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New York, 21 March 2007 – United Nations' Secretary-General's message on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

On 21 March 1960, police opened fire on peaceful demonstrators protesting racially discriminatory laws in Sharpeville, South Africa. 69 people died and scores more were injured. Every year the world commemorates that massacre to focus attention on the fight against racism wherever and whenever it occurs.

The theme of this year's observance, "Racism and Discrimination – Obstacles to Development", draws attention to the links between racism, discrimination and development. Racist practices hurt their victims, but they also limit the promise of entire societies where they are tolerated. They prevent individuals from realizing their potential and stop them from contributing fully to national progress. They perpetuate deeply embedded social and economic inequalities. Where unaddressed, they can cause social unrest and conflict, undermining stability and economic growth.

The world has made significant strides against racial discrimination in recent decades. The apartheid system was dismantled in South Africa, while many nations passed anti-discrimination laws. But much more remains to be done. Laws on the books haven't always translated into improved conditions on the ground. And numerous countries have yet to formulate and implement effective anti-discrimination policies. In fact, 42 years after it was adopted, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination still falls well short of universal ratification. Overall, recent reports point to a disturbing rise in incidents of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in many parts of the world.

The United Nations, through its lawmaking, human rights monitoring and awareness raising roles, has an important part to play in the fight against racial discrimination. But each and every one of us must also make a stand: we must disavow discriminatory and intolerant acts in our personal lives, and speak out forcefully against them in the public sphere. Given the connection between racism and development, these actions should be seen as an integral part of local and national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Let us mark this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination by recommitting ourselves to the equality of all human beings, and by resolving to make every effort to realize this simple yet powerful ideal.



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Geneva, 21 March 2007 – “Discrimination negates contribution of whole parts of society,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights says

Message of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Forty seven years after the massacre of dozens of peaceful demonstrators in Sharpeville, South Africa, the world comes together to remember, once again, the worst excesses of a brutal racist regime, and to take stock of the ravages that racial discrimination continues to inflict everywhere.

Racial discrimination is wrong and harmful in itself. It is a denial of human rights, an affront to human dignity and a direct assault on the foundation of the human rights edifice – the principle of equality. Discrimination and bias also have a direct impact on a society's development. A society that tolerates discrimination holds itself back, foregoing the contribution of whole parts of its population, and potentially sowing the seeds of violent conflict.

An overwhelming majority of States has accepted the legal obligation to fight racial discrimination. But a reality check demonstrates that formal commitments are not enough. This International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is the occasion to mobilize public opinion, as well as to remind governments of their duty to combat racial discrimination in all its forms and thereby help ensure the full development of all members of our communities now and for generations to come.