

HRC44

Item 9: Interactive Dialogue with SR on Racism

Racial Equality in the context of information technologies.

15 July 2020

Thank You Madam President, Action Canada makes this statement on behalf of the Sexual Rights Initiative and the Coalition of African Lesbians.

We welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. As noted by the Special Rapporteur, ICTs can not be seen as neutral vectors of information and communications and the discrimination and rights violations they convey must be seen on a continuum of intersecting oppressions that affect marginalised communities, such as people with disabilities, black women, LGBTQ people, and sex workers.

The current conversations on racial discrimination at the HRC and globally must not silence the voices of people who are bearing the brunt of these rights violations. While northern-based tech corporations make a profit out of black bodies and minds from the global South, they purposely continue to allow racist, misogynist and homophobic speech on their platforms. Women human rights defenders, feminist and queer activists, particularly people of color are routinely subject to threats of violence and discrimination online with little means of seeking justice or redress. We urge these corporations to put people before profit, and to enact and enforce policies aimed at combating all forms of discrimination and violence.

We commend the Special Rapporteur for underlining that color-blind or race neutral strategies are not effective in actually highlighting and therefore combating racial discrimination in emerging digital technologies. We urge all States as well as private corporations and the public sector, to follow the Special Rapporteur's recommendations and take the uncomfortable journey of examining their own history of racism and misogyny; a task that should not be taken as a whitewashing process. We urge States to provide effective remedy for racial discrimination by corporations and to support the development and adoption of a legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and human rights.

New developments in the use of artificial intelligence tools for a range of purposes have also put the bodies and lives of people of color on the line. Multiple studies have shown artificial intelligence tools intentionally or unintentionally discriminate against marginalised groups of people. Corporations and State actors should aim in the development of their technologies not only to diversify their engineering teams and interrogate their whiteness, but also to apply an intersectional approach that is sensitive to the lived realities of the people of the global South from the beginning.