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President: Mr. Kőrösi (Hungary)

The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Agenda item 66 (continued)

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

The President: The General Assembly will now resume its consideration of agenda item 66, entitled “Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”, to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in accordance with paragraph 48 of resolution 77/205, of 15 December 2022.

We gather today to celebrate the great work of those who continue to combat all forms of racism and discrimination. In this field, we need relentless efforts.

Now, 75 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the legacies of the racist systems of slavery, apartheid and segregation can still be felt in our communities, our institutions and our minds. Like a virus, racism mutates and adapts itself to different times and contexts. It is said that racism is like a Cadillac, there is a new model every year. In fact, its manifestations and symptoms may change, but the breadth of its harm remains intact. Racism and hate speech besiege our societies from many directions. Old falsehoods have taken on new forms, embedded in modern technologies. Online, that violence takes on

new and covert but no less toxic forms. Algorithms can perpetuate racial stereotypes and biases. Technology can be used to increase illegal surveillance and reinforce discriminatory practices. If left unregulated, social media can supercharge campaigns of extreme violence that can go as far as fomenting genocide. Governments and technology corporations should work together to regulate virtual platforms and curb hate, wherever and whenever it appears, in any language.

Working out the global digital compact is an unprecedented opportunity to tackle online hate in a manner that also addresses hate speech against women and girls and various minorities. Millions of Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent, indigenous peoples, national, ethnic and linguistic minorities, religious communities and migrants continue to be subjected to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, inequality and exclusion in various areas of their lives. Most of the harmful narratives are rooted in notions of racial supremacy and evoke atavistic fears. Even worse, they embolden extremists by giving legitimacy to their acts of violence.

(spoke in Russian)

How many times must we bear witness to the devastation caused by those discriminatory misapprehensions? In 1945, we vowed “never again”. Seventy-five years ago, we pledged to uphold the promise that all are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. Today we celebrate that vow and that promise.

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(spoke in French)

But is it enough? Will repeating those words spur us into action? As we mark 20 years since its adoption, how can we better incorporate the Durban Programme of Action — our guiding principle in combating racism, racial discrimination and other intolerances — into all our activities?

(spoke in English)

In the 16 negotiating tracks ongoing in the General Assembly, where can we pay closer attention to racial discrimination?

(spoke in Arabic)

The fight against racism requires collective efforts at many levels. We must therefore work together to achieve the just and equal world that our Organization was created to promote.

(spoke in English)

We can do that through education, dialogue, advocacy and self-reflection, through just policy-making and through good governance. We owe it to the Emmet Tills, the Malik Oussekinés and the George Floyds of this world — to all those who have fallen prey to the human-made delusion that is racism. We owe it to the Marcus Garveys, the Rosa Parksés, the Mahatma Ghandis, the Rigoberta Menchú Tums and the Nelson Mandelas of this world — to all those who have dedicated their lives to combating discrimination and racial violence. Let us learn from their lifelong commitment to justice, accountability and peace. Let us pledge ourselves to do the same.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to join the General Assembly for the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Today we recall the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, and pay tribute to the heroes of the struggle against apartheid and all those who have fought racism and racial discrimination around the world. Racial discrimination is a deeply damaging and pervasive abuse of human rights and human dignity that affects every country. It is one of the most destructive forces dividing societies. It is responsible for death and suffering on a grotesque scale throughout history. Today racial discrimination and the legacies of enslavement and colonialism continue to ruin lives, marginalize communities and

limit opportunities, preventing billions of people from achieving their full potential. Racism is not innate, but once it is learned it can take on a destructive power of its own.

When Governments and other authorities use racism and discrimination for political ends, they are playing with fire. Official tolerance and a tacit green light for racial discrimination can fuel tensions and set light to a conflagration of violence and atrocity crimes. That has played out catastrophically throughout history. We should not need reminding that racism and racial discrimination can be steps on the way to genocide. Conversely, initiatives and programmes to eliminate racial discrimination and protect the rights of minorities are investments in crisis prevention and peace. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms, without distinction of any kind. But as we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Declaration, we are still far from realizing equality in dignity and rights for all. Xenophobia, prejudice and hate speech are on the rise. Political leaders scapegoat migrants with devastating impact. White supremacist influencers profit from racism on social media platforms. Artificial intelligence algorithms amplify and digitize racial discrimination. After a period of increased global awareness of racism, some countries are experiencing a vicious backlash against anti-racist policies and practices.

We need to resist and reverse those trends resolutely and condemn and eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms. We must take action to address racism wherever and whenever it arises, including through legal channels. Obviously, civil society plays an important role. Today we recognize the contributions of organizations that fight racism and call for continued support for their critical work. As we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration, I join the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in urging every Government to adopt, by December of this year, a comprehensive, time-bound national action plan to combat racism and racial discrimination. Such plans should include anti-discrimination legislation and policies informed by evidence and data. We have international legal frameworks and global commitments in place: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. I call on all States today to ratify the Convention and to implement

their obligations and commitments without delay. We must transform political will into comprehensive action, with those experiencing racism and racial discrimination at the centre. The private sector also has a crucial role to play. I call on businesses to take urgent steps to eliminate racial discrimination in their products and services, as well as in their workplaces.

(spoke in French)

Here at the United Nations, we are making progress in implementing our Strategic Action Plan on Addressing Racism. My Special Adviser, Mojankunyane Gumbi, and her Anti-Racism Team engage with staff across the global Secretariat and develop comprehensive anti-racism training. There are now anti-racism advocates at senior levels across the global Secretariat. Many staff have taken part in anti-racism dialogues. Looking forward, an independent review on past complaints of racism and racial discrimination will identify gaps and enhance accountability. Addressing racism and racial discrimination will require deliberate, coordinated long-term efforts, and I call on all staff of the United Nations to do their part. At the United Nations and around the world, we must turn the aspirations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights into reality for all people, without distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. In this anniversary year, let us work together to root out racism and racial discrimination and uphold the dignity and rights of all people, everywhere.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Before proceeding further, I would like to consult members on inviting the following speakers to make statements, in accordance with paragraph 48 of resolution 77/205 and as mentioned in my letter dated on the 17 March 2023: Mr. Eric Adams, Mayor of New York City; Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights; and Ms. Verene Albertha Shepherd, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite those speakers to make statements at this meeting?

