

Virtual Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting

14 October 2020, 11h00 - 14h00 hours (BST)

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COMMONWEALTH STATEMENT ON RACISM

The Commonwealth's fifty-four equal and independent sovereign member states share values and aspirations that oppose all forms of racism and racial discrimination. We, nevertheless, recognise that all societies are vulnerable to hatred, intolerance, discrimination and negative stereotyping on the basis of race, colour or ethnic origin. The protests we have witnessed around the world have prompted us to confront the lasting effects of historical, as well as systemic, forms of racism. They have also highlighted the need for a long-overdue reflection on our approach to eliminate racial prejudice, intolerance, religious and violent extremism, xenophobia and hatred in all its forms and manifestations.

As we do so, we recall that the Commonwealth brings together members from six continents and the ocean, representing 2.4 billion people of many different nationalities, ethnicities, origins, cultures and religions. We are one of the most multicultural, multinational and multi-racial voluntary associations of states in history. The special strength of our Commonwealth family lies in the combination of our diversity and our shared heritage in language, ethos and the rule of law, in our respect for all States and peoples, in our shared democratic values and principles, in our promotion and protection of human rights for all, and in our protection of those in vulnerable situations. As we accelerate efforts to deliver the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Commonwealth should seek to address the structural and political causes of racism and racial discrimination, reducing inequalities and building a bright common future that leaves no-one behind.

Combatting all forms of racism and prohibiting racial discrimination have long exemplified Commonwealth principles and values set out in the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, the Lusaka Declaration on Racism and Racial Prejudice, the Harare Commonwealth Declaration, the Commonwealth Charter and our Affirmation on the 70th anniversary of the Commonwealth last year. We now reiterate our unwavering commitment to these core Commonwealth principles and values.

Racism and racial discrimination intersect with issues of poverty, age, sex, disability, gender identity, race, migration and religion, and reflects stereotypes, cultural norms, legislative measures, social behaviours and application of technology. Recalling the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the programme of activities of the International Decade for People of African Descent. As such, we will continue to fight against hate speech, any targeting of groups in vulnerable situations and all forms of discrimination - whether rooted in age, sex, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or belief, political, economic or other grounds.

We reaffirm our fundamental commitment to freedom of opinion and expression, and support the rights of all individuals in the Commonwealth to express their views peacefully in accordance with applicable international human rights law. We must continue to listen to the people and our vibrant Commonwealth civil society, to engage in conversations to dismantle entrenched, systemic racism, racial discrimination, misogyny, religious discrimination, violent extremism and hate speech in all their forms and manifestations, and achieve equality.

We stand united in our commitment to ensure the human rights, dignity, and equality of all people, we are resolved to adopt all necessary measures to eliminate racial discrimination and inequity which persist today and tend to be exacerbated during times of crisis. We express our deep concern at the rise in xenophobia, racism and other forms of discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, the need for inclusive multilateralism is clear.

We will increase our efforts by sharing good practice across the Commonwealth to build mutual understanding and advance our common goal of eliminating racism and racial discrimination. Among other things, these efforts where applicable may include:

- (i) introducing or strengthening legislation and administrative measures to prevent racism and racial discrimination in all its manifestations and protect vulnerable groups, including Indigenous Peoples;

- (ii) ensuring that access to, and administration of, justice is free from racial prejudice and discrimination based on race, colour or ethnic origin;
- (iii) combatting systemic racism in our institutions so that they meet the needs of people from all ethnic or social backgrounds;
- (iv) addressing racial discrimination in social and cultural spheres, giving due consideration to how racism and sexism can intersect, and to the rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- (v) ensuring education and awareness that promote equality, the value and strength of inclusion and respect for diversity, and the importance of tackling systemic racism and racial discrimination;
- (vi) promoting equal economic opportunity, including for those from minority communities, in order to reduce socio-economic inequality caused by racism;
- (vii) creating a safe and enabling environment for civil society and human rights defenders;
- (viii) countering incitement of racial discrimination and hatred, including in new forms of ICT-facilitated space, particularly during times of crisis; and
- (ix) ensuring that the story of the Commonwealth reflects historical facts accurately, for example, slavery, the slave trade, and colonialism.

We will continue to work together, along with our international partners, to enhance contacts and exchanges between the peoples of the Commonwealth; to celebrate our diversity and our efforts to deliver a common future, recognising the contributions of all; and to promote equality and respect for all people.

Ends.