

46th session of the Human Rights Council

**Annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming**

***Theme: The state of play in the fight against racism and discrimination 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action and the exacerbating effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these efforts***

*Concept note (draft as of 16 February 2021)*

- Date and venue:** **22 February 2021, 4 to 6 p.m., Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations, Geneva**  
*(will be broadcast live and archived on <http://webtv.un.org>)*
- Objectives:** The annual high-level panel discussion will gather high-level representatives of United Nations agencies and funds, high-level representatives of Member States and other stakeholders to discuss progress made in efforts to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The event will also serve as the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action by the Human Rights Council.
- High-level representatives of United Nations agencies and funds will share their views, good practices and challenges, including those related to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the fight against racism and discrimination.
- Chair:** **H.E. Ms. Nazhat Shameem Khan**, President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statements:** **H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir**, President of the 75th session of the General Assembly  
*(video message)*
- H.E. Mr. António Guterres**, Secretary-General of the United Nations *(video message)*
- Ms. Michelle Bachelet**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
*(video message)*
- Panellists:**
- **Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**, Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) *(video message)*
  - **Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) *(video message)*
  - **Ms. Gabriela Ramos**, Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (TBC)
- Outcome:** The panel discussion will contribute to the following outcomes:
- Increased understanding of achievements and challenges in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance;
  - Enhanced collaboration among United Nations entities;
  - Renewed commitments to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and support its follow-up processes on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of its adoption.
- A summary report will be prepared by OHCHR.
- Mandate:** In paragraph 42 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21, the Human Rights Council decided to hold an annual panel discussion to interact with heads of governing bodies and secretariats of United Nations agencies and funds within their respective mandates on specific human rights themes with the objective of promoting the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system. At its organizational session, held on 7 December 2020, the Human Rights Council decided

that the theme of the 2021 panel discussion will be “The state of play in the fight against racism and discrimination 20 years after the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action and the exacerbating effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these efforts”. With this decision, the annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming thus replaces the high-level panel discussion on the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, mandated previously by Human Rights Council resolution 45/23.

**Format:**

The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two segments. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statements, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, for States and observers (2x12), national human rights institutions (2x1) and non-governmental organizations (2x2).

The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet.

**Background:**

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA) is a comprehensive and visionary framework for preventing and combatting racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Twenty years after its adoption, it is still highly relevant and pertinent—even more in cases of unpredicted crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The DDPA contains 48 references to health and healthcare. In paragraph 110 of the Programme of Action, various stakeholders are urged, *inter alia*, to provide effective mechanisms for monitoring and eliminating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in the health-care system, and to take steps to ensure equal access to comprehensive, quality health care affordable for all, including primary health care for medically underserved people. Accordingly, in the programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent it has been reiterated that States should take measures to improve access to quality health services for people of African descent.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated racism and inequality. It has had a disproportionate impact on certain marginalized racial, religious, national or ethnic communities and population groups, making them vulnerable to higher rates of infection and mortality, to harsh treatment by law enforcement and to unequal access to adequate medical care.<sup>1</sup> There have also been numerous instances where people belonging to racial, religious or ethnic minorities were subjected to hate speech and vile conspiracy theories accusing them for the spread of the virus.

Structural inequalities and racism may affect each aspect of diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19, beginning with who gets access to telemedicine, then whose symptoms are taken seriously, who gets tested first for COVID-19, leading next to who gets hospitalized, who gets personal protection/preventive means, respiratory devices in hospitals and home care, and then ultimately who gets vaccinated.<sup>2</sup>

In 1966 Martin Luther King Jr. said: “Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhuman because it often results in physical death.” Fifty-five

---

<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_human\\_rights\\_and\\_covid\\_23\\_april\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/COVID-19\\_and\\_Racial\\_Discrimination.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/COVID-19_and_Racial_Discrimination.pdf)

years later, the racial disparities and discrimination in health systems remain. As underlined in Human Rights Council resolution 45/23, the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action represents an important opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its commitments to eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

**Background documents:**

- [Human Rights Council resolution 45/23](#) of 6 October 2020 entitled “Commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action”
- [General Assembly resolution 75/237](#) of 31 December 2020 entitled “A global call for concrete action for the 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”
- [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#)
- [Outcome Document of the Durban Review Conference](#)
- [General Assembly resolution 66/3](#) of 22 September 2011 entitled “United against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”
- [General Assembly resolution 69/16](#) of 18 November 2014 entitled “Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent”
- [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#)
- Report of the Secretary-General on the programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent ([A/75/363](#))
- Report of the Secretary-General on the global call for concrete action 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/75/561](#))
- Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the activities in follow-up to the implementation of the programme of activities within the framework of the International Decade for People of African Descent ([A/HRC/45/47](#))