

*Check against delivery*

**Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

**92<sup>nd</sup> Session, 24 April to 12 May 2017**



**Opening Address by**

**Simon Walker**

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Section Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms  
Division**

**Palais Wilson, Ground Floor Conference Room  
Monday 24 April 2017, 10.00 a.m.**

Distinguished Chair,  
Honourable members,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the ninety-second session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, your first three-week session of the year. This session comes at a time when we are living in significant turmoil. We are seeing an unprecedented number of movements of migrants and refugees globally, including millions of refugees who are forced by conflict, violence and persecution to leave behind their homes and take great risks in search of safety, unsure of what awaits them. When these individuals feel they have finally found safety some are then subjected to racist and derogatory hate speech and violence from the communities they have turned to for safety and security.

Even more egregiously, this violence is spurred on by a number of politicians and leaders, who use their platforms to manipulate the fear of their constituents to create division, incite violence and trigger hostility towards minority groups including migrants and refugees through incitement to hatred and racial profiling. Leadership holds with it great responsibility. In these difficult times, the rights and dignities of all persons must be upheld and leaders should work responsibly for respect and recognition of the human rights of all. The work of the treaty bodies in general and yours in particular play a pivotal role in this regard. As you begin this ninety-second session of CERD, the task before you remains great.

Distinguished members,

Since your last session in December 2016, your Committee has continued to play an active role. The Chair of your Committee moderated

for the first time the general debate on racism at the March session (2017) of the Human Rights Council in the context of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This year the debate focused on racial profiling and incitement to hatred, including in the context of the migration. The discussion was extremely well-timed. The Chair was also invited by the President of the General Assembly together with the Special Rapporteur on racism as keynote speakers for the commemorative plenary meeting on 21 March. These opportunities provide your Committee with a forum to raise awareness of your crucial activities, through your concluding observations, your decisions on individual complaints and your legal interpretations. They also provide the occasion to reach more constituents in the international community – not only States but also civil society and national human rights institutions working in the fight against racial discrimination.

Chairperson, members of the Committee,

As you know, on 19 September 2016 by resolution 71/1, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration for Refugees and Migrants which expresses the political will of world leaders to protect the rights of refugees and migrants, to save lives and share responsibility for large movements on a global scale. By adopting the New York Declaration, Member States made bold commitments including: to start negotiations leading to an international conference and the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration in 2018; to develop guidelines on the treatment of migrants in vulnerable situations; to achieve a more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting the world's refugees by adopting a global compact on refugees in 2018. Furthermore, in March this year, the Secretary-General nominated former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms.

Louise Arbour, as his Special Representative for International Migration. Ms. Arbour will have a strong hand in moving this agenda forward.

CERD has been actively engaged by issuing a statement at the August session in this context, appealing to member States and inter-governmental organisations to ensure that solutions aimed at addressing large movements of refugees and migrants are grounded in and guided by existing international human norms and standards, including the ICERD. It is our hope that the Committee will continue its active engagement in this process.

Chairperson, members of the Committee,

Your programme of work includes an informal meeting with States parties entitled **“ICERD in Today’s World”**, following your very successful meeting with civil society at your last session in November 2016. By focusing the meeting’s agenda on the key challenges that States parties experience in addressing racial discrimination in their respective countries, as well as their experiences in engaging with the Committee, the meeting provides an opportunity to advance the agenda of ICERD.

Chairperson, members of the Committee,

Allow me also to acknowledge your pioneering efforts in utilizing social media to connect with stakeholders outside Geneva during your informal meeting with NGOs last November. CERD was the first treaty body to use Twitter and Facebook in this way, and CESCR has since followed your example. This positive experience with virtual technology shows the power CERD has to ensure that its work travels beyond these walls and is simultaneously shared with and influenced by a global audience, including youth and civil society members.

Given the rise of social media in information exchange, it is important that your messages are packaged in an accessible fashion. Ms.

Nicoleta Panta, our communications officer, whom you have already met, is here to improve the visibility of your work. I encourage you to take advantage of her expertise, experience and enthusiasm in creating awareness of your work beyond the traditional media and meeting the new realities of how we communicate today.

The UN webcast will continue to make your work more visible at this session, and I am delighted to inform you that it will continue operating into 2018. Donor states expressed their satisfaction with the webcasting of these sessions in terms of quality and reliability. They were also impressed by the different use made of the webcast by a diversity of stakeholders, including States, NGOs, NIs, the UN and the media. It has been used for awareness-raising and capacity building and live webcast screening have taken place at the national level.

I would like to conclude by wishing you a very productive session and reiterate the great appreciation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for your extremely valuable work.

Thank you.