

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE DEPUTIES FORUM

**SUMMARY RECORD AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

19 August 2020  
Virtual Meeting

Session 1: Dialogue with Ms. Shireen Dodson, UN Ombudsman

In his opening remarks, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator (DERC