



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2005/15
9 February 2005

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixty-first session
Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA
AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION**

Combating defamation of religions

Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2004/6. It contains a brief presentation of the activities carried out by the United Nations, intergovernmental bodies, human rights mechanisms, specialized agencies and programmes, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to support intercultural dialogue, respect and tolerance.

* The late submission of this report is necessitated by the need to reflect the latest information available.

1. In its resolution 2004/6, the Commission on Human Rights called upon the High Commissioner for Human Rights to promote and include human rights aspects in the dialogue among civilizations, inter alia through: (a) integrating them into topical seminars and special debates on the positive contributions of cultures, as well as religious and cultural diversity; (b) collaboration by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with other relevant international organizations in holding joint conferences designed to encourage this dialogue and promote understanding of the universality of human rights and their implementation at various levels.
2. The present report seeks to provide a brief overview of initiatives and activities undertaken by United Nations bodies and human rights mechanisms, OHCHR and specialized agencies that aim at addressing the issue, and at raising awareness on cultural and religious diversity and on their positive contributions.
3. An overview of measures and strategies undertaken by different stakeholders with a view to ensuring inclusive and culturally diverse societies and to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action can be found in the progress report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of relevant recommendations of the recent session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (E/CN.4/2005/16). Also, the report of the Secretary-General on global efforts for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (A/59/375) contains information on activities undertaken by States, United Nations bodies, specialized agencies, international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and youth groups and organizations to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.
4. Tolerance and respect for others are fundamental values enshrined in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in several of its provisions referred to religious freedom as one of the fundamental human rights, stressing, inter alia, that religious intolerance continues to be a serious obstacle to the full enjoyment of all human rights and occurs in different parts of the world. It called upon all Governments to counter intolerance and related violence based on religion or belief and to put into practice the provisions of the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.
5. More recent international documents have reiterated the principles of religious freedom and tolerance inherently connected with the prerequisite of respect for other people's beliefs. The United Nations Millennium Declaration places tolerance among those fundamental values that are essential to international relations in the twenty-first century, namely: freedom, equality, solidarity, respect for nature and shared responsibility. It states, "Human beings must respect one another, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and

between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted.” Also, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action point to an urgent need to adopt practical and workable measures in the areas of prevention, education and protection, legislation, the judiciary and administration in order to counter racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance.

6. Human rights bodies and mechanisms play a key role in highlighting the linkages between human rights, respect and tolerance. The General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights have constantly called for respect and tolerance, thereby encouraging the dialogue among civilizations, a culture of acceptance based on respect for all human rights and for religious diversity, and have stressed the valuable contributions of all religions to modern civilization and the contribution that dialogue among civilizations can make to an improved awareness and understanding of the common values shared by all humankind. Treaty monitoring bodies and special procedures of the Commission also have an important role in this regard.

7. The importance of a continued and strengthened dialogue among religions or beliefs, encompassed by the dialogue among civilizations, to promote greater tolerance, respect and mutual understanding has continuously been stressed by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. In his reports, he has underlined that under the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, Governments, religious bodies and civil society organizations should continue to dialogue at all levels to promote greater tolerance, respect and understanding.

8. The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance has underlined that, despite the commitments made at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance discrimination rooted in colour-based racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Christianophobia and, in general, discrimination against the “other” (be it a migrant, a refugee or a non-citizen) continues on an alarming scale (see A/59/329 and E/CN.4/2005/18). The Special Rapporteur has emphasized the fact that combating religious intolerance requires a determination to pursue and address not only the legal and political aspects of the issue, but also the ideological, cultural and psychological foundations, processes and mechanisms that have contributed to the perpetuation and resurgence of this phenomenon. The Special Rapporteur has constantly called upon States to prepare national programmes to combat these scourges as a matter of urgency. National plans to counter racism and discrimination should take into consideration the cultural depth of racism. The Special Rapporteur has also stressed the urgent need to establish a dialectical link between the fight against racism and discrimination in all its forms and the promotion of dialogue between cultures and religions and the building of “democratic multiculturalism”. The fundamental importance of education in combating prejudice, intolerance, racism and xenophobia has repeatedly been emphasized. In his report to the current session of the Commission he presents, inter alia, an analysis of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and Christianophobia (E/CN.4/2005/18/Add.4).

