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Statement by Mutuma Ruteere

SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

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Honourable Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to come before you and to engage again this year in the interactive dialogue with the Third Committee of the General Assembly as Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. I am deeply honored to be discharging this important mandate and I am grateful to Members States for their continuing support to the mandate.

Since I reported to this Committee last year, I have had the opportunity to report in June to the Human Rights Council where I presented my thematic report on the role and place of education in preventing and combating racism and racial discrimination as well as another report addressing the latest developments with regard to the human rights and democratic challenges that extremist political parties, movements and groups, including neo-Nazis and skinhead groups continue to pose. I also had the privilege to conduct country visits to Spain (January) and Mauritania (September). I thank both Governments for their invitation, as well as Greece, for which I also received an invitation for mid-2014. I encourage all concerned Governments to reply positively to the pending requests for invitations.

Honourable Chair,

The two reports that I will present today are submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/155 on global efforts for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (A/68/333) and General Assembly resolution 67/154 on “glorification of Nazism: inadmissibility of certain practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance” (A/68/329).

In the interim report submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/155, I address the issue of racism and poverty. The continued socio-economic vulnerability of minorities is frequently the result of historical legacies, such as the impact of slavery and colonization, systems of inherited status and also formalized and state-sponsored discrimination that for a long time were in place in many parts of the world. These historically created imbalances continue to profoundly affect discriminated groups. In this report, I analyze the legal and policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, the manifestations of poverty and racism in the areas of economic and social rights such as education, adequate housing, and health care, as well as other rights including the right to work in just conditions, social security, food and water. I then provide an overview of the different discriminated groups affected by poverty and racism, such as afro-descendants, indigenous peoples, Roma and Dalits and migrants before underling some examples of positive measures taken to prevent poverty and discrimination.

Honourable Chair,
Excellencies,
Racial or ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by poverty, and the lack of education, adequate housing and health care transmits poverty from generation to generation and perpetuates racial prejudices and stereotypes. These affected groups, such as Afro-descendants, minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees, are disproportionately affected by poverty in all regions of the world. The complex relationship between racism and discrimination infers that only the guarantee of equality and non-discrimination can redress that imbalance and protect such groups from falling into or being trapped in poverty. In many parts of the world, race and ethnicity continue to be persistent factors of poverty.

The multigenerational manifestations of poverty, with successive generations inheriting the disadvantages of their predecessors, means that over the years poverty and deprivation have come to characterize particular racial and ethnic groups. Discrimination based on racial, religious, ethnic, linguistic and also socioeconomic factors exacerbates the vulnerability of those persons and groups. This situation and the lack of participation of groups that are discriminated in the decision-making processes is often the result of historical legacies rooted in long traditions. Discriminatory treatment and practices end up perpetuating the situation of poverty these groups already suffer and encourages exclusion. I believe that it is the obligation of Governments to prevent marginalization and to ensure protection as well as to guarantee the enjoyment of human rights for all, including the right to education, the right to adequate housing, the right to health and the right to food and safe water.

One of the reasons why groups that are discriminated against and remain trapped in poverty is the perpetual marginalization they suffer in terms of access to education, despite the obligation of States to realize this right for all without discrimination. Realizing the right to education for all children should be the cornerstone of strategies directed at reducing poverty and ending discrimination.

Vulnerable and marginalized groups disproportionately face obstacles in accessing health care. Many inequalities in accessing adequate health care are related to social disparities and exclusion, themselves often the result of racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. From a geographical point of view, access to health care is often limited for those living in rural or economically remote areas and disparities sometimes result from laws, policies or programs which intentionally or not concentrate services in urban areas.

Similarly, legal insecurity of tenure for poor and marginalized ethnic and racial minorities forces some of the members of those communities to move to urban areas, where the only affordable housing is in informal and slum settlements with substandard housing conditions and the daily risks of eviction. The lack of safe and healthy housing has consequences for the development of children and has a direct link to the vicious cycle of poverty and discrimination. The lack of adequate housing also affects the enjoyment of other human rights, such as the right to work, education, health and social security.