It was so decided (decision 77/554).

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Adams.

Mr. Adams: In 1948, the world came together to declare that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. With the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international community made a historic promise: that no person should be treated differently on the basis of their race or colour. Seventy-five years later, we have not reached that mountaintop of racial equity. Too many people around the world still face racial hatred. Too many still struggle against the shackles of racial violence and poverty. Millions are still left behind in the depths of displacement and despair. As New York City's second Black mayor, I know what it feels like to be rejected. I understand the pain of so many who face daily obstacles to opportunities. Discrimination has no borders. We see it in education. We see it in health care. We see it in climate change. We see it in access to clean water and healthy food.

I am proud to say that, since I took office, New York City is leading the way in the fight against racial discrimination. Our first-in-the-nation Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes is seeing success. This year alone, hate crimes are down across New York City by nearly 70 per cent. We know that we cannot do that work alone, which is why my administration is investing in community organizations to fight hate, bias and discrimination. And we are working to close the opportunity gap with more jobs, job training and affordable housing. We are also building trust and understanding across the five boroughs through our programme entitled Breaking Bread, Building Bonds, which will call on New Yorkers to host 1,000 dinners across the city. Each dinner will have at least 10 people, who will all come from different backgrounds and cultures. And we are doing something revolutionary. We are having conversations with each other. We are learning from one another. Bringing people of all different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds together to share meals will enable us to embrace our diversity. As an organized group, we will stand together against all forms of hate. We are making progress, but we must keep climbing as a city, a nation and an international community.

In the year 2023, there is simply no space anywhere in the world for discrimination based on race, gender or sexual-orientation. We cannot be detached spectators as we watch discrimination continue to affect the lives of so many. We cannot sit on the benches. We must get on the field and join the fight together. We have come too far to give in to forces of complacency. The work will not be easy. But we must take solace in all those

who came before and sacrificed so much — leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr. The time to realize their legacy is now. We cannot waste another moment. We must join hands, from Cape Town to Queens, and recommit ourselves to the promise of racial equality. Together we can reach the mountaintop and build a more equal world. Together we can end racial discrimination. Together we will succeed.

The President: I give the floor to Ms. Brands Kehris.

Ms. Brands Kehris: It is a privilege to participate in today's event in honour of the victims of racism and racial discrimination, both past and present. Today is an opportunity to recall the very origin and purpose of the establishment of the United Nations, which was founded in repudiation of, and to prevent, political systems based on ideologies of racial supremacy that had caused unimaginable human destruction and devastation. To that end, the Charter of the United Nations enshrined respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, as one of its principal purposes. Drawing on that mandate, the Economic and Social Council established the Commission on Human Rights and tasked it with the preparation of an international bill of rights. The result was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a constitution for the whole of humankind, which was adopted by the General Assembly 75 years ago. At its heart is article 2, which pronounces the principles of equality and non-discrimination to be the basis for all other rights and freedoms and the foundation of peace.

The connection between the elimination of racial discrimination and the prevention of conflict was also manifested by the fact that the first two binding human rights treaties were the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination. The latter sets out that discrimination between human beings on the grounds of race, colour or ethnic origin is an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations among nations and is capable of disturbing peace and security among peoples and the harmony of persons living side by side, even within one and the same State. And yet racism and racial discrimination still abound today.

Their manifestations take many different forms and shapes, direct and indirect. We see it in the scourge of intersecting forms of discrimination. Indigenous women, for instance, face exceptional impediments to the full enjoyment of their rights. They

are disproportionately affected by the loss of lands, territories and resources due to climate change and the development of megaprojects. Racial discrimination is also deeply structural, as endured daily by millions of people of African descent when faced with excessive use of force, racial profiling and other discriminatory practices by law enforcement agencies and other institutions. Intersecting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, language and age surfaced prominently during the coronavirus disease pandemic. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed alarm at the stigmatization, labelling, scapegoating and blaming for the spread of the virus that has made victims of Asians and people of Asian descent. The pandemic also highlighted the digital divide and its negative impact on indigenous children, children of African descent and migrant children, as education activities moved to the private sphere, depriving those children without access to the Internet of education for over a year.

Why is racism still so prevalent 75 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration? The reasons range from a lack of political will to the denial or ignorance of structural discrimination in institutions and society. Racism persists because of fear, including the fear of losing dominance and power, and has taken contemporary expressions in the renewed rise of populism and xenophobia. To move towards a world that is free of racial discrimination, we must acknowledge its systemic nature and that race is a social construct — an ideological attempt to legitimize domination. Our responsibility is to act now to effectively combat racism and racial discrimination. As part of our Human Rights 75 initiative, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has outlined five specific and urgent actions: first, adopt and implement comprehensive national laws and policies; secondly, establish and strengthen independent national human rights institutions and equality bodies; thirdly, collect and publish data disaggregated by race, national or ethnic origin, sex, gender, age, migration status and other factors; fourthly, ensure the effective participation of racial and ethnic groups in public decision-making and evaluations; and fifthly, consider taking concrete action to confront past legacies of racial discrimination and deliver reparatory justice. I appeal to all Governments and other actors to heed that call.

There is no excuse for failure. We have the tools and mechanisms to guide action. In addition to the guidance provided by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial

Discrimination, other United Nations treaty bodies and the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and other special procedures, two new expert bodies established two years ago can also help chart the way forward. The International Independent Expert Mechanism is mandated to advance racial justice and equality in the context of law enforcement. It has held consultations with States and affected individuals and issued communications on individual cases of concern, and it conducts country visits. The Permanent Forum on People of African Descent is working, together with the Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the elaboration of a United Nations declaration on the promotion, protection and full respect of the human rights of people of African descent. In that context, I wish to stress the urgency of implementing the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and its follow-up processes; it remains an essential road map for establishing racial equality.

