

A ROAD MAP FOR TOLERANCE

Relevant for: null | Topic: Social Inequality and Exclusion

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Every year on March 21, a global movement gathers to fight prejudice and intolerance by marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This provides an opportunity to explore the nuanced causes and consequences of modern racism, and renew an important commitment to combat discrimination. Racial discrimination, beyond being a breach of human rights, has harmful effects on human health and well-being, and risks wider disruptions to social cohesion. The words of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan remain pertinent: “Our mission is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be defeated.”

Current forms of racism and discrimination are complex and often covert. Public attitudes to anti-racism have improved, as expressions of racist ideology have become less socially acceptable. Yet, the anonymity of the Internet has allowed racist stereotypes and inaccurate information to spread online. At the onset of the pandemic, traffic to hate sites and specific posts against Asians grew by 200% in the U.S. In India and in Sri Lanka, social media groups and messaging platforms were used to call for social and economic boycotts of religious minorities, amid false information accusing them of spreading the virus. Structural forms of discrimination, including micro-aggressions and everyday indignities, remain widespread. The use of new technologies and artificial intelligence in security raise the spectre of ‘techno-racism’, as facial recognition programmes can misidentify and target racialised communities.

Prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory acts, whether subtle or overt, aggravate existing inequalities in societies. A study published by *The Lancet* drew attention to the social dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic and the greater vulnerability of ethnic minorities, who have been disproportionately affected. The World Health Organization has cautioned on the dangers of profiling and stigmatising communities that can lead to fear and the subsequent concealment of cases and delays in detection. Women and girls also carry a double burden of being exposed to racial and gender-based prejudices. Racial discrimination deepens and fuels inequality in our societies.

To contribute to this important discussion and signify the need for urgent work, UNESCO’s headquarters in Paris hosted a Global Forum against Racism and Discrimination on March 22, 2021, in partnership with the Republic of Korea. The Forum gathered policymakers, academics, and partners to initiate a new multi-stakeholder partnership on anti-racism. The new proposed road map to tolerance calls for a multisectoral effort to tackle the root causes of racism through anti-racist laws, policies and programmes.

UNESCO’s actions against racism through education, the sciences, culture, and communication offer an example of a way forward. UNESCO promotes the role of education in providing the space for young people to understand processes that sustain racism, to learn from the past, and to stand up for human rights. Through new approaches to inter-cultural dialogue and learning, youth and communities can be equipped with skills to eradicate harmful stereotypes and foster tolerance. UNESCO also offers master classes to empower students to become champions of anti-racism in their schools and communities. The International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities provides an additional platform for city-level planning and a laboratory for good practices in the fight against racism.

Recent and new manifestations of racism and discrimination call for renewed commitments to mobilise for equality. Racism will not be overcome with mere professions of good faith but must be combatted with anti-racist action. A global culture of tolerance, equality and anti-discrimination is built first and foremost in the minds of women and men.

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

END

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