9. At its tenth session, the Working Group on Minorities of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights addressed specific situations of minorities across the world. Governments provided information on best practices for addressing the problems faced by them. The Working Group examined the situation of religious intolerance against ethnic and religious minorities, including analysis of incidents of related violence, and problems of economic and social marginalization facing Muslims in several parts of the world (see E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/29).

10. At its ninth and tenth sessions, in 2003 and 2004, the Working Group on Minorities decided to encourage the holding of regional or subregional meetings in cooperation with regional mechanisms to continue the work on minority issues with a view to strengthening the national system of protection of human rights. To this end, OHCHR and the Working Group organized two subregional seminars, "Minority rights: cultural diversity and development in Central Asia", held in Bishkek from 27 to 30 October 2004, and "Minority rights: cultural diversity and development in South Asia" held in Kandy, Sri Lanka, from 21 to 24 November 2004. The seminars aimed at enhancing better understanding of international human rights standards for minority protection in the region; empowering NGOs and civil society organizations by providing them with the opportunity to discuss issues of common interest related to minorities; and working with other international and regional organizations in the region with a view to exploring possibilities of future community-led training for minorities and NGOs in the region.

11. OHCHR is providing support to intergovernmental and treaty bodies, as well as special procedures addressing the issues of religious freedom, tolerance, and dialogue among civilizations and cultures. In addition, a substantive effort is also made to raise awareness in this area through public information campaigns, seminars and conferences, training and technical cooperation projects.

12. Education is an indispensable and effective tool for combating fear of human diversity and for changing intolerant attitudes and behaviours. OHCHR, through its programmes on human rights education, aims at promoting respect and tolerance, multisectoral schooling and the incorporation of different historical and cultural perspectives into school curricula. Understanding one's own and other people's human rights is a precondition for participation, mutual exchange, and rejection of stigma and marginalization.

13. In the context of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) (see E/CN.4/2005/98, E/CN.4/2004/93 and A/59/525), OHCHR promoted interreligious and intercultural dialogue through activities in the following areas:¹ facilitating links and information-sharing between the Decade's actors; supporting national capacities for human

¹ For detailed information on the specific activities carried out by OHCHR within the framework of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), see OHCHR, *Annual Report 2003, Implementation of Activities and Use of Funds*, pp. 46-48; OHCHR, *Annual Appeal 2004*; OHCHR, *Annual Appeal 2005*, pp. 101-103.

rights education; assisting human rights grass-roots education activities; developing human rights training materials; and disseminating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights worldwide. Particular attention was paid to education as a preventive tool against racism, discrimination, intolerance and violence.

14. The initiative “Young people drawing for human rights”, launched in November 2003, is an example of the Office’s activities in this area. Drawing contests for children and youngsters in schools have been organized in countries where OHCHR has a field presence. The programme was implemented in Mongolia, Colombia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mexico, and South Africa, and it was accompanied by a substantive discussion on human rights in the participating schools. The winning drawings were produced in July 2004 as OHCHR posters in the six United Nations languages.

15. On 21 March 2004, to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, OHCHR organized, in collaboration with the United Nations Office at Geneva, a panel discussion on “Intercultural dialogue: a means to combat racism”. It was guided by the focus of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action on dialogue among nations, cultures, religions and people as a powerful tool to prevent and combat racial discrimination.

16. OHCHR supported initiatives aimed at promoting tolerance based on the respect for human rights and religious diversity and it has taken part in several initiatives aimed at fostering the debate on the positive aspects and the enrichment of the dialogue among cultures and religions. In May 2004, OHCHR contributed to the Forum of Cultures held in Barcelona, Spain, at the initiative of the Barcelona City Council, the Catalan Autonomous Government and the Government of Spain, with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In July 2004, an OHCHR representative moderated a session on the “Dialogue among Civilizations” at the United Nations Graduate Study Programme in Geneva.

