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

Joint written statement* submitted by International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration, International-Lawyers.Org, Meezaan Center for Human Rights, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, International Educational Development, Inc., World Peace Council, non-governmental organizations on the roster

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

[26 May 2025]

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



Racial Discrimination in the Digital Age

I. Introduction

In a world increasingly shaped by digital innovation, climate crises, armed conflicts, and political polarization, racism remains a relentless and evolving global crisis. From hidden algorithms that reinforce bias to the open resurgence of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, anti-Arab racism, and anti-Semitism, racism today manifests in both age-old and novel forms. The international community faces a defining moment: either confront these injustices with collective resolve or risk normalizing a future marred by division and discrimination. The urgency of this issue cannot be overstated.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), adopted unanimously in 2001, remains the most comprehensive international framework to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. However, almost 25 years later, its implementation is uneven and often undermined by selective political will, underfunding, and limited public awareness. The need for public awareness and education to fully implement the DDPA cannot be overstated.

II. Persistent and Emerging Challenges

A. Anti-Black Racism and Global Legacies of Slavery

Anti-Blackness continues to be a global and profoundly systemic problem, rooted in centuries of slavery, colonialism, and racial hierarchy. Despite widespread recognition of the harms of racial discrimination, structural anti-Black racism persists in both overt and covert forms across Europe, the Americas, and Arab countries, cutting across law enforcement, education, housing, healthcare, and labor systems.

Data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) shows alarming disparities in Europe. The 2023 EU-MIDIS II report found that 30% of people of African descent in Europe had experienced racial harassment in the previous five years, with the highest rates reported in Austria (72%), Finland (63%), and Germany (54%). In France, despite legal protections, Afro-descendants continue to face routine identity checks and police profiling. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2022 expressed concern about the "excessive use of force and discriminatory identity checks targeting people of African descent."

In the United States of America, anti-Black racism remains entrenched in the criminal justice and economic systems. According to the United States of America's Sentencing Project's 2023 report, Black Americans make up 38% of the incarcerated population, despite representing only 13% of the total population. Meanwhile, the United States of America's Government Accountability Office (GAO) in 2022 noted significant racial wealth gaps, with Black households holding only 12 cents for every dollar held by white households. Structural disparities in access to healthcare, education, and housing reinforce cycles of disadvantage.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, anti-Black racism often operates in silence, despite its pervasiveness. In Tunisia, following a rise in racist rhetoric from public officials in 2023, Human Rights Watch documented a wave of attacks, arbitrary arrests, and evictions targeting Sub-Saharan African migrants. The UN Committee on Migrant Workers has urged Tunisia and other North African states to investigate and prevent racist attacks and protect migrants' rights.

In Lebanon, Black domestic workers—predominantly women from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sierra Leone—continue to be subjected to systemic abuse under the kafala (sponsorship) system, which ties their legal status to their employer. The International Labor Organization (ILO) and OHCHR have repeatedly called for the abolition of this exploitative system, citing widespread cases of wage theft, physical abuse, and restrictions on movement.

In Jordan, Sudanese and Somali refugees face discrimination in housing and employment. A 2021 study by Refugees International found that nearly 70% of these refugees had experienced racial abuse or been denied services because of their skin color.

Despite the Declaration of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024), implementation and awareness of its objectives remain low in many countries. The 2023 OHCHR midterm review of the Decade highlighted "fragmented engagement" from governments and a lack of sustained political and financial investment in promoting Afro-descendant rights.

B. Racial Discrimination in the Digital Age

Technological innovation is not inherently neutral. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and algorithmic systems reproduce and reinforce structural inequalities without safeguards. AI and other digital technologies are increasingly shaping access to jobs, public services, and legal justice. However, these systems often reflect the racial biases in the societies that create them. The unchecked role of technology in exacerbating discrimination underscores the need for regulation and oversight.

A landmark 2019 study by the United States of America's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) found that facial recognition algorithms were 100 times more likely to misidentify Asian and Black faces than white faces. These inaccuracies are not benign—they lead to wrongful arrests, visa denials, and denial of basic services.