No institution or society is immune from racism, but every Government and every person has a responsibility to ensure that the arc of humankind bends towards justice, to paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr. By rejecting racism and racial discrimination, we protect human dignity and contribute to peaceful coexistence among peoples and States by protecting pluralistic and diverse societies. As the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights reminds us, human diversity is an asset, not a threat. Let us mark this seventy-fifth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration by taking concrete action to honour everyone who has endured racism and by implementing the vision of the founders of this Organization.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Verene Shepherd, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Ms. Shepherd: On behalf of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, let me say how honoured I am to be here, as well as to be joining with the global community to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which was proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1966 to honour and memorialize those killed and wounded in the anti-apartheid struggle in Sharpeville, South Africa, on 21 March 1960.

This year the commemoration coincides with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1948. In that regard, I would like to pay tribute to all our predecessors who courageously paved the way to put an end to the ugliness of racial discrimination and racism at a time when the world was healing from the horrors and wounds of the Second World War, which also came about on the basis of racial hatred.

Over its 30 articles, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lays out the road map for how societies should function and how the rights of all peoples must be respected and upheld. Article 1 rightly proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Article 2 stresses that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, principles that are echoed and amplified by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Admittedly, many States have gradually undertaken a number of measures, either individually or in common, to outlaw and fight against racial discrimination and racism. At the domestic level, a significant number of States have enacted legislation to prohibit discrimination. Anti-racism institutions or equality bodies have been established, and strategies have been put in place to promote tolerance and understanding and accelerate the integration of ethnic and national minorities, as well as non-nationals, facing obstacles and marginalization at various levels. Those measures have tackled prejudices based on race, colour, descent, nationality or ethnic origin, which often have the effect of sidelining populations from the rest of society. At the international level, many important institutions and mechanisms have been set up, including those established by the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and its predecessor. The momentum in the fight against racial discrimination and racism culminated in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and has remained anchored at the top of the international agenda to this day. More States have ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which has garnered near-universal recognition among States, and I feel very honoured to chair the Committee

implementing that Convention. That progress is undeniable, and we should continue to build on it.

Those important positive developments should nevertheless not overshadow the great challenges and pushback that undermine global efforts and remain to be tackled, including the resurgence of nationalist populism and supremacist ideology based on ideas of racial superiority, which threaten the values to which all nations are committed; the rise of racist hate speech, sometimes expressed by public and political figures, including on social media; and the recent ugly mass killings and massacres of people of African descent. The denial of the rights of migrants continues. Many groups still face long-standing inequalities, including inequalities originating in colonialism and the transatlantic trafficking in enslaved peoples, to which the international community has not yet responded adequately through reparations.

I encourage States to redouble their efforts to firmly commit to individual and global efforts to end racial discrimination, racism and xenophobia in practice; reflect on the root causes of the persistent negative stereotypes against national and ethnic groups, and work to deconstruct those prejudices; build robust anti-racial discrimination legislation and apply it effectively; work towards a culture of tolerance and racial equality in their societies, which are growing increasingly diverse; and use education as a tool to trigger changes in mentalities. May the international community commit today to working together; building bridges and synergies; keeping alive the legacy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and ensuring that everyone enjoys the same dignity and rights, with no fear of exclusion or denial. We should not only uphold those ideals but transform them into reality, especially through human rights education, so that we pass the flame of our fight against racial discrimination to the new generations. We cannot allow those 69 South Africans, including Wiggi Bakela, James Beshe, Miriam Lekitla and Paulina Mafulatse, to have died in vain. Lest we forget, we must use history education to increase knowledge of the past. As Jamaican Marcus Mosiah Garvey said,

“A people without knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots”.

We need to develop those roots.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sierra Leone, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Turay (Sierra Leone): On behalf of the Group of African States, I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting today to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The African Group reaffirms the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the purpose of which is to promote and encourage universal respect for, and the observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction. We reaffirm the need for Member States to adopt all necessary measures to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations, and to prevent and combat racist doctrines and practices in order to promote understanding among races and build an international community that is free from all forms of racial segregation and racial discrimination.

The African Group is convinced that any doctrine of superiority based on racial differentiation is false, morally condemnable and socially unjust, and that there is no justification for racial discrimination in theory or practice anywhere in the world. We are disappointed that manifestations of racial discrimination continue to exist in some parts of the world, based on racial superiority and hatred and on policies of apartheid, segregation and separation. Building a future of justice requires mending an unjust past. We all have a responsibility to engage in solidarity in order to tackle poverty and exclusion, invest in education and rebuild trust and social cohesion. In line with our international human rights obligations and commitments, we must show stronger political will, take concrete actions and accelerate actions to advance racial justice and equality. We must speak out against hate speech and harassment, both online and offline. The African Group recalls the blueprints for determined action, including the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and its follow-up processes. We welcome the milestones achieved that are intended to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We reiterate that the Declaration embodies the firm commitment of the international community to tackle racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at the national, regional and international levels. We recognize that racism is a global concern and that tackling it should be a universal effort for us all.

By adopting the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action by consensus in 2001, Member States agreed to ensure justice, development, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. They committed themselves collectively and individually to implement the Declaration's road map, which illustrates how the international community will follow up its commitments to prevent future occurrences of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and to increase the momentum to make the fight against that scourge a reality. We are pleased with the Member States that, since the adoption of the landmark Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, have adopted legislative and administrative measures to effectively combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in any form. More important, we thank all Member States that appreciate and respect fostering the knowledge of people of African descent, including by recognizing and promoting their culture, heritage and development and contributing to their economies for the benefit of humankind worldwide.

The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action emphasizes the importance of preventive and concerted action, especially in the field of education and awareness-raising. We are convinced that quality education, the elimination of illiteracy and access to free primary education for all are still necessary and not an option. Education contributes to more inclusive societies, equity, stable and harmonious relations and friendship among nations and peoples, and it promotes a culture of peace, mutual understanding, solidarity, social justice and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We realize that, although globalization offers great opportunities in development, the benefits are unevenly shared, while its costs are evenly distributed. We appeal for the prevention and mitigation of the negative effects of globalization. Those effects exacerbate, among other things, poverty, underdevelopment, vulnerabilities, social exclusion, cultural homogenization and economic disparities within and among States.

