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**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Written statement* submitted by Jammu and Kashmir Council for Human Rights (JKCHR), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Racism - rise of the far right within Europe, the United States of America and Asia

Societies around the world have had to grapple with racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance, since we can remember. Unfortunately, it has become a cancer, where measures are taken to prevent it, but there is no actual cure in sight as of now. And in recent times, we have globally witnessed the resurgence of racism, xenophobia and intolerance in general, all over the world, which is a worrying sign for the global village that we now live in.

This kind of behaviour or mind-set stems from ignorance. Having a lack of understanding of other people and different cultures to our own can lead to such treatment of others. Sometimes, people simply fear what they do not know, or what is unfamiliar. But all of this can also be easily intensified depending on the surrounding environment. For example, we have seen a strong reaction towards immigrants and those seeking refuge within Europe, in recent times, with mostly black and Muslim immigrants from African and Arab/Middle Eastern countries feeling unwelcome.

And this has led to some factions in society to believe that these people coming into their country are either terrorists, because they come from war torn countries, or that they are have come to ultimately steal their jobs or cheat the system out of benefits. Perhaps it is their own insecurities that lead them to believing this. But the fact that these immigrants and refugees are different to them, makes these immigrants and refugees an easy target. And unfortunately, racism and xenophobia are happening within schools as well.

In a recent case in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a Syrian school boy in West Yorkshire was subjected to severe bullying by another school boy, simply because the Syrian boy was of a different race. The boy was also subjected to water being thrown on his face, which is significant because it reminds us of waterboarding, a form of torture that has been used in the past by the United States of America, in order to obtain information from suspected terrorists. This case, with the help of social media, gained national as well as international interest and it finally went to the authorities.

Unsurprisingly, Tommy Robinson, a far-right activist who had formed the far-right party EDL (English Defence League) tried to take advantage of the situation by claiming that the Syrian boy had previously attacked two schoolgirls. But the claims have not been proven. It is interesting to note that the far-right activist claimed the Syrian boy had attacked girls. It simply plays into a stereotype that has formed in the west, where Muslim men and men from Arab and Middle Eastern countries have an oppressive mind-set, which is why they cannot respect women.

The young Syrian boy's sister, who also went to the same school, was also subjected to bullying. Her hijab (headscarf) was forcefully removed. A case like this is not isolated. And this sort of behaviour is not restricted to the playground either. Shockingly, we are even seeing adult men and women behaving like this on the streets and even on public transport. As a society we are becoming so intolerant, we begin to perceive anything different from us in a negative manner. Sadly, we are also losing tolerance, empathy and simply cannot be bothered to understand anything or anyone that might be different to us. It is easier to not know, and to reject it. But this sort of behaviour can be fuelled by an unstable or hostile environment as well.

We have seen populist movements prosper across the globe, as well as the rise of the far right within Europe and the United States of America. Also, the ongoing crisis of Brexit within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. All of these are perfect conditions for racism, and xenophobia to thrive. When people feel marginalised and ignored, hatred and anger can easily fester, and ultimately, scapegoats are found. As we have recently seen in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, post Brexit has led to a very hostile environment, where there has been a rise of attacks on not just refugees, but people of different religions, and colour of the skin. A few cases in the media also highlighted attacks on Eastern European, Polish immigrants, indicating that it was not just the colour of the skin that was a target. Anyone that was not typically

“English,” could find themselves a target. Racism has always been a part of every society. But certain situations make it perfect for racism, xenophobia and intolerance to ripen.

Another example is the anxiety that minority groups have felt post Donald Trump’s win. President Trump’s election campaign was all about putting America first, but he was not talking about putting all people first. Donald Trump’s ignorant and racist comments about different countries and people were in bad taste and no doubt, helped to divide a country. He referred to Mexicans as killer and rapists, and with his travel ban on Muslims from several countries because those people could potentially pose as threat. The President was not only grossly stereotyping people from other countries, he was also tapping into anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments that already existed. And when you have leaders of the Western world use this type of language and put labels on people, it is bound to fan the flames of hatred.

Within the west, we have also witnessed a rise in anti-Semitic attitude. Unsurprisingly, there have been several cases of memorial and grave desecration, and attacks reported in Europe. But the Labour Party in United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has had serious allegations of anti-Semitism levelled at several Members of Parliament. Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, has vowed to stamp out all forms of racism. But many critics are left unconvinced as this has been an ongoing issue for quite some time now.

This highlights how serious racism has become, if it has seeped into party politics, and found a home there. The wounds of the holocaust remain raw for many people of the Jewish faith. So, to find their faith under target once again, despite everything that the free world has fought for, must be disheartening. But to see racism within political parties is a great shame. And when it is done by someone in higher authority, then naturally people will take it as a green light for this sort of a behaviour and will ultimately jump on the band wagon.

But if we look beyond the west, we will also find levels of intolerance and racism. Because it would be unfair to see racism as a “white” man/woman’s problem only. If we look towards India, the world’s largest democracy, since December, it has deported 1,300 Rohingya refugees from the country, citing them as a potential threat to their national security. The Rohingya refugees have described a campaign of fear mongering, harassment and intimidation by the Indian government. They have also described mistreatment by locals, because they were not trusted. The government can clear its position by putting it down to national security, but it is deeper rooted than that. It is a xenophobic attitude towards people that are different, that do not share the same nationality, religion or culture. And it is also interesting to note that the current government is driven by a right wing, Hindu nationalist policy, and the Rohingya refugees are Muslims. And despite knowing that these people were seeking refuge because of persecution, the government was still unwilling to shelter them.

We should also highlight the issue of racism within Asian countries as well, which are not really discussed in much detail. Countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and China have generally found it difficult to embrace different races. Most black students that have travelled to Asian countries to study, have often complained of being treated differently, simply because the colour of their skin is darker. And it is hardly surprising that countries such as China and the Republic of Korea have been accused of normalising racism, following some advertisements deemed racist due to the portrayal of black people within it.

Unfortunately, these countries have not taken concrete, active steps to counter racism within their society. Celebrating fair skin and demonising darker skin tones has become the norm. In fact, a lot of variety shows (for entertainment) have used racist content, where black people have been the centre of jokes. And this is a problem deep within society. It has become a mind-set shared by people, which makes it very hard to change. What makes it even more difficult for these societies is the lack of diversity. For example, South Korea’s tv and music industry has flourished in recent times, attracting global interest. But you will not find people of different ethnic backgrounds in the media or the music industry.

When there is no acceptance of other cultures and ethnic backgrounds, it will reflect on all levels. Racism, xenophobia and intolerance is a global issue. But unfortunately, when it comes to looking for solutions, the world finds itself bickering on how to go about it. Clear

examples are follow up to the Durban Declaration, which have been either opposed or boycotted by several countries due to disagreements on the contents and wording. And it is a great shame because if we are not able to stand together on one platform, if we stand divided, then how can we expect to search for ways to bridge the divide among people. The world and its people are evolving. But sadly, racism, xenophobia and intolerance also seem to be growing with time. We all have the right to be treated equally and fairly. Sadly, not all get to feel this and experience it.