17. Within the framework of the World Youth Festival, OHCHR organized and sponsored a round table for young people under the title “Stand up against racism!”, held in Barcelona in August 2004. Six young panellists from different backgrounds and continents were invited to present a successful initiative or project aimed at promoting cultural diversity. The common thread running through all the interventions was the role of young people as potential vehicles for change. The purpose of the round table was to sensitize young people about the damage caused by racial discrimination; giving greater visibility to groups that are victims of discrimination; and sharing knowledge about successful anti-discrimination projects.

18. OHCHR participated in a global meeting of experts in the field of education for tolerance, intercultural education and human rights education related to religion or belief, organized by the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Norwegian Committee for UNESCO, held from 2 to 4 September 2004. It was one of the follow-up activities to the recommendations of the 2001 Madrid Consultative Conference on Tolerance, Non-Discrimination and Freedom of Religion or Belief in Relation with School Education. The purpose of this meeting was to identify and analyse obstacles and promising pedagogical

approaches to fostering tolerance, respect and recognition of “the other” in relation to religion or belief through school education; to explore the relationship between intercultural/interfaith education, human rights education (learning about freedom of religion or belief) and other civic education; and to provide a forum for exchange of ideas, experience and material between educators, experts and decision makers in these fields.

19. At the initiative of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, an “Expert Seminar on Defamation of Religions and the Global Combat against Racism: Anti-Semitism, Christianophobia, Islamophobia” was held from 11 to 14 November 2004 in Barcelona. OHCHR and the UNESCO Centre of Catalonia co-organized this event, which was convened to promote better understanding of the issue of defamation of religions. The seminar included an analysis of recent developments as compared to traditional causes of discrimination on the basis of religion, as well as an analysis of the contemporary manifestations of this type of discrimination. The meeting aimed also at facilitating information-sharing and dialogue on the issue of defamation of religions by participants/representatives of the various religions and at formulating proposals for action against religious bias at all levels (see E/CN.4/2005/18/Add.4).

20. OHCHR co-sponsored a seminar on “Human rights: bridging the cultural divide”, held in Milan, Italy, on 15 and 16 November 2004. The seminar provided an opportunity for a multidisciplinary debate on the issues of justice, security, promotion and protection of human rights in a multicultural world, as well as on the relationship between diverse cultures. The need to re-emphasize the notion of universality of human rights in a culturally diversified world was underlined. The High Commissioner for Human Rights addressed the seminar.

21. Support, in the form of small grants administered by the “Assisting Communities Together” (ACT) project, a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and OHCHR, was given for grass-roots youth projects to promote respect for diversity in schools and through non-formal education. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/212 requesting OHCHR to continue and expand ACT, OHCHR launched in October 2003, in cooperation with UNDP, the fourth phase of the project. Human rights educational initiatives aiming at combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance were selected in 10 countries. NGOs’ projects addressing discrimination against indigenous populations were awarded grants in Nicaragua, Colombia, Uruguay and Cambodia. Public awareness-raising activities to promote and enhance tolerance, a culture of peace and coexistence between ethnic groups are being implemented in Chad, Burundi and Romania. Efforts to promote and protect the rights of the disabled, eradicate gender discrimination and discrimination based on sexual orientations are being carried out through public information campaigns and training workshops in Mongolia, Serbia and Montenegro, Kyrgyzstan and Mauritania. OHCHR also provided assistance to six national human rights institutions from Mexico, Venezuela, Fiji, India, Mongolia and Niger to implement activities in the field of awareness-raising on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

22. A Fellowship Programme for persons belonging to national or ethnic religious and linguistic minorities has been launched by the OHCHR. The aim of this initiative is to give such persons, particularly young minority women and men, an opportunity to gain knowledge in the

field of international human rights in general, and on minority rights in particular. The Fellowship Programme is intended to assist organizations and communities. Five Fellows will be chosen to participate in this first Programme, to be held from late February to the beginning of June 2005.

