. From denying individuals the basic principles of equality and non-discrimination to fuelling ethnic hatred that may lead to genocide, racism and intolerance destroy lives and communities.

An acknowledgment of the existence of the phenomenon is a necessary precondition for the fight against discrimination.

No effort should be spared by States to live up to their international obligation to prohibit and stop racial discrimination by any person, groups or organisations, without any distinction between public and private actors.

## What is a National Action Plan Against Racial Discrimination?

A National Action Plan against Racial Discrimination (NAPARD) constitutes a comprehensive programme of activities aimed at progressively bringing about improvements in the promotion of racial equality.

Several States have already developed national human rights action plans, identifying the steps the State is willing to undertake in order to improve the promotion and protection of human rights in general.

Just like with human rights in general, genuine improvements in the fight against racial discrimination require special measures, resources and long-term efforts. A NAPARD is an action-oriented document which, instead of setting forth claims and vague promises, sets out practical goals, devises programmes and activities to ensure the achievement of these goals, allocates sufficient resources, and develops evaluation mechanisms, all with the aim of eliminating racial discrimination.

A NAPARD will likely trigger activities in many areas of public administration as well as in the private sphere, where racial discrimination is also present. Each NAPARD will set specific goals, objectives and actions, determine the responsible State bodies, target dates and performance indicators for each objective.

A NAPARD is therefore a realistic and pragmatic approach towards the elimination of racial discrimination, which recognizes that the promotion of racial equality involves more than identifying alleged wrongdoers or adopting legislation prohibiting discrimination.

While certain general principles apply to all national action plans against racial discrimination, no uniform approach can be applied to all States. A NAPARD needs to be adapted to the historical and legal circumstances of the State where it will be developed and implemented. It is up to each State to decide what policies, programmes and activities shall be put in place to achieve its general goals in the fight against racial discrimination.

## Why should States develop National Action Plans against Racial Discrimination?

The prohibition of racial discrimination places obligations on States and tasks them with eradicating discrimination in the public and private spheres, and requires them to adopt special measures to eliminate conditions which cause or help to perpetuate racial discrimination.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in June 1993, already recommended that States should consider the desirability of drawing up a national action plan identifying steps whereby States would improve the promotion and protection of human rights.

In 2001, the World Conference against Racism encouraged States to develop or elaborate national action plans to promote diversity, equality, equity, social justice, equality of opportunity and the participation of all. And in April 2009, the Durban Review Conference reaffirmed the call on States to formulate national policies and action plans to prevent, combat and eradicate racial discrimination.

By developing comprehensive and effective national action plans against racial discrimination, States demonstrate that they are resolved and committed to countering the challenges and obstacles they face to eliminate racial discrimination. And by doing so, they comply with their international human rights obligations, which require them to take measures to give effect to relevant rights enshrined in human rights instruments.

By adopting of a NAPARD, States not only reiterate their commitment to eliminating racial discrimination, they also turn that commitment into realistic activities aimed at reaching achievable targets.

## The work of OHCHR

The struggle against racism is a matter of priority for the international community and is at the heart of the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The OHCHR has developed guidelines on national human rights action plans as well as guidelines for national plans of action for human rights education.

The Office has provided assistance to several States on how to develop National Action Plan against Racial Discrimination, follows up on the progress of various National Action Plan Against Racial Discrimination and has taken stock of national experiences in developing a "Guide on Developing National Action Plan against Racial Discrimination."

OHCHR can provide technical assistance to States that are currently developing, implementing or considering the development of a National Action Plan against Racial Discrimination, upon their request.

OHCHR remains in contact with national institutions created for the promotion of racial equality as well as with regional and international bodies working on equality, and works to further the struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Through the Anti-Discrimination Section, OHCHR builds national capacity to eliminate racism through advisory services, conducts research and analysis on racism, services intergovernmental and expert mechanisms addressing the situation of victim groups, and engages with the wider community forging partnerships, raising awareness and mobilizing support for anti-discrimination measures, such as legislation, policies and programmes.

## Normative standards and further reading

- [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#)
- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)
- [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)
- [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#)
- [Durban Review Conference Outcome Document](#)
- [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, general recommendation No. 32 \(2009\) on the meaning and scope of special measures in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Racial Discrimination](#)
- [OHCHR Guide on Developing National Action Plan Against Racial Discrimination](#)
- [OHCHR Handbook on National Human Rights Plan of Action](#)
- [OHCHR Guidelines for National Plans of Action for Human Rights Education](#)
- [Ad Hoc Committee on the elaboration of complimentary standards](#)
- [Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#)
- [Barcelona Traction, Light and Power Company, Limited, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1970, p.3](#)