The African Group expresses the need to maximize the benefits of globalization through, *inter alia*, the strengthening and enhancement of international cooperation and partnerships to increase equality of opportunities for trade, market access, infrastructure development, the transfer of technology, economic growth and sustainable development, in line with the

right to development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the full and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the African Union Development Agency's New Partnership for Africa's Development.

The 2030 Agenda envisages a world of universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination and of respect for racial, ethnic and cultural diversity, which sets the principles for pursuing those goals. We are of the view that Member States should reinforce protection against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance by ensuring that all persons have access to effective and adequate remedies and enjoy the right to seek just and adequate reparation and satisfaction from competent national tribunals and other national institutions for any damage resulting from such discrimination. We believe that reparatory justice is crucial to building racial equality. Reparations for slavery and colonialism include not only justice and accountability for historic wrongs, but also the eradication of the scars of the racial inequality, subordination and discrimination that were built under slavery, apartheid and colonialism.

In conclusion, the African Group reaffirms its commitment to the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. We call on all our partners and the international community to find ways to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including pooling our efforts to fully achieve the 2030 Agenda, in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the right to development. It is important to fight that scourge together, given the economic inequalities and poverty across countries and regions globally.

We believe that remembering the wrongs of the past, wherever and whenever they occurred, and unequivocally condemning their racist tragedies will lead to the building of societies based on justice, equality and solidarity. Only through our concerted and sustained efforts can we achieve a shared future, based on our common humanity, if globalization is fully inclusive of, and equitable for, us all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Bahamas, who will speak on behalf of the members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Smith (Bahamas): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

We continue to remember and honour the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance suffered through past injustices. Yet we also do not forget that we still have work to do, as those injustices, though changed in form, continue to be perpetuated.

We acknowledge the great strides made throughout the years through the various blueprints for action — the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and its follow-up process, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality (A/HRC/47/53, annex) and the newly established Permanent Forum on People of African Descent.

However, we also note the work that still needs to be done and the ubiquity of discrimination in all forms, particularly against indigenous peoples, minorities, religious minorities, women, girls and people of African descent, as well as social, economic and financial discrimination. We therefore unequivocally reaffirm our commitment to eliminating such evils.

While the world charges forward in the wake of the coronavirus disease, we note its impact on the enjoyment of human rights and its disproportionate negative impact on groupings of people who were most at risk. That includes the matrix of underlying structural inequalities that affect the most vulnerable people.

The deficient progress made in achieving gender equality and the continued violence against women and girls, linked to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, generate multiple and aggravated forms of discrimination on the basis of gender. We need to do more to empower all women and girls through the elimination of gender stereotypes in every sphere of life, especially in the context of innovation, technological change and education in the digital age. Moreover, we must redouble our efforts to eliminate racial and gender discrimination and, in that regard, promote and adopt gender-responsive approaches to policies, strategies and programmes of actions against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

We continue to affirm our support for the recent establishment of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent and the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. We recognize the invaluable role of our indigenous peoples and the need to ensure that they have meaningful representation in those forums and can equally participate by sharing their knowledge and expertise.

The Latin America and Caribbean Community countries are a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual group of countries that, as a region, express their diversity through race, colour, descent and national and ethnic origin. We therefore remain committed to the International Decade for Latin American and Caribbean People of African Descent, proclaimed on 1 January 2014, and seek to continue to strengthen regional and international cooperation, consistent with the aims and aspirations of those proclamations.

As the International Decade for People of African Descent concludes in 2024, the Group supports proclaiming a second International Decade for People of African Descent, with the aim of maintaining the highest political attention to that process and so as to fulfil our commitments of recognition, justice and development.

We look forward to participating in the upcoming second session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in May and to supporting its initiatives to improve the safety, quality of life and livelihoods of people of African descent.

In conclusion, GRULAC member States reaffirm their commitment to acting against racial discrimination in all its forms against all human beings, who are born free and equal in dignity and rights, with the potential to contribute constructively to the development and well-being of their societies if given the opportunity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

Mrs. Dostert (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Group of the Western European and Other States on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Today's commemoration reminds us that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related

intolerance are well established in all societies of the world. We fully agree with the Secretary-General that racism is a deeply rooted global scourge that transcends generations and perpetuates inequality, discrimination and marginalization.

It is undeniable that racism and racial discrimination in all its forms are on the rise around the world, depriving people of the enjoyment of their human rights. Nationalist and populist ideologies often fuel racism. The coronavirus disease pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and the extent and impact of all forms of racism. Racism has actively impeded inclusive and sustainable recovery from the pandemic.

Whenever racism occurs, it is our duty to denounce and condemn it and lead by example. Racist hate speech must be fought, and racially motivated crimes must be stopped. We must reject and counter all forms of harassment, hate speech, violence and incitement to violence, both online and offline, and we must stand in solidarity with and empower the victims of racism through our actions, recognizing and dismantling the societal structures that perpetuate deep-seated racism. We must also strengthen the implementation of international law obligations already in place and constantly adapt the legal response at the national level to meet new challenges. We must also address racism through reliable sources of information, knowledge and accountability.

To achieve this goal, it is essential that we renew our commitment to the full and effective implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. This landmark convention was adopted in December 1965 and remains as relevant as ever. The Convention is still the central international instrument for fighting racial discrimination around the world. As States parties, we must redouble our efforts to make the Convention's goal of a world free from racial discrimination a reality. We call for universal ratification of this vital convention.

We also recognize the essential work of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which monitors the effective implementation of the Convention by examining State party reports and issuing country-specific and general recommendations. We also strongly support the important mandate of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The Special Rapporteur's transmission of urgent appeals and communications to States with

regard to alleged violations of international human rights law, fact-finding country visits, and reporting to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly create effective accountability mechanisms that we must all follow. In addition, in 2023, we are ready to participate in the second session of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent and look forward to seeing how it will contribute to the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and other relevant international human rights instruments on combating racism and racial discrimination and to the full enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Today's commemoration is also an opportunity to highlight the important role of children and youth in the fight against racism. Youth and human rights advocates around the world, both online and offline, continue to call for progressive action in the fight against racism. We owe it to young people and future generations to hear their voices and embrace diversity in our common effort to fight all forms of racism and create tolerant and inclusive societies.

