General Assembly 3: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance

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Introduction

In today’s ever-developing world, globalisation and migrations provide people with the opportunity to interact with people from other nations and ethnicities. As the interaction between people increases so does the racial discrimination. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance occur on a daily basis. Such behaviour hinders the progress for millions of people around the world. From denying individuals the basic principles of equality and non-discrimination to fueling ethnic hatred that may lead to genocide, racism and intolerance harm and destroy lives and communities. Nowadays, as the number of polarising speeches delivered by politicians in an accusing tone against minorities increase, the struggle against racism has become a matter of priority for the international community.

As the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stressed in its December 2009 Guidance Note on Combating Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance through a Strategic Approach: “Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance constitute a serious threat to the overall protection environment for people…” The United Nations has been concerned with this issue since its foundation and the prohibition of racial discrimination is crucial in all core international human rights instruments. It places obligations on States and tasks them with eradicating discrimination in public and private spheres. Over the years, the United Nations has taken important measures against this issue. A series of international human rights treaties and other instruments have been adopted, and many conventions on the Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance have been held since 1945. The United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948. The adoption of this Declaration strengthened the international human rights movement by defining the basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all human beings should enjoy for the first time in human history. It has over time been widely accepted as the fundamental norms of human rights that everyone should respect and protect.

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance is a significant issue because it restricts people’s abilities, standards, and opportunities in life. For that reason, all sorts of such behaviour are against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and need to be eradicated. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance attack the core of a person’s dignity, for they seek to divide the human family, to which all people and individuals belong, into categories, some of which are considered more worthy than others. Over the course of history, occurrences have proved time and again that, when allowed to take
Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance root, discrimination, racism and intolerance shatter the very foundations of societies and damage them for generations. Hence, in order to bring this issue to an end, the various aspects of the issue should be addressed, and solutions should be sustainable in the long-term.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Racism**

Racism is prejudice or hostility toward a person’s race, colour, language, nationality, or national or ethnic origin. Even though some communities are particularly vulnerable against racism, any ethnic group can be the target of racism. Polarising statements from the politicians might bring about an increase in racist sentiments towards migrants and minorities. Violent attacks of racism by groups of perpetrators against the migrants or minorities not only harm the migrants physically but also harms their business and properties.

**Racial Discrimination**

According to the Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, racial discrimination is defined as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.”

**Xenophobia**

UNESCO defines “xenophobia” as the following. Xenophobia stands for fear of the stranger and means hatred of strangers. Xenophobia can be understood as "an attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given population". Xenophobic behaviour is based on existing racist, ethnic, religious, cultural, or national prejudice. Xenophobia can also be defined as the "attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity." Xenophobia and racism often overlap but are distinct phenomena. Whereas racism usually entails distinction based on physical characteristic differences, such as skin colour, hair type, facial features, xenophobia implies behaviour based on the idea that the other is foreign to or originates from outside the community or nation.

**General Overview**

Each day the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance become more significant to the societies. This behaviour severely affects the people’s lives and especially that of the minorities for they are exposed to the oppression and the hatred of the majority of a particular ethnic group or society. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance occur on the grounds of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. Victims of such behaviour can suffer multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination based on other related grounds such as sex, language, religion, political or another opinion, social origin, property, birth or another status. Racism and racial discrimination are contagious acts, and they
Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance are prejudice or hostility towards one’s race, colour, language, or national or ethnic origin. This act is explicitly illegal according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the United Nations openly condemns such behaviour.

Despite the efforts and the support of the United Nations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), racial discrimination and xenophobia still take place. Even though mainly minorities are endangered and vulnerable to such acts, any ethnic group can be the target of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia. People should always bear in mind that the majority of one society is the minority of another, and a local in one society is a foreigner of another society. Intolerant news or content in the media and polarising or isolating speeches given by political figures aggravates this situation and motivates people to marginalise others and commit acts of discrimination, racism, or xenophobia.