Honourable Chair,

More than 200 million persons identify themselves as being of African descent. Many of them continue to face pernicious discrimination as part of the legacy of slavery and colonialism that still hinders them from fully participating in the decision-making process. Today, persons of African descent continue to suffer from discriminatory practices such as
inadequate access to housing at various stages of the rental or sale process. Persons of African descent also continue to face difficulties in finding housing, which contributes to their settlement in certain areas, isolated from the cities’ strategic points. This situation enhances the emergence of “ghettos” where essential services are largely inadequate.

Similarly, indigenous peoples who are part of a worldwide disadvantaged minority, continue to face discriminatory practices deeply rooted in cultural structures and reinforced by industrial development. While they constitute approximately 5 per cent of the world’s population, indigenous peoples represent around one third of the world’s 900 million extremely poor rural people. As a result of geographical isolation and marginalization, indigenous children are less likely to access education in comparison to non-indigenous populations. Some weaknesses of the education system significantly contribute to decreasing enrolment rates, drop-out, illiteracy and social exclusion. The increasing expropriation of indigenous peoples’ lands for economic purposes also reinforces their vulnerability in terms of their right to adequate housing by affecting their ancestral culture, which is based on communal land and resources.

With an estimated population of 10 to 12 million, the Roma represent one of the most important minority groups in Europe. An unacceptably large percentage of Roma continue to live in poverty and suffer discrimination in virtually all aspects of life, including employment, health care, education, and adequate housing. Discrimination in education can be the result of indirect factors such as the need for official documents proving residency or a birth certificate or the refusal of access due to the lack of vaccinations.

Similarly, the caste system continues to be the source of discrimination against the Dalits who have a low hierarchical status according to tradition and beliefs. Abuses at school by teachers and fellow students such as corporal punishment, verbal abuse, forced “manual scavenging” or injuries reinforce social alienation and drop-out rates. Most of the Dalits live in rural areas, and are often excluded from services only available in urban areas.

Finally, the situation of many migrants remains precarious and calls for closer attention, particularly as many host countries continue to experience economic difficulties. Access to official documents continues to determine the extent to which migrants can enjoy other rights and employment. In various countries, several documents (identity document, residence, birth or medical documents) are a condition for admission of children into school. Migrants in an irregular status often lack these official documents.

Honourable Chair,

I would like to emphasize some of the good practices and initiatives taken to prevent poverty and discrimination. These include collection of disaggregated data, programmes aimed at increasing education and educational opportunities, laws which protect disadvantaged groups in the labour market, poverty alleviation initiatives, and special measures aimed at enhancing equality between all groups. I also recommend that Member States review and redesign policies and programmes which may have a disproportionate effect on racial or ethnic minorities in view of their socio-economic vulnerability and implement effective measures to improve the access of such groups to civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.
Honourable Chair,

I would like now to turn to my second report on the implementation of resolution 67/154 on “glorification of Nazism: inadmissibility of certain practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”, in which I was requested to prepare a report on the implementation of the resolution, based on views collected from Governments and non-governmental organizations. I welcome the contributions sent by 16 States on the implementation of the resolution, as well as views sent by seven intergovernmental, non-governmental and other organizations pertaining to the issue raised in the resolution.

In this report I stress that the human rights and democratic challenges posed by extremist political parties, movements and groups are universal and no country is immune from them. Any commemorative celebration of the Nazi regime and its crimes against humanity, whether official or non-official, should be prohibited by States. I further encourage States to ratify international legislation to combat racism and call for the modernization of national anti-racism legislation in the light of the increasingly open expression of hate speech and incitement to violence against vulnerable groups.

States should also fulfill their responsibility of bringing to justice the perpetrators of crimes with racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic or homophobic motivation and to combat impunity. Similarly, States should ensure the full and effective implementation of legal, policy and institutional measures protecting vulnerable groups as Persons of African descent, Roma, migrants and refugees. Let me further reiterate that statistical data is needed to understand the scope and nature of racism, xenophobia and all related intolerance within societies. The organization of cultural events, research work, festivals, conferences, seminars, exhibitions and information campaigns are positive measures that contribute to the building of a society based on pluralism, mutual understanding, tolerance and non-discrimination. I therefore encourage States to strengthen the implementation of such initiatives. Finally, the media have a responsibility to play in combating stereotypes, promoting a culture of tolerance and playing an integrative role in providing space for ethnic minorities to have their voice heard.

I thank you for your attention.