The fight against racism can only be won by addressing the root causes of racial inequality, protecting the rights of people from marginalized groups, strengthening education in schools, redoubling efforts to counter extremist groups, and taking concrete steps to prevent and combat racism, with the ultimate goal of its eradication. In this shared struggle, we are guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and we support the fundamental principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening us to commemorate this important day.

I want to thank Secretary-General Guterres for his presence and for his statement and thank in particular Mayor Adams for joining us today and for his bold remarks.

In past years, on this commemorative day, I have shared my own personal experiences with racial discrimination. But today I want to share another story — one that I had never heard until earlier this month, when a local news station from Baton Rouge,

Louisiana, where I come from, reported on it. It is a story of how a relative of mine, my mother's cousin, Vincent Smith, fought for the right to vote for his family and for others.

Vincent lives in West Feliciana Parish in rural Louisiana, having lived there all of his life. Back in 1965, West Feliciana was 68 per cent Black, and, at that time, not a single Black person there was registered to vote. That was not a coincidence.

Vincent worked with an ally, a 20-year-old white girl from New York, to galvanize Black people who understood that their lives would change and improve if they exercised their right to vote. They therefore made a grass-roots effort and built a real grass-roots movement. They trained people on how to answer what was then called the "foolish questions" of the racist voting rights test, a test where Black people got much harder questions than their white neighbours.

When they saw what was happening, the Ku Klux Klan burned crosses on their neighbours' lawns and shot bullets into the night sky. The group did everything it could to instil fear and terror in the Black voters of West Feliciana. But Vince and his community stood up anyway. They believed they would overcome, and they did. They registered to vote, and they voted. Vincent said, "You have to fight for what you believe in."

Today I want to shout out to the many unsung heroes who have fought and continue fighting to eliminate racial discrimination, and I want to particularly thank my own cousin for sharing his story with the world and for highlighting how important it is that we not forget how hard he and others fought for our rights. I want to encourage all of us to follow their example and fight for what we all believe in.

I know what the United Nations believes in, because this year we are celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. This profound statement is not an opinion; it is a fact. Our human rights are inalienable and indivisible. They are interdependent, interrelated and universal. Today we must commit to making these rights real for everyone, everywhere, regardless of their race or their ethnicity. And I will be the first to say that the United States has not always done right by that commitment. We have a long history of racial discrimination. No one denies that, and I have

been discriminated against myself. We still have real and ongoing challenges, from the lingering legacy of chattel slavery and Native American displacement to the rise of anti-Asian hate and anti-Semitism to many other racist roots that run deep throughout our history and culture. And yet I am very proud of my country and of the progress we have made and are still making to address those issues. The Biden Administration is committed to dismantling structural racism, ending discrimination and fighting back against all forms of xenophobia. As President Biden has said, advancing equity is not a one-year project but a generational commitment. That is why he has made advancing racial equality and combating systemic racism a core priority of his entire Administration. He signed four executive actions related to that as soon as he took office. At the Department of State, we released an equity action plan last year. Secretary Blinken made it clear that advancing equity in our foreign policy is a top priority, and he has announced the appointment of a Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice because racial discrimination is not a local problem but a global one.

Sadly, every single country on Earth has some form of racism. And in some countries and contexts, that discrimination becomes deadly. At the United Nations, we have an obligation to step up and stand up for human rights in order to defend against racism and hatred in all its forms and to champion platforms that spread ideas, elevate best practices and bring us together to improve the safety and quality of life of all peoples. That is why we are proud to support the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent. Indeed, we are the only country to have made a voluntary contribution, and I encourage others to do the same. It is why we at the United Nations need to work with civil society more often and more broadly to tackle other forms of racism, too.

As Ralph Bunche said in his Nobel Peace Prize speech, the United Nations exists not merely to preserve the peace but also to make change, even radical change, possible without violent upheaval. And I would take it one step further. I would say that if there is no justice, there can be no peace. Let us therefore make that radical change. Let us make the United Nations a place where our shared humanity is recognized, where we remove the scourge of racism from all our foundations and where we lift up the world's many unsung heroes, such as my cousin Vince, who are fighting to create a less hateful and more hopeful world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Skoog (European Union): As we leave the Hall after today's debate, I strongly urge everyone to go to the visitors' entrance and stay a few moments just to contemplate the Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which really stands as a reminder of the most horrifying example of racism and exploitation and of the fact that the scourge of racism and discrimination is recent and not very far away.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

I am pleased to be addressing the General Assembly as we commemorate the International Day of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. It is a day that reminds us that racism and xenophobia persist in all corners of the world and that it is the shared duty of every member of the Assembly to promote and protect human rights, including by combating discrimination and violence against persons on the basis of their race.

The EU rejects and condemns all forms of racism and intolerance and remains firmly committed to combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, both within the European Union and throughout the world. The EU is a project built on diversity, bringing nations and people together and overcoming divisions, and is founded on a strong legal framework, including against racial discrimination. That framework has been developed over the years to address discrimination, racism, xenophobia, hate speech and crimes in all EU member States, in accordance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. That Convention is the bedrock of our action. It is a living instrument able to address both new and emerging challenges. Our focus should remain on realizing universal adherence to the Convention and encouraging its full and effective implementation.

In recent years, the EU has taken a number of steps that we believe are important in countering racial

discrimination. In September 2020, the European Commission adopted the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025, its first ever, which aims to step up action against racism. It calls for better enforcement of EU law, for the formulation of new proposals to further strengthen the legal framework and for closer internal and external coordination. In 2021 we appointed a new Anti-Racism Coordinator, whose task is to bring anti-racism action to the core of the European institutions. In 2021 and 2022, together with prominent partners, the European Commission organized two EU summits against racism. In 2022 we adopted a new human resources strategy for the European institutions, aimed at ensuring that our workforce is representative of our society and our working environment is free of discrimination, inclusive and accessible, with a view to ensuring that our staff can use their full potential.