In many parts of the world, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and migrants have been among the principal targets of violence motivated by xenophobia, racism, and religious hatred. Their vulnerability increases when they are marginalised and isolated in a group and when their universal human rights are not protected by the member states. In the recent years, there have been many acts of xenophobic and other bias-motivated violence that have affected refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and others in different corners of the globe. A brutal anti-immigrant mob attack in Athens, injuring dozens; sub-Saharan African migrants targeted during the recent conflict in Libya; threats of anti-immigrant violence in the run-up to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, recalling the 2008 wave of violence there; migrant workers from Central Asia assaulted in broad daylight on the busy Moscow subway; and racist harassment and violence against Haitians are just a few examples that have garnered domestic and international attention. The numerous incidents point out the importance of this issue and illustrate that many things are at stake.

There are many factors that trigger racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance in society. The contributing factors and focus of xenophobia can vary from country to country. In some states, racist sentiments are a driving force for such behaviour whereas, in some countries, religious differences or economic factors spark intolerance towards others. In all acts of racial discrimination and xenophobia, the targets of xenophobic violence are usually marginalised communities that are often viewed as foreign or minority. Furthermore, the perpetrators of such violence often act with relative impunity and go unpunished which creates the suitable environment for victimisers to discriminate or damage more people. Xenophobia can be a motivating factor behind violent attacks on individuals and property. Racial discrimination and xenophobia based violence threaten a wide range of individuals and communities distinguished by ethnic origin, religious beliefs, race, colour, or nationality. These violent attacks can take a range of forms, targeting people from diverse groups across a region. Violent attacks by groups of perpetrators against minorities and migrants, as well as damage to business institutions or property owned by associated foreigners or minority group, are common features and examples of bias-motivated crimes.

Today, refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, displaced persons, and migrants are particularly vulnerable to such forms of violence as they are often distinguished by their
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appearance, language, religion and customs, particularly in largely homogenous societies. Discrimination, intolerance and bias-motivated violence are often causes of displacement and conflict in regions. This violence further affects the national minorities and people of immigrant origin, citizens and non-citizens, longtime residents and newcomers in a country. This violence creates fear in the minority groups and the migrants. As a result, these groups feel left out, oppressed, and not wanted. As a result of this fear, the migrants or the minorities cannot live their life in that society to the full extent, and they start to not enjoy their life. As they feel more restricted each day, these people cannot benefit from the services or the opportunities the society has to offer. Individuals who fear such violence cannot move freely in the towns and cities where they reside. Therefore, much less of that migrant group in a society participate fully in the larger society. As one victim of an attack motivated by xenophobia explained, “Since the attack on me I feel very scared of people. I have lost every hope of living in this community.”

Bias-motivated violence sends a message of fear to entire communities that share a similar identity. Thus, such incidents threaten the equal enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms by a broader group as well as the individual victim. Fear of violence and being victimised by xenophobic or discriminatory acts might prevent vulnerable individuals from seeking available protection and services, including education, medical care, and food aid. Considering in a broader sense, the fear of violence among the minorities, migrant, or foreigners might have very diverse and wide range of effects on the life of those people. As a result, the elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance have very diverse aspects that require attention for the society to live in harmony and for every member of that society to equally benefit from what the society has to offer.

Major Parties Involved

Greece

In Greece, due to the migrant crisis, in recent years, there has been an observable increase in violence against refugees, asylum seekers, and especially migrants in Greece. Racist attacks and threats against these groups have been reported in the media and by NGOs, along with suggestions that law enforcement officials have often been slow to respond to such crimes. In 2011, ultranationalist mobs took to the streets in neighbourhoods with large migrant populations and attacked more than 100 Asians and Africans. Hundreds of youth wielding baseball bats reportedly chased, punched, and kicked foreigners; dozens of immigrant-owned shops were attacked or looted. Dozens of people were injured. Many of the incidents reported over the last few years involved attacks on houses where foreigners resided, attacks on refugees’ shops, and beatings and stabbings of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants in the streets.

United States

In the United States, the polarising national debate on immigration has lead to violent xenophobic assaults against Hispanic people. There have also been some reports of attacks on
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Refugees and asylum seekers. A high incidence of racist attacks on black Americans and immigrants is also reported by municipal and county hate crimes monitors. A 54 percent rise in the growth of hate groups operating in the United States since 2000 has been reported by news agencies. Although hate crimes are a serious and continuing problem in the United States, the government has taken important steps to prevent and respond to hate crime. The government has generally responded to hate crimes vigorously by putting in place a robust system of monitoring and reporting, as well as creating and improving a sound legal base for prosecuting hate crimes as the more serious crimes that they are.

