

**Speech by Mr. Githu Muigai, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance  
at the occasion of the High-Level Panel to celebrate the International Day on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

19 March 2009

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentleman,

Let me first of all express how pleased I am to be among you today to celebrate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

While the fight against racism is an endeavour that occurs every single day, special celebrations like the International Day are unique opportunities to make us focus collectively on the challenges that lie ahead. This Panel also gives us the ideal setting to pay tribute to those who have suffered, and who continue to suffer, the consequences of all forms of racism.

I am particularly happy that in 2009 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is celebrated at this timely juncture. Within a month, the Durban Review Conference will take place in this building. This will mark the largest world gathering to fight racism in the past 8 years. I cannot but emphasize the contemporary relevance of this event.

The breadth and ambition of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action created a beacon of hope for those working against all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Never before had we identified so clearly the key international, regional and national strategies that need to be implemented to redress historical wrongs and current injustices. I see the DDPA as the most comprehensive blueprint at our disposal to move forward in our efforts to eliminate the scourge of racism.

The unprecedented framework established by the DDPA, however, has yet to be fully implemented across the globe. Day after day we are reminded of the continued relevance of the fight against racism. Displays of intolerance abound, from small gestures in interpersonal relations to large-scale violence targeting people of different skin colour or ethnicity. We all agree that the task ahead of us is immense.

This is why the Durban Review Conference is so important. Time is ripe for a renewed international engagement against racism. We need to finally give meaning to the words we uttered and to the pledges we made in 2001. This can only be done by finding effective ways of implementing the DDPA. A successful Review Conference will in this sense empower stakeholders across the globe, providing them with concrete tools, effective strategies and good practices for their daily fight against racism.

Excellencies,

The Review Conference also comes at a challenging time amidst the current turmoil in the world economy. I would like therefore to take a few moments to reflect on an often forgotten dimension of the global financial crisis, which is its impact on the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The victims of racism, in developed and developing countries alike, generally form the most economically marginalized groups in any society. An unmistakable testimony of the historical impact of racism, and of its contemporary resilience, is the overlap between poverty and ethnicity across the world.

A devastating consequence of the socio-economic vulnerability of minorities is the double impact that the financial crisis will bestow upon them. As many others, they will suffer from decaying wages, increasing unemployment and even more critical standards of living. But in addition, they are also more vulnerable to many expressions of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Such manifestations of racism and xenophobia can take the form of increased intolerance against foreigners, particularly migrants. In the current context, the positive contribution of migrants to economic growth, social interactions and cultural diversity tend to be forgotten. Rather, migrants are more likely to be seen as competitors for scarce jobs and social services. Political parties are often ready to capitalize on these fears for political ends. Racist and xenophobic political platforms are still widespread, attesting to our collective failure to effectively combat racism.

Racial or ethnic minorities are also more likely to suffer from racism in their own countries. Discrimination in the provision of public services, which are ever more essential during the current crisis, contributes to the impoverishment and social stagnation of these individuals. Furthermore, barriers for minorities to enter the labour market, to find adequate housing, to attend good schools and to enjoy health care can be further reinforced under the current context.

It is in these difficult times that our commitment to the fight against racism must be unrelenting. In this regard, a successful Durban Review Conference should be seen as a central component of the international community's strategy to face the present multitude of crises.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the release of the revised draft outcome document for the Durban Review Conference. I echo the High Commissioner's words in expressing my hope that this shorter text will represent a major turning point for the intergovernmental negotiations and lead to a consensual final document. The revised draft has addressed the concerns of many stakeholders in this process and thus provides a solid basis for the next round of negotiations. I would like therefore to express my sincere appreciation for those involved in this preparation of this revised document for their constructive work to facilitate consensus.

Excellencies,

The facts are clear. The fight against racism is as relevant today as it has ever been in the past. Racism is a global problem; any solution must therefore be collective. I therefore would like to take this opportunity of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to call upon on States as well as civil society to participate fully and constructively in the negotiations leading to the Review Conference in April and to devise consensual solutions that will have a concrete impact on people's lives.

Thank you very much.