A reinforced and reformed EU Roma strategic framework was also launched in 2021, focusing on equality, inclusion and participation. The same year, the European Union presented its first-ever comprehensive EU strategy on combating anti-Semitism and fostering Jewish life. The EU is deeply concerned about the rise of hate speech and hate crimes in that regard. Since 2008, public incitement to violence or hatred on certain grounds, including race, colour, religion, descent and national or ethnic origin, has been a crime across the EU. Extensive efforts have also been made at the EU level to ensure the effective enforcement of legislation through targeted support to member States and their law-enforcement agencies. A chapter of the EU Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan is dedicated to protecting people and eliminating inequalities, discrimination and exclusion.

At the United Nations, the EU engages constructively in the work of the Human Rights Council in the field of combating racism and racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance worldwide. We closely follow deliberations on the follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the negotiations on related resolutions of the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. We believe that we need a general reflection on how to better ensure universal participation in global efforts to eliminate racism, and that in order to be effective, the debate on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action should be inclusive. The relevant initiatives and decisions should be based on consensus and available resources should be primarily devoted to supporting

concrete measures to fight racism and all forms of discrimination on the ground.

As the United Nations, it is our common duty to combat the scourge of racism. We can do that effectively only by overcoming our divisions and addressing, in a consensual way, how we can achieve genuine progress towards our common goal, which is a world free of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Barbados, who will speak on behalf of the members of the Caribbean Community.

Mr. Jackman (Barbados): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

I take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this commemorative plenary meeting to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We also thank the high-level speakers for their participation in this morning's meeting.

Each year, we gather on this day in recognition of a simple universal truth: all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Since its inception, the United Nations has been unwavering in its commitment to defending those rights, enshrined in the Charter of the Organization and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, through which every human being is entitled to all the rights and freedoms, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property and birth or other status, without distinction of any kind. While some progress has been made in the past 75 years, we are forced to continue to combat the scourge of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in many parts of the world.

CARICOM expresses grave concern over the increasing incitement of hatred and intolerance, including through the use of new and emerging technologies, and strongly condemns racial profiling and negative stereotyping on any grounds and against any persons.

The perpetuation of structural racism and discrimination through employment barriers, inequity in career advancement on the basis of race or ethnic origin and systemic displacement is a direct contradiction to the Organization's long-standing

commitment to promoting social progress and better standards of life.

Indeed, such acts of discrimination against minorities and the most vulnerable fuel division, isolation, malicious ideologies and, in many cases, hate speech, violence and hate crimes. The fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is therefore an indispensable condition for the advancement of sustainable development and to ensure that no one is left behind.

The international community has made strides in its sensitization towards reducing societal stigma and discrimination against people of African descent. However, as the end of the International Decade for People of African Descent fast approaches, CARICOM is of the firm belief that there is still much left to be desired and much work to be done.

Centuries of colonialism and enslavement have cast a long shadow of racial discrimination, and their manifestations are not only embedded in our societies, but also continually assume new forms of hindrance to development. Today people of African descent still contend with discriminatory domestic laws that hinder the full enjoyment of their human rights, including access to decent work, access to the highest attainable quality of health care, access to justice and the right to life.

Systemic racism requires a systemic response. The lingering injustice and immorality of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade do not allow space for building trust or confidence in the acknowledgement that we are all equal. It is by first expressing remorse for the grave atrocities committed and taking practical steps towards recognizing the imperative for reparatory justice that we chart the necessary path to healing, the restoration of dignity and progress for people of African descent.

CARICOM takes this opportunity to reaffirm its support for a draft United Nations declaration on the promotion and full respect for the human rights of people of African descent as a key deliverable of the programme of activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent. It is critical that the declaration be accompanied by concrete action towards righting the wrongs of slavery, the slave trade, the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, genocide and past tragedies inflicted on millions of men, women and children.

The comprehensive measures for combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance prescribed in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action are unfortunately still relevant today. It is in that vein that CARICOM calls for an increase in financial resources for the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent to support its mandate and to amplify the voices of people of African descent on the road to recognition, justice and development.

In addition, we call on the international community to uphold the standards of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, as well as on Member States to put in place and fully enforce anti-discriminatory laws to address systemic challenges that contribute to the devaluation and disenfranchisement of people of African descent. Indeed, our common destiny of sustained peace and prosperity depends on it.

Ms. Pereira Gomes (Brazil): Today, as the world celebrates the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we also recall the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 75 years ago. Article 1 of the Declaration prescribes that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Yet we are sorry to acknowledge that many people around the world are still suffering from racism and racial discrimination. Combating racism was already urgent then, 75 years ago, and it is still urgent now, especially as we witness widespread intolerance and the spread of hate speech, both online and offline.

Aware of that compelling situation, Brazil is keen to fight racial discrimination and protect the rights of people of African descent. In that regard, our Government recently created the Ministry of Racial Equality in order to plan and execute public policies targeting racial issues in a more focused manner.

Brazil actively participated in the negotiations of the programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, which resulted in the establishment of the Permanent Forum of People of African Descent, whose first session was held in Geneva last year. We very much look forward to the second session, which will be held here in New York in May.

Furthermore, Brazil has been engaging in the negotiations of the United Nations declaration on the rights of people of African descent, which is expected to be adopted at the end of the Decade in 2024.

We are happy to mention that Brazil and the United States, two countries with large populations of African descent, recently resumed the joint action plan to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination, which seeks to establish a cooperation platform to combat racial discrimination and promote the exchange of good practices in several areas.

Brazil is home to a large population of African descent, and we are very proud of that. Since 1988, our federal Constitution considers racism as a crime not subject to bail or to any statutory limitations. This year, a new law was enacted to equate the use of racial slurs, which was previously considered a lesser crime, with racism, and it is now a crime with increased accountability.

Among steps taken that directly affect people of African descent was the adoption of a wide array of affirmative actions and quotas in public universities and in public service. Since the adoption of the quotas in universities about 10 years ago, the admission of students from African descent, along with indigenous and low-income students, increased twofold in Brazil. These quotas are helping to curb inequality in the short and long terms and have had positive consequences in overcoming negative stereotyping of the Afrodescendent population.