South Africa

In May 2008, racial attacks broke out in as many as 135 different locations across the country leading to at least 62 deaths and resulting in over a hundred thousand people displaced, and substantial property damage. Before the 2008 violence, at least another 72 foreign nationals had been killed in allegedly xenophobic attacks since 2000. Patterns of violence included a number of cases of attacks on all foreigners living in a particular location as well as attacks specifically targeting foreign-owned shops. After the rising tension in the country, certain provinces have drafted contingency plans for widespread xenophobic attacks, and the National Prosecuting Authority has begun monitoring cases of xenophobic violence, although the results of that monitoring have not been made public. Despite such efforts, racial attacks and intolerance due to xenophobia kept occurring.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The UN Refugee Agency engages in efforts to combat xenophobia and racism in order to provide international protection to refugees, assist governments in finding durable solutions for them, as well as to prevent and reduce stateless and protect stateless populations. UNHCR has an important role to play in working with governments, civil society and victims in an attempt to better document xenophobic violence that affects the communities, assist these victims in reporting violence to the authorities, and advocate accountability through criminal justice systems. While several UNHCR offices have developed projects or initiatives aimed at addressing xenophobia and bias-motivated violence, and efforts in this area are increasing, there is a need for greater consistency to ensure that UNHCR country offices engage proactively to address these protection challenges.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has a broad mandate to address racism and xenophobia. It functions to help state institutions and provide technical assistance with the goal of addressing commitments to combat xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. The OHCHR has adopted an all-inclusive approach to fighting discrimination, evaluating its impact on the lives of indigenous people; migrants; national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities; persons with disabilities; women; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons. The OHCHR has explained that it “aims at building
national capacity to eliminate migration-related discrimination through advisory services, research and analysis, raising awareness and mobilising support for antidiscrimination measures. OHCHR is well-placed to play an enhanced role in addressing racial discrimination and related forms of intolerance.

**Timeline of Events**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 December 1948</td>
<td>The United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 December 1965</td>
<td>The convention entitled “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” was held.</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>The 1978 World Conference Against Racism was held in Geneva, Switzerland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>The 1983 World Conference Against Racism was held in Geneva, Switzerland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 September 2001</td>
<td>World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was held by the United Nations in Durban.</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>Durban Declaration and Programme of Action was initiated by the United Nations.</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Durban Review Conference Outcome Document was published.</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>The 2009 World Conference Against Racism was held in Geneva, Switzerland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Tenth Anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action Political Declaration was established.</td>
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**Past Resolutions and Treaties**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, defines the human rights each individual has. This declaration is prominent because it is the first document that established the human rights and advocates for the protection of those rights.

Commission on Human Rights resolution 1997/74 of 18 April 1997, General Assembly resolution 52/111 of 12 December 1997 and subsequent resolutions of those bodies concerning the convening of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and
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Related Intolerance were adopted. Before these resolutions, the two World Conferences to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination were held in Geneva in 1978 and 1983 respectively.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Despite the fact that the United Nations appointed The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, adopted many resolutions that take measures against the issue, and held many conventions which were the underpinnings of the following plans of action, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance remains unresolved and as an important issue. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance has on several occasions stressed the vulnerability of refugees to bias-motivated attacks. Furthermore, the adopted of laws for racist and discriminatory acts are not enough nowadays to deal with such acts. The implemented projects and plans of action sometimes failed due to lack of coordination and joint initiatives.

Possible Solutions

The member states need to revise, improve, or even create new policies and legislations against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. These legislations should provide sufficient protection in case of bias-motivated crimes and should avoid the issue of impunity. Victimisers should not go unpunished, and this behaviour should not be promoted among the society. The offenders should be appropriately prosecuted, and attacks should be monitored and reported to the United Nations. Moreover, another important solution could be to raise public awareness on the issue and educate the public about the risks of such contagious behaviour.

Useful Links

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance

Bibliography


