



## United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC)

### Topic A: Strategies to Uproot Systemic Racism in Terms of Political Participation and Representation

#### Introduction:

Systemic racism is broadly defined as a framework of judgements, regulations, or statutes promulgated by a sovereign government or authoritative entity. These regulations or statutes confer specific rights and privileges upon one ethnic group, while concurrently depriving other groups within the same society of equal rights and privileges. The discriminatory practice stems from entrenched cultural and religious biases, fears, myths, and forms of xenophobia perpetuated by the privileged group.

Therefore, institutional racism denotes the ingrained racial bias systematically embedded within government laws and policies, extending to their practical implementation. This bias is evident in various sectors, such as law enforcement and judicial systems, and can manifest either explicitly or implicitly, systematically neglecting the needs of racialized communities.

Several forms of systemic racism exist, including:

1. **Political disempowerment:** it pertains to the vulnerability and loss of political influence, where voting and electoral district designations serve as a poignant contemporary and historical illustrations of systemic racism.
2. **Segregation:** it is often intertwined with economic disadvantaged, limiting opportunities, such as access to quality employment or educational choices.
3. **Financial practices:** it manifests by creating substantial barriers to home ownership and wealth accumulation. Racial and ethnic disparities persist in areas previously marked by exclusion, with entities like payday lenders and check cashing services imposing exorbitant fees and usurious interest rates. Instances include redlining, a discriminatory practice denying financial services based on neighborhood racial composition.
4. **Environmental injustice:** it is known that racially segregated communities frequently bear the direct health consequences of environmental injustice. These instances involve the disproportionate placement of toxic waste sites in minority neighborhoods.
5. **Judicial systems:** it is supported by the discernible racial disparities in imprisonment, which are indicative of widespread discriminatory policing and sentencing practices.





6. **Historical Instances:** it is the way in which institutional racism has left an indelible mark throughout history, with egregious instances highlighting the profound impact on marginalized communities. Some examples include antisemitism, apartheid, or public policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) or the Mexican Repatriation (1929-1936), both imposed by the United States.

To effectively confront systemic racism, a comprehensive overhaul of systems, laws, policies, and practices is imperative. Transformation should be crafted with an unwavering commitment to effectiveness, durability, and broad impact, eschewing the adoption of piecemeal, time-limited programs that often prove inadequate in generating sustained or fundamental change. The endeavor demands a strategic and encompassing approach, ensuring that the modifications resonate across diverse facets of society, fostering enduring and meaningful transformation rather than mere superficial adjustments.

**Concepts and definitions:**

- **Biase:** prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.
- **Disenfranchisement:** the state of being deprived of a right or privilege, especially the right to vote.
- **Privileges:** a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.
- **Racism:** the relegation of people of color to inferior status and treatment based on unfounded beliefs about innate inferiority, as well as unjust treatment and oppression.
- **Segregated:** separated or divided along racial, sexual, or religious lines.
- **Structural racism:** the role that laws, policies, institutional practices, and entrenched norms, written or unwritten, play into perpetuating racism within societies.
- **Systemic racism:** the involvement of whole systems (such as political, legal, economic, health care, educational, and judicial systems), including the structures that uphold them, into perpetuating racism.
- **Xenophobia:** dislike, hatred, or fear of outsiders.

**Current issue:**

Systemic racism in terms of political participation and representation refers to the existence of patterns and structures in political institutions that perpetuate racial discrimination and inequality. This can manifest itself in various ways in the political arena, affecting the participation, representation, and political power of racialized communities. Scientifically, it is a tractable event, urgent for cognitive scientists to address. The built-in systems that





undermine life opportunities and outcomes by racial category, with a focus on challenges to people of color.

The United States, for example, has made progress in eliminating some of the legalized and institutionalized racial discrimination of years past, such as slavery, Jim Crow laws, “separate but equal” schools, and the ban on voting or owning land. Whilst these hard-won victories deserve to be remembered and celebrated, the data on social and economic welfare still shows disparities between many peoples of color:

- Unemployment rates for African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans are considerably higher than the national average. Growing income inequality increasingly affects minorities.
- The median wealth for households in the U.S. is ten times higher than for African American households, and eight times higher than for Hispanic households.
- Minority homeownership rates lag their white counterparts. Yet research shows that minorities face additional barriers to obtaining mortgage approval.
- African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans are disproportionately affected at all stages of the criminal justice system.
- Asian Americans are often verbally assaulted and physically harassed. Women are the most frequent target, suffering nearly 70 percent of the attacks.<sup>1</sup>

However, systemic racism is not exclusive to the United States. Even if it is a clear archetype, racial discrimination and inequality continues to exist in every region of the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, racism takes various forms based on the countries’ colonial past, where racial and ethnic discrimination has its roots in slavery and European colonialism since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Even in 2023, multiple forms of discrimination and racism against afro-descendant individuals, indigenous peoples, and other racial groups and minorities persist and are on the rise. The recent visibility of police brutality, incidents of racial profiling, systemic violence against afro-descendant individuals, and the impunity surrounding these issues demonstrate that the eradication of racism is an imperative that cannot wait.

There is also Europe, where many countries struggle with the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in political institutions. Minorities may face barriers in accessing political positions, and this lack of representation can contribute to policies that do not adequately address the needs of these communities. Europe has seen the rise of xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment, which can impact the political participation of racial and ethnic minorities, especially those who are immigrants or belong to immigrant communities.