I conclude with a word about the dialogue with the Human Rights Council and special procedures on racial discrimination. It is worth mentioning that Brazil has confirmed the visit of the international Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement for later this year. Moreover, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination evaluated Brazil's reports last November.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (spoke in Spanish): We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of the Bahamas on behalf of the Group of Latin America and Caribbean States.

On 21 March 1960, in the city of Sharpeville, South Africa, 69 people were killed by law-enforcement officials, 180 were injured and nearly 12,000 were imprisoned as a result of a protest against the system of institutionalized racial discrimination known as apartheid. In honour of these martyrs, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is commemorated every 21 March.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and have the capacity to contribute constructively to the development and well-being of society. However, as has been said, the systematic practice of racism and intolerance has been a constant in human history. Through its various bodies, the United Nations has established a set of instruments, mechanisms and forums for discussion and analysis to eradicate discrimination. For example, the third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, marked a turning point in the understanding of mechanisms to eradicate racism and racial discrimination.

The discussions and conclusions adopted in Durban are powerful insofar as they have opened up possibilities for social movements, States and international organizations to have the conceptual, political and symbolic elements they need to rewrite a history that was mutilated by colonialism and neocolonialism. In that regard, I specifically refer to the proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015–2024 (resolution 68/237), a programmatic umbrella adopted with the premise that in those 10 years States could focus the design of their public policy on achieving recognition, justice and development for populations of African descent.

Furthermore, the international design urges States to identify the reasons why people of African descent are unable to enjoy the full exercise of their human rights, recognize that they have played a substantive role in the violation of these peoples' rights through structural discrimination and adopt measures that, within the national and constitutional regulatory frameworks in force, promote that Afrodescendent communities cease to have the worst socioeconomic outcomes.

The Decade is soon coming to an end and, although greater progress has been made in some places than in others, it is undeniable that racism, discrimination and intolerance persist as a practice that harms the rights of individuals and undermines the social fabric. This 21 March, we call for individual commitments from Member States and the international community as a whole to continue their efforts to promote the construction of societies free of racism, discrimination and intolerance — societies that are more equitable and inclusive because they are based on tolerance and

respect for diversity. These principles are proclaimed and respected in my country, Ecuador.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Solomon Islands, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

Mr. Matea (Solomon Islands): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening us today to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This year we are also celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his remarks and also wish to extend our profound gratitude to the Mayor of New York City, Mr. Eric Adams, for gracing our day today with his presence.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Asia-Pacific States.

The Asia-Pacific Group wishes to reaffirm our commitment to combating racism in all its forms. Sadly, we have not reached the goals of full equality enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Asia-Pacific Group wishes to express concern at the growing hatred, ethnic intolerance and negative stereotypes based on religion, language, culture or ethnic diversity. We need to promote values of tolerance, accept differences among people and promote a culture of respect for diversity within the societies of our countries and the world.

We appeal to the international community to take concrete action and to demonstrate strong political will to mobilize all efforts at the national, regional and international levels to address all forms and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance through cooperation, partnership and integration. Education and awareness about different cultures and religions could play a crucial role in promoting the values of tolerance, acceptance and respect for diversity. We must focus heavily on correcting misunderstandings, combating negative stereotypes and promoting harmony for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. The Asia-Pacific Group would like to stress the importance for all States to ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the full and effective implementation of the provisions of that treaty.

In conclusion, the Asia-Pacific Group wishes to reaffirm its strong determination and unwavering commitment to highlighting the struggle and fighting for the elimination of racial discrimination as a top priority. We call on all countries to take urgent steps to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country's delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone on behalf of the Group of African States and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity

We thank the Secretary-General and all the participants for their statements. Tunisia reiterates its condemnation of all forms of racism and racial discrimination. We emphasize our commitment to continuing the fight against all forms of intolerance and discrimination. Indeed, in 1846, Tunisia was a pioneer in the official abolition of slavery.

Tunisia joined the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and remains committed to implementing the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and to the International Decade for People of African Descent, in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

Based on its principled position, my country has strengthened its national human rights system to combat all forms of racial discrimination. Tunisia adopted a law in 2018 aimed at eliminating racial discrimination, punishing perpetrators and facilitating access to appropriate compensation for all victims of verbal or physical aggression of a racist nature. The law sends a clear message confirming that Tunisia's legislature and its society reject racism and acknowledge the rights and protection of all those who are subjected to racism. The law stresses its message as a general and comprehensive policy that is not limited only to the legislative framework.

In the weakness of international governance of cyberspace and of any rules for its responsible use, social networks have become platforms for spreading hate speech, fuelling racial discrimination and racism without any oversight or accountability. That is why we must make greater efforts to combat all forms and manifestations of racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that establishing a just and fair world without racism and racial discrimination requires that we all make efforts at all levels to promote

the values of tolerance, solidarity, justice and respect for human dignity. We must listen to the voices of victims of human rights violations resulting from racism, racial discrimination and injustice. We must also empower those people and facilitate their access to reparatory justice, effective protection and appropriate recourse in response to any harm caused by such discrimination.

Tunisia remains committed to that message and is effectively engaged in all efforts and initiatives to achieve equality for all, revive human rights everywhere and address all forms of discrimination, stigma and hate speech. That is a constant factor in Tunisian politics and our principled position.

Mr. Nyanid (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): Cameroon aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Sierra Leone on behalf of the Group of African States.

My delegation welcomes the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which, regrettably, is a sad and painful reminder that racism persists. There is still much resistance by people around the world who are convinced that they are superior to others simply because of the colour of their skin or because they were born of a certain race. In that regard, it is regrettable that Governments around the world continue to leverage the fear of foreigners, including migrants, and racial differences for political purposes. The relevant provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination must therefore be implemented. The Convention is unequivocal when it states that

“any doctrine of superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous, and that there is no justification for racial discrimination, in theory or in practice, anywhere”.

Racism is not innate; it is acquired and learned. It demonstrates turpitude and a lack of education. We must therefore question education within families, the content of school curriculums and the media, which are key elements that influence people's mindsets and, ultimately, society, as a whole. It is therefore essential that we strengthen education to combat this scourge.

