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UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities

STATEMENT

to the

27th virtual session of the Working Group of experts on people of African descent

“The Urgency of Now: Systemic Racism and the Lessons of 2020”

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The United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (“the Network”) was created by decision of the Secretary-General at the 6 March 2012 meeting of the Policy Committee, with the main goal of providing a platform to address issues of racial discrimination and the protection of national or ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, including issues of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender, disability, age and other grounds. The Network brings together more than 20 UN Departments, Agencies, Programmes and Funds.

Meeting on 4 November, the Network’s Senior leadership emphasized the troubling developments of 2020 – including both the events leading to the global Black Lives Matter engagements, as well as the very serious impacts of COVID-19 seen in minority communities. The senior officials emphasized that the developments of 2020 have created opportunities for both advancing protection and participation of minorities and for combatting racism and related intolerance which are clearly inter-related and inter-connected. They also recalled the strong expectations on the part of the public-at-large for heightened, meaningful and effective UN engagement in these areas, and that there is now more than ever an urgency to the moment.

The UN entities, members of the Network, committed to reinvigorating and intensifying the work of the Network, *inter alia* responding to the various calls by the Secretary General, including the Call to Action on Human Rights, and the letter to staff of June 2020, also in light of upcoming key anniversaries and processes 2021+, such as the mid-term review of the Decade of people of African Descent, 20th anniversary of the World Conference Against Racism, and the 30th anniversary of the 1992 UN Minorities Declaration.

The senior officials also noted that racism, discrimination and diversity are now matters of attention internally across the UN, and are in many cases the subject of ongoing scrutiny and processes in-agency now. They committed to linkages between these internal reform processes and external policy and protection work.

On 7 December, the Network will convene to finalize its 2021+ Work Plan, a detailed programme of work building on the commitments made by the Network’s senior level. This work will include, *inter alia*:

1. Providing practical guidance to UN Country Teams and other field-based entities on measures to combat racial discrimination and strengthen protection of minorities, including gender dimensions and other intersectional aspects, in particular by documenting and highlighting practical examples, and with a view *inter alia* to complementing the forthcoming UN Sustainable Development Goals Operational Guide on Leaving No One Behind. This material should particularly inform – and be attentive to -- COVID-19 response, as well as to the development of UN country frameworks and programming.
2. Advancing attention to and action on combatting racial discrimination and strengthening protection of minorities, including in displacement, security, peacekeeping and the protection of civilians in conflict-affected settings, and in the context of climate change.
3. Deepening substantive understanding and engagement of law, policy, norms, facts and good practices in the areas of expertise of the UN Network as a whole, and its participating agencies and entities in particular. In 2021, this shall include attention to tackling racial discrimination and strengthening protection of minorities in areas including criminal justice and law enforcement, taking note in particular of the views and concerns expressed during the Human Rights Council’s June 2020 urgent debate and Resolution 43/1 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, as well as advancing more broadly the minority protection agenda as per the Secretary General’s February 2020 Call to Action on human rights.

Finally, noting that today is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Network also commits to advancing and deepening its work on all aspects of intersectionality with respect to its minority rights and combating racism mandate, taking into account the rights of women and girls, as well as other relevant gendered aspects.

The Network herewith expresses interest in deepening and strengthening its cooperation with the WGEPAD, and commits to find and maximize early opportunities to explore synergies and complementarities of action.

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