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<sup>1</sup> *Systemic racism and the Asian American community*. (2022, May 20). Family Therapy Magazine [Online article]. <https://ftm.aamft.org/systemic-racism-and-the-asian-american-community/>





Policies that disproportionately affect minority communities, such as those related to criminal justice, housing, and social services, can further marginalize these groups, and hinder their ability to participate fully in the political process. Addressing systemic racism in Europe requires comprehensive efforts, including legal reforms, educational initiatives, and increased representation of minorities in political institutions. It also involves challenging societal attitudes and fostering inclusivity to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, have equal opportunities to participate in and contribute to the political landscape.

Similarly, Asian countries may experience discrimination in electoral processes, ranging from voter suppression to biased constituency delimitation, which can disadvantage certain minority groups. This influences political participation and representation as well, so it is essential to recognize that the experiences of systemic racism are diverse and shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts.

#### **Initiatives taken by the international community:**

- **The adoption of the Inter-American Convention against Racism (IACRDI):** it is an instrument that represents a significant milestone, consolidating the Organization of American States' (OAS) commitment to the total and unconditional eradication of racism, racial discrimination, and all forms of intolerance. With its adoption, the IACRDI became the regional counterpart in the Americas to the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)** of 1965, the first internationally universal instrument prioritizing the fight against racism and racial discrimination.

The adoption of the IACRDI aims to strengthen regional human rights efforts and create an international protection framework closer to the local context, responsive to the realities of the region. Certainly, the adoption of the Inter-American Convention against Racism signifies a substantial advancement in recognizing the racial gap in a region where racism and racial discrimination have been systematically overlooked. The existence of such an instrument is a necessary step for the visibility and combatting of racism.

- **The Statement given by the International Science Council on Combating Systemic Racism and Other Forms of Discrimination:** in advocating the free and responsible practice of science, the Council promotes equal opportunities for access to science and its benefits, and opposes discrimination based on factors such as ethnicity, religion, citizenship, language, political or other opinion.
- **The stepping up of the European Union to install measures to eradicate racism and collaborate with third countries to achieve this goal:** the E.U. has been working with Member States to achieve a more complete understanding of the problem within





the E.U. and to implement a more effective approach to eliminating racism. The E.U. also continues to address the problem in non-E.U. countries. Racism is addressed in human rights dialogues with other countries, where measures to combat it and possibilities for closer collaboration are discussed.

- **The launching of the Global Coalition Against Systemic Racism and Reparations:** it is an international platform which purpose is to promote actions that confront and eliminate systemic racism and advocate for reparations through collaboration among public, private, political, social, business, cultural and productive entities, as well as international organizations.

This coalition established a decalogue, which outlines the following commitments:

- a. **Anti-racist language:** commitment to eradicate, censure and condemn racist language in all forms of communication, promoting the use of anti-racist language.
- b. **Statistical visibility:** focus on statistical visibility of afro-descendant individuals in censuses, surveys, and public records to address systemic racism and historical reparations.
- c. **Places that are free of discrimination:** creation of spaces that are free of discrimination, especially regarding workplaces, prohibiting limitations or exclusions based on employment criteria and condemning discriminatory actions.
- d. **Affirmative actions:** implementation of affirmative actions of afro-descendant individuals to compensate for systemic discrimination, including affirmative quotas and measures to promote recognition and empowerment.
- e. **Awareness activities:** promotion of awareness activities about the anti-racist struggle and the recognition of afro-descendant individuals, including support for international days, such as the International Day of Afro-Descendants.
- f. **Coalition growth:** promotion of the Global Coalition with allies to boost the international anti-racist community, emphasizing the need for participation from all social, political, economic, and civil society actors.
- g. **Digital eradication of racism:** concrete actions to eradicate racism in the digital world.
- h. **Support for initiatives:** support for anti-racist actions and initiatives from international bodies, including the ratification of international conventions and treaties.
- i. **Victim assistance:** improvement of assistance to victims of racism and discrimination, including strengthening victims' ability to speak up for themselves, legal assistance, and access to mental health care.





- j. **Exchange of experiences:** periodic exchange of experiences and co-creation among the Global Coalition’s partners through regular meetings, with a commitment to systematize experiences in combating racism and discrimination.
- **The United Nations calling attention on the need to reform the justice system in the U.S. to combat systemic racism:** United Nations’ experts have called for urgent reform of the U.S. criminal justice system to combat systemic racism and racial discrimination against afro-descendant people. The recommendation for reform suggests a recognition of the broader societal impact of systematic racism and its detrimental effects on marginalized communities.

Efforts to combat systemic racism in the criminal justice system may involve policy changes, legislative reforms, and initiatives focused on eliminating discriminatory practices. Additionally, fostering accountability, transparency, and inclusivity within the justice system are likely key components of the suggested reforms.
- **The creation of the United Nations Permanent Forum for People of African Descent:** it is a consultative mechanism for people of African descent and a platform for improving their security, quality of life and livelihoods, as well as a consultative body to the Human Rights Council. The forum engages in dialogue, influences policies, and collaborates with international bodies to address racial discrimination and social injustices affecting diverse communities.

**Guiding questions:**

1. How has historical systemic racism influenced political participation and representation among racialized communities at your delegation?
2. In what ways have discriminatory policies and practices shaped access to political engagement at your delegation?
3. How might underrepresentation contribute to a lack of engagement in the political process?
4. How does the intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status affect political participation at your delegation?
5. In what ways can community-based initiatives empower racialized groups politically?
6. How does the media influence the political participation and representation of racialized communities at your delegation?

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