

2021 Annual Conference

CONCEPT NOTE THEMATIC SESSION 1

Systemic racism and national actors: how can national human rights actors be engaged in the fight against systemic racism?

**Maison de la Paix (Pétale 5) and online event (Zoom),
Tuesday 12 October 2021, 14:00 – 15:30 (CET)**

TOPIC

During the past 12 months, UN human rights mechanisms have introduced a number of important instruments in order to tackle the issue of systemic racism and racial profiling.

In November 2020, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination published its [General Recommendation No. 36](#) on *Preventing and Combating Racial Profiling by Law Enforcement Officials*. Such general recommendation is of relevance to all national human rights actors in the fight against racial discrimination, thus contributing to the strengthening of democracy, the rule of law, and peace and security among communities, peoples and States. With specific references to both NHRIs and civil society organisations, General Recommendation No. 36 is set to become a useful tool to advocate for the rights of victims, help to prevent racial profiling acts and educate the population, including on the increasing use of new technologies.

In June 2021, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet released her groundbreaking [report](#) on the *promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers*, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 43/1. Recognizing the imperative for action, the report introduces a four-point agenda to end systemic racism and human rights violations, calling upon States and the Human Rights Council to: «Step Up: Stop denying and start dismantling; Pursue Justice: End impunity and build trust; Listen Up: People of African descent must be heard and Redress: Confront past legacies, take special measures and deliver reparatory justice».

Presenting her report to the 47th session of the Human Rights Council on 12 July 2021, the High Commissioner called upon States «to translate this agenda into action plans and concrete measures developed through national dialogues and with the meaningful participation of people of African descent to address the specific histories lived experiences and current realities in each State ». As a result, the Human Rights Council adopted a [resolution](#) on *the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Africans and of people of African descent against excessive use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officers through transformative change for racial justice and equality*. Most notably, the resolution establishes an international independent expert mechanism, comprising three experts with law enforcement and human rights expertise, to investigate governments' responses to peaceful anti-racism protests and all violations of international human rights law and to contribute to accountability and redress for victims.

Despite the heightened visibility around this issue due to the highly charged trial of Derek Chauvin following the killing of George Floyd, incidents of police brutality and racial discrimination against people of African descent continue to occur. Solutions to address systemic racism, however, do not concern policing alone. Action must take place within and amongst all national institutions. As stated by the High Commissioner Bachelet: “Systemic racism needs a systemic response. It demands a thorough look at the structures that reinforce inequality in all aspects of our lives, all of which are contributory factors in the phenomenon on police violence. Discrimination in housing that has created segregated neighborhoods; discrimination in education that for generations has deprived children of equal opportunities to flourish; discrimination in employment that has fueled cycles of insecurity and poverty; and discrimination in healthcare that has impaired and shortened lives” (19 March 2021). As highlighted in all above examples, solutions to address systemic racism, do not concern policing alone. Action must take place within all national institutions. This thematic panel will focus on avenues for cooperation among different national human rights actors in the fight against systemic racism. These include political commitments, as well as local and national initiatives to work towards racial justice, as part of broad and sustained actions that place discriminated minorities at the center of policy planning and implementation.

PANELISTS

- **Mehrdad Payandeh**, Chair for International Law, European Law and Public Law, Bucerius Law School and Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- **Sara Hamood**, Coordinator, Racial Justice Team, OHCHR
- **Sibongiseni Maxwell Dhlomo**, Member of Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (TBC)
- **Camille Tauveron-Lahouze**, Advisor, Sub-commission B on “Racism, Discrimination and Intolerance” and **Michel Tabbal**, Advisor, Sub-commission D on “International and European Issues”, French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights
- **Shane O’Curry**, Director, Irish Network Against Racism

MODERATOR

- **Florence Simbiri – Jaoko**, Member of the GHRP Advisory Board

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