

Statement of Ms. K. P. Ashwini Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 21 March 2023 to all members of the General Assembly

As the sixth Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, appointed by the Human Rights Council in 2022, I am circulating the following statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to all members of the General Assembly.

I would like to firstly pay tribute today to all the victims of the Sharpeville massacre on this day in 1960, as well as their family members. The atrocities perpetrated against victims and survivors of racial discrimination must always be in the front of our minds.

I welcome the General Assembly's debate today on the urgency of combatting racism and racial discrimination, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes clear that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms, without distinction of any kind, including race and colour. It recognises that all people are equal before the law and entitled without discrimination to equal protection of the law and provides that all human rights must be afforded to everyone without discrimination.

In the 75 years that have passed since the adoption of the Declaration, the international community has developed additional international standards on racial justice and equality, including the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, among others. These are crucial normative standards, upon which my mandate is grounded.

Despite the development of such important standards, the world envisaged at the time of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, free from racism and discrimination, remains elusive. Many countries across the world continue to lack comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and racist hate speech is proliferating online and offline around the world. Racially marginalised groups continue to bear a disproportionate burden of global crises, including COVID-19 and its aftermath, poverty and uneven economic development and the climate crisis. Police brutality against members of racially marginalised groups continues with impunity; migrants around the world face racism, xenophobia in multiple forms; those from racially marginalized groups face persistent discrimination in relation to a range of economic, social and cultural rights; victims of racism and discrimination face, often insurmountable barriers to accessing justice. It is essential to acknowledge the intersectional dimension of racial discrimination specially gender. The fight against racism has indeed never been so urgent.

Being a former untouchable, my lived experiences of discrimination, marginalisation and struggles shapes my conviction and approach towards the fight against racism and discrimination.

On this day, as UN Special Rapporteur, I call on States to urgently recommit to the fight for racial justice, to summon the political will that is needed to effectively address the legacies of colonialism and slavery, and to fight the many contemporary manifestations of racism and discrimination.

As Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, I am highly committed to contributing to the fight for racial justice for all those from racially and ethnically marginalised groups and I intend to take an approach that addresses intersectional forms of discrimination and "leaves no-one behind" and call on States to fully cooperate with my mandate.