23. In 2003, a grant agreement between OHCHR and the Government of Argentina to finance the elaboration of the National Action Plan against Racism was concluded. A preliminary draft of the National Plan contains an extensive analysis of the situation of the different religious communities in Argentina and frames concrete steps which the Government will undertake to enhance interreligious tolerance and dialogue. These measures cover various areas, ranging from the normative to the educational.

24. OHCHR, in cooperation with the New Zealand Race Relations Conciliator, organized a "Roundtable on International Race Relations", held in Auckland, New Zealand, from 2 to 5 February 2004. Participants identified the wide variety of causes of religious intolerance and religious ignorance as amongst the key challenges to national institutions in combating racial discrimination in the twenty-first century. They also recognized strong links between religious intolerance and racism grounded in specific historical contexts and deeply affected by more recent international and national events. National institutions could affect race relations by: contributing to a clear definition of discrimination and developing mechanisms for the protection of religious rights and freedoms; developing innovative strategies, including community dialogue; developing race relations strategies that take into account the need for dialogue frameworks, including forums for religious and other leaders to engage with communities affected by religious and racial intolerance; building mechanisms to reinforce tolerance and respect for religious freedom; and undertaking research on racial and religious intolerance.

25. In Sierra Leone, where the President of the Republic recently received an international award for the peaceful coexistence of Islam and Christianity in the country, the Human Rights Section of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone has consistently facilitated dialogue between religious communities. Regular lectures and seminars for Christian and Muslim religious leaders have been organized on topics such as children's rights, women's rights, issues regarding domestic violence, under-age marriages, and support to education for girl children.

26. UNESCO has actively pursued the implementation of the United Nations Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and the relevant provisions of its Executive Board decisions, in particular with a view to encouraging and facilitating dialogue among civilizations and formulating ways and means to promote dialogue among civilizations in the activities of the United Nations in various fields. It has fostered knowledge about civilizations and cultures, encouraging the promotion of common universal values through a spectrum of activities.

27. UNESCO and automaker Daimler Chrysler organized the "Mondialogo School Contest" to engage 15- to 18-year-old students in thinking about ideas for conflict resolution and intercultural dialogue. An Internet portal offers all those interested in intercultural exchange a

forum for communication and information accessible regardless of time and place. The aim of the global contest is to encourage dialogue between students and develop understanding, tolerance and friendship among people from different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Participants, who came from 126 countries, have been paired to work together across continents on a joint project.

28. UNESCO organized several conferences focused on the dialogue among cultures and civilizations. The Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on “Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations for Peace and Sustainable Development” was held in Hanoi from 20 to 22 December 2004. It was conceived as a forum for direct and open interaction among institutions and individuals to discuss strategies and measures for political action at different levels. The Regional Summit on Inter-religious and Inter-ethnic Dialogue, held in Tirana on 9 and 10 December 2004, focused on the contribution of religion and multi-ethnicity to the dialogue among civilizations and cultures. One of its aims was to examine and assess how religion and multi-ethnicity can be put constructively to work through dialogue in the areas of expertise of UNESCO - namely education, culture, the sciences and communication, and information - as an important contribution to the stability and progress of the Balkans. The high-level conference “Eurasia in the 21st Century - Dialogue of Cultures or Conflict of Civilizations?”, held in Issyk Kul, Kyrgyzstan, on 10 and 11 June 2004, focused, inter alia, on the topics of shared values, cultural diversity and heritage.

29. The UNESCO Integrated Strategy to Combat Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, adopted at the thirty-second session of the UNESCO General Conference, has generated the establishment of the International Coalition of Cities against Racism. The cities are committed to an ethical and political charter that takes a firm position against racist ideologies and discriminatory practices. On 9 and 10 December 2004, at the Fourth European Conference: Cities and Human Rights, the European Coalitions of Cities against Racism was officially launched. During 2005, two coalitions, in Latin America and Caribbean and in North America, are planned to be launched. The initiative will also be extended to Africa, the Asian-Pacific region and Arab States. Cities are a privileged space to link upstream and downstream actions. The role of city authorities and policy makers at the local level is instrumental to create dynamic synergies, to build partnerships and to frame plans of actions with immediate impact on the daily life of communities.

