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Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

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

Written statement* submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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

[27 May 2020]

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

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Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia under COVID-19

Approximately, six decades have passed since the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1963) which stresses on the important point of the condemnation of racial discrimination as a violator of human rights and a threat against international peace and security. The Durban Declaration and Plan of Action (2001) stresses on countries to eliminate discrimination by the end of the second decade of the new millennia. Also, the Durban Two Conference (2009) which mentions the commitments and actions of countries in the elimination of discrimination, all indicate Mankind's efforts to be ridden of the ugly racial discrimination phenomenon.

In spite of all this, hardly any country in the world clearly does stress on the need for the elimination of racial discrimination, but with the spread of the COVID-19 global crisis, the hidden layers of discrimination are more visible and the bitter realities of xenophobia and intolerance have been unveiled.

The current COVID-19 outbreak has provoked social stigma and discriminatory behaviours against people of certain ethnic backgrounds as well as anyone perceived to have been in contact with the virus. COVID-19 is not just a health issue, it can also be a virus that exacerbates xenophobia, hate and exclusion.

The spread of COVID-19 turned into a global crisis, impacting health, hygiene and economies, however, it also has other not so visible impacts such as xenophobia and spread of racial discrimination. In societies where minorities are discriminated against, xenophobia, discrimination and violence raise in crisis situations. Also, crises always facilitate exploitation and spread of human rights violations.

This statement tries to draw attention of the members of the Human Rights Council towards the negative impacts of the spread of hate speech and rise of xenophobia and racial discrimination in the world under COVID-19.

Hate speech in some countries

With the outbreak of COVID-19 and countries measures in combating the virus, and its origins in the world, hatred toward the Chinese and China rose sharply in many countries. In this atmosphere some people followed the policies of their governments and took personal actions and committed hate crimes. For example, according to recent reports, a Chinese woman was acid attacked by a man in New York who had reacted to the negative anti-Chinese propaganda.¹

On the other hand, there are claims from inside China that most of the new identified virus cases in the country have come from outside the country, and people have brought the virus with them into the country. This caused a wave of violence to break out and people being suspicious of non-Chinese citizens, especially the black people.² According to published reports, some Chinese people refused to rent homes or hotel rooms to black people on the pretext of not observing the quarantine rules, or refused to serve them in shops, supermarkets or restaurants.

Spread of racial discrimination in countries

In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, blacks and racial minorities are the disadvantaged social-economic groups. The outbreak of COVID-19 has raised the issue of racial discrimination among the racial and ethnic minorities of the country. According to the Intensive Care and National Audit Centre report up to 3 April, out of

¹ <https://www.shahrekhabar.com/political/158633976009694>.

² <https://www.isna.ir/news/99012816728>.

2249 critically ill patients 13.8 percent are Asians, 13.6 black, and 6.6 other races.³ These figures show how inequalities in a country's demographics results in cases of poor nutritional diets, hard labour and inability to receive necessary healthcare resulting in the vulnerability of minority groups compared to others.

Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) expresses deep concern to anti-foreign sentiment having surged online and in the streets, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories spreading, COVID-19-related anti-Muslim attacks occurring and migrants and refugees being vilified as a source of the virus – and then being denied access to medical treatment which have been spoken about by United Nations (UN) officials including the Secretary General.

Also, based on existing evidence, ODVV, categorises the discrimination as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, in the framework of targeted and structural discrimination which result in the grave violation of human rights, and draws the attention of the members of the international community towards its repercussions.

Recommendations

- Commending the actions of the UN in informing the dark implications of damages caused in the fight against COVID-19, such as the spread of discrimination and xenophobia, ODVV recommends that the role of NGOs be further highlighted in this regard and this can be pursued through partnerships with NGOs in conducting joint projects.
- In spite of recommendations of various UN bodies with regards to observation of minorities' rights and refraining from hate speech by world leaders, we continue to see more and more of this trend. Adoption of necessary measures such as setting a mechanism for registering cases of violation of human rights while combatting COVID-19, can alongside the Human Rights Council mechanisms such as thematic rapporteurs who deal with this in an expertise way, can be deemed as a positive step.
- We ask the Human Rights Council to ask all governments to observe human rights while fighting the COVID-19 virus and to fight all aspects of the virus that impact health, economy, society and human rights in a unison way. Drafting, development and monitoring the implementation of strategic guidelines in this regard can be a problem solver.
- Monitoring and documentation of social media offenses and asking for the removal of racist and hurtful contents in the fight against hate speech (which results in the spread of xenophobia and racial discrimination in the world) through the flag-bearing of the Human Rights Council and partnership of NGOs can be seen as a problem solving recommendation.

³ <https://www.icnarc.org/About/Latest-News/2020/04/04/Report-On-2249-Patients-Critically-Ill-With-Covid-19>.