That will also involve an understanding of history and a recognition of the role that the transatlantic slave trade and colonization played in the persistence of racism and racial discrimination. The Durban

Declaration and Programme of Action recognizes slavery, in particular the transatlantic slave trade, as a crime against humanity and acknowledges that racism is a consequence of colonialism, whose effects perpetuate economic and social inequalities, including in Africa. The Programme of Action also underscores that poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion and economic disparities are closely linked to racism and contribute to perpetuating racist mindsets and practices, which, in turn, exacerbate poverty.

Regrettably, that realization was arrived at more than 20 years ago. Yet very little has been achieved through concrete action steps in the relevant policies and programmes. African countries continue to wait for more countries to officially recognize their role in slavery and colonialism. The peoples of Africa await even symbolic acts, which, if not to apologize for, at least, express regret for slavery and colonialism, which is the reason that many countries are prospering today at Africa's expense.

The colonial past is one of slavery. It is abhorrent and shameful for some and painful and traumatic for others. Nonetheless, it must be confronted. The fight against racism and racial discrimination requires responsibility and courage on both sides to confront that past. It is only by doing so that we can resolve to combat racism with an objective study of the history of slavery and colonialism, a recognition of the right to development, reform of the international economic and financial system to promote the fight against poverty, foster development in Africa and seriously address the issue of reparations. That can be done while recognizing and taking responsibility for the mistakes of the past, using reparations as a way to repair the harm caused by the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism and promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship via education. They are the tools we must use to eradicate, once and for all, racism and racial discrimination throughout the world.

Mr. Pieris (Sri Lanka): It was Martin Luther King, Jr. who said,

“Although we have learned to enjoy the freedom of the skies and fearlessly navigate the seas, we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers and sisters of one human family. Our abundance has brought us neither peace of mind nor serenity of spirit”.

How true that is. Members will appreciate that, throughout history, racism, xenophobia and discrimination have indeed tested our democratic values. And contemporary forms of discrimination present us with major challenges in our quest for peace and social stability. Unabated tirades of hate speech, a resurgence of nationalist populism and organizations that promote ideologies of racial superiority are debacles for all of us, are they not? How do we move beyond the rhetoric and move forward to address such issues?

That brings to mind the late President Mandela, who said,

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite”.

That is a gem of wisdom to live by and pursue with all our hearts. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us today to review the achievements made so far regarding the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in all its forms and manifestations. My delegation strongly believes that the issue must be given our highest priority, as it is one of the core activities of the General Assembly.

As set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the historic and forward-looking Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, it is the duty of all nations to facilitate and ensure equality in the areas of employment, health and the environment in our march towards the total and meaningful elimination of racism and racial discrimination. In that context, the Durban Declaration should be seen as a beginning, not as an end, as it is key to responding to the hopes and aspirations of those who continue to suffer discrimination throughout the world. Sri Lanka reaffirms that all human beings are born free and equal, as it was observed many times this morning, and in dignity in the enjoyment of their rights. The fundamental rights chapter of our Constitution guarantees against the discrimination of persons, in article 12, sub-article 2. Therefore, in that regard, we are of the view that any form of discrimination or doctrine of racial superiority is scientifically false, morally reprehensible and socially unjust and destructive. Sri Lanka also notes that Internet platforms and digital technologies are also being used to promote and raise funds to promote racism and xenophobia, and that cannot be tolerated.

In addressing the socioeconomic impact caused by the pandemic, the Government's approach has been inclusive, non-discriminatory and holistic, in acknowledging the utmost importance of providing for and safeguarding the health and safety not only of its people but also foreign nationals within its territory.

The Government of Sri Lanka remains committed to building a society where the rights of all communities are secured and their safety and security are ensured. Human dignity is valued, and the equal treatment of every person, notwithstanding religion, ethnicity or race, is the accepted form of public life. Therefore, in going forward, Sri Lanka envisions an inclusive transformation towards a sustainably developed nation for everyone who lives there, where strengthened law enforcement and rights protection are recognized as being critical.

I conclude with what President Obama said with regard to our responsibilities as members of one human family,

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek”.

Let us therefore speak out loud and clear for a world free of racism.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Caccia (Holy See): The Holy See is pleased to participate in this commemorative meeting to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and takes this opportunity to reiterate its strong condemnation of racism and racial discrimination.

Racism hinges upon the distorted belief that one person is superior to another, which stands in stark contrast with the fundamental principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Despite the commitment of the international community to eradicate it, racism continues to re-emerge. It is as if it were a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding and lurks in waiting. Instances of racism still plague our societies, resulting in what Pope Francis called “a crisis in human relationships”.

The crisis unfolds at different levels. On the surface, racism shows itself in discriminatory actions that are

based on the false assumption of racial superiority. Overt racism is often identified and condemned. In that regard, Governments are called upon to enact laws that address such instances. At a deeper level, however, racial prejudice can be embedded in all aspects of society. It may be less evident; nonetheless, it exists. It is present in the inequalities that are encouraged and used, sometimes even at the institutional level, to disadvantage and harm certain people solely on the basis of their race. In that regard, the crisis in human relations resulting from racial prejudice can be effectively countered by the promotion of a culture of encounter, solidarity and authentic human fraternity.

To speak of such culture does not mean simply to live together and tolerate one another. Rather, it means that we should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges and planning a project that includes everyone. Building such a culture is a process that depends on recognizing the unique perspective and invaluable contribution that every person brings to society. Every person has a particular richness and perfection in the manner of his or her being, rooted in her or his inherent dignity, regardless of race. Only the recognition of human dignity can make possible the common and personal growth of everyone and every society. In order to stimulate such growth, it is necessary in particular to ensure conditions of equal opportunity for men and women and guarantee objective equality among all human beings.

The Holy See would also like to express its concern about the racism and racial prejudice sometimes directed at migrants and refugees. Many hope to find new opportunities for themselves and their families as they flee from war, persecution and natural catastrophes. In that regard, a change of stance towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter — the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in this commemorative meeting. The Assembly has concluded its commemorative meeting to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 66.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.