

Consultative Dialogue for the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination,  
Xenophobia and Related Intolerance  
29 February 2016

## **OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa Statement of Support**

Delivered by Katherine Liao, OIC and Deputy Representative of the OHCHR Regional Office for Southern Africa (ROSA)

### **Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am very proud to be representing the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, this morning in support of the Department of Justice's initiative to launch, for public consultation and crucial dialogue, the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (NAP) - that is being launched in South Africa today.

The prohibition of racial discrimination is enshrined in all core international human rights instruments and it constitutes an obligation owed to everyone. The issue of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance is one of today's most critical, and indeed most complex, human rights challenges. Despite positive changes in laws, hate crimes and discrimination continues, indeed not a week goes by without reports of brutal violence and intimidation, police harassment and widespread discriminatory treatment affecting people around the world. Even those who speak out in defence of the rights of the most vulnerable people risk persecution and assault and even, in some countries, legal sanctions.

During the month of March, South Africa commemorates its national Human Rights Day that was born of the sacrifice 69 people made when they lost their lives during the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960. We remember and honour the fight against apartheid and the terrible suffering brought about by racial discrimination.

South African history, particularly since 1994, gives me strong reason to believe that South Africans know what to do about addressing racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance since you have been, leading and guiding the world to fight intolerance and discrimination. The example South Africa provided through its inclusive constitution which provides protection from all forms of discrimination, has inspired others around the world. Many other countries have also embarked on historic reforms – fighting inequality and discrimination against, for example, indigenous peoples, migrants, persons with disabilities, and members of the LGBT community.

The OHCHR calls for the protection of the rights of all against all forms of discrimination. I am very pleased to note that the launch of the public consultations for the National Action Plan takes a human rights-based approach because such an approach is founded on the interrelated principles of non-discrimination, meaningful participation, empowerment, and accountability.

Based on best practices, I would like to mention the some practical measures which may be considered in order to combat xenophobia at the national level. I will not mention all of them here but some of the important ones include:

- Ratifying international and regional human rights instruments and implementing relevant standards which protect the human rights of all persons at risk of discrimination.
- Elaborating and implementing legal measures, in conformity with international and regional human rights standards, that prevent and address discrimination, for example, by enacting anti-discrimination provisions.
- Strengthening law enforcement and criminal justice responses to violence and discrimination, including through adequate training and resourcing.
- Enabling victims and communities at risk of discrimination to access justice, including through accessible complaints mechanisms, and ensuring remedies for victims.
- Reaching out and build links with communities and individuals affected by discrimination, including through the provision of legal, medical and psychological assistance.
- Collecting data on hate crimes and improve the quality of such data-collection systems.
- Taking measures to promote tolerance and respect for diversity and challenge prejudice and negative stereotypes in the media, including through social media and the internet.
- Encouraging political leaders to speak out against discrimination and promote respect for all.
- Developing and launching awareness raising initiatives, focusing on inclusiveness and diversity and human rights, including through campaigns that recognize the rights and contributions marginalised groups to society.
- Creating adequate institutions and mechanisms to monitor and report on discrimination, e.g. by creating specialized national bodies and by building networks with civil society.

In the past, President Nelson Mandela, and many others including the High Commissioner for Human Rights have highlighted that “Overcoming intolerance and prejudice will require more public education.” We hope that the National Plan of Action being launched today will also contemplate a public education component to promote more acceptance, tolerance and understanding of all people and dispel negative stereotypes and beliefs.

I feel very confident that this Consultative Dialogue on the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance ongoing in South Africa will go a long way in empowering communities, with the guidance of the Government of South Africa led by the Department of Justice, to address the challenge of reinforcing the protection of the human rights of all people living in South Africa, including their protection from violence and all forms of discrimination, combat impunity, and ensure more effective remedy for discriminatory behaviour that do occur.

Therefore I take this opportunity to give this message of support, and thank you for your voice, the role you are playing and your commitment to the cause of dignity, human rights for all in South Africa and by your good example, the world.

**END**