In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, a 2020 report from the London Policing Ethics Panel revealed that predictive policing systems disproportionately flagged Black communities as high-risk, exacerbating existing over-policing and mistrust. In the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the use of algorithmic fraud detection in welfare claims led to the wrongful targeting of thousands of families, disproportionately of migrant background, sparking national and international condemnation.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2021 highlighted growing concerns about biometric surveillance disproportionately affecting African and Middle Eastern migrants at the borders. These practices often violate privacy, due process, and reinforce racialized assumptions of threat.

C. Online Hate Speech and Algorithmic Amplification

Social media platforms and search engines are critical in shaping public opinion and political discourse. However, algorithmic incentives favor divisive content, creating echo chambers where racial hatred and misinformation flourish unchecked.

UNESCO's 2022 report, "The Amplification of Hate," found that Facebook's algorithm was more likely to promote posts containing hate speech than neutral content.

The Global Project Against Hate and Extremism's 2023 findings revealed that over 600 hate groups operate freely across digital platforms, targeting racialized communities, migrants, and religious minorities. Online vitriol often escalates into offline violence: the Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand and the Buffalo supermarket shooting in the United States of America were both fueled by online radicalization.

Marginalized groups are especially vulnerable. Reports by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) show that Black, Muslim, and Roma communities face coordinated online abuse, often without platform moderation or legal redress.

III. Legal and Human Rights Implications

The ongoing and emerging manifestations of racism are clear violations of ICERD, the DDPA, and other binding international legal frameworks. The DDPA offers a comprehensive framework, but its implementation has been slow and politically contested.

Despite the global consensus on the DDPA, implementation remains inconsistent. Some countries have taken concrete steps to align national laws and policies with the Declaration, while others have distanced themselves or failed to take meaningful action. Opposition by a few states—often due to political disagreements or concerns over specific language in the DDPA—has weakened global momentum. Without stronger international cooperation and public education, the goals of the DDPA will remain unmet.

IV. Recommendations

A. Legal Reforms and Institutional Accountability

- Align national legislation with ICERD and the DDPA.
- Establish independent oversight bodies to monitor and address racial discrimination.
- Collect and publish disaggregated data on racial disparities in all sectors.

B. Regulating and Monitoring Digital Discrimination, Online Hate Speech and Misinformation

- Develop UN-wide human rights standards for AI, biometric systems, and algorithmic transparency.
- Require human rights impact assessments and third-party audits for AI technologies.
- Enforce regulations requiring companies to report algorithmic bias and take corrective action.
- Mandate transparency reports from tech platforms regarding hate speech content.
- Strengthen international cooperation on digital platform accountability.

C. Addressing Anti-Black Racism and Structural Inequality

- Develop and implement national action plans against anti-Black racism.
- Ensure comprehensive implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent.
- Provide reparations and institutional reforms in countries with legacies of slavery and colonialism.

D. Protecting Black Domestic Workers under the Kafala System

- Urge MENA states to abolish and replace the kafala system with rights-based labor laws.
- Provide legal pathways for domestic workers to report abuse without fear of deportation.
- Fund shelter, legal aid, and reintegration programs in cooperation with UN bodies.
- Encourage bilateral agreements between the origin and host countries to ensure rights monitoring and accountability.

E. Education and Public Awareness

- Launch global education initiatives on the DDPA and ICERD.
- Include anti-racism modules in school curricula and professional training.
- Promote media literacy to combat online hate.

F. Implementing UN Resolutions and Mandates

OHCHR and the UN Secretariat should fully implement the key resolutions on combating racism adopted by the Human Rights Council under Item 9 and the General Assembly. These resolutions reflect the international community's collective commitment and provide a clear foundation for action.

Therefore, the OHCHR and the Secretariat must act promptly on these clear mandates. Raising visibility and access to the DDPA is not an option but a necessity. People must know the DDPA in order to act on it.

V. Conclusion

Addressing contemporary forms of racism requires urgent and coordinated global action. It is necessary to fully implement international commitments, from the DDPA and ICERD. Moreover, It is imperative to regulate new technologies, dismantle systemic racism, and amplify public understanding of the frameworks that protect all individuals from racial discrimination. Only then can we move closer to a world rooted in equality, dignity, and justice.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), Arab Lawyers Association-UK, Human Rights Defenders (HRD), Brussels Tribunal, Iraqi Committee for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), Organization for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.