30. The UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity acknowledges the complex landscape of cultural difference. It argues that cultural diversity should be safeguarded because it is inseparable from the respect for human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly the rights of groups that are disadvantaged or victims of discrimination. The defence of cultural diversity implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples, but it must not be allowed to serve as a pretext for infringing on fundamental human rights or for promoting cultural relativism. The new UNESCO Strategy on Human Rights includes this priority in order to further explore the definition of cultural rights and to promote their protection.

31. Within the framework of the implementation of the Declaration on Cultural Diversity and its Plan of Action, UNESCO is developing a new strategy for helping its member States and civil society at large to achieve a better understanding of cultural diversity and to foster intercultural and interreligious dialogue. This strategy forms part of the UNESCO programme of action aimed at countering intercultural or inter/intra-religious tensions, which most often arise from discrimination and violations of human rights. The seminars and colloquiums organized by UNESCO examined positive effects of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue and risks associated with pluralism as an agent of division and discrimination. The organization considers it a matter of priority to encourage efforts to stabilize and revitalize the cultural identity of displaced, fragmented and stigmatized communities.

32. Within the framework of the UNESCO Inter-religious Dialogue Programme, efforts have been made to foster the protection of freedom of belief and conviction through alternative and innovative approaches. UNESCO cooperates with specialized NGOs, United Nations agencies and programmes, OHCHR and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. In this connection, the Programme was involved in the preparation and organization of the 2001 Madrid Consultative Conference "Teaching Intercultural and Inter-religious Dialogue" contains guidelines for more concrete action, in terms of pedagogical tools or training of trainers or schoolmasters, in accordance with each country's or region's needs. The UNESCO strategy will continue to focus on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, with a special emphasis on education for the reciprocal knowledge of religions and spiritual traditions.

33. UNESCO University Chairs for intercultural and interreligious dialogue will work within a UNITWIN network, enabling them not only to exchange not only know-how and enhance academic solidarity and cooperation, but allow the training of trainers for schools on the topic of religious learning in a neutral and objective way. During 2003 and 2004, these Chairs met twice, in Graz, Austria and Bucharest, to examine ways of cooperation.

34. The United Nations Department of Public Information undertook various activities aimed at fostering tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity. On 21 June 2004, the Department organized a seminar on "Combating anti-Semitism: education for tolerance and understanding". This was the first of a cycle of seminars under the common title "Unlearning Intolerance". The seminar was clustered into three panels on: (a) perspectives on anti-Semitism today; (b) education for tolerance and understanding; (c) confronting anti-Semitism. Future seminars will focus on other specific groups against whom intolerance is directed in many parts of the world.

35. The *UN Chronicle* ran articles entitled "Sudan: tragedy in Darfur", "Confronting anti-Semitism: education for tolerance and understanding, and "10 stories you should hear about" (on the situation of indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation). The United Nations Information Service in Vienna set up an information stand and a discussion corner on "Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance" during the Open House Day at the Vienna International Centre, on 26 October 2004.

36. Member States, United Nations agencies and programmes, and the wider international community, including non-governmental organizations, are taking steps to counter one of the basic evils of our history - religious intolerance. Notwithstanding these efforts, the Commission on Human Rights is rightly alarmed by increasing serious instances of intolerance and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. Defamation of religions is one of its most aggressive manifestations. It is therefore of utmost importance that further efforts be made to counter these phenomena, not only incidentally but by strategizing and harmonizing action at the local, country, regional and international levels. Education systems and awareness-raising should play a decisive role in such strategies. However, fostering a culture of respect should be accompanied by adequate legislative and administrative measures to specifically counter discrimination and intolerance, whether direct or indirect, in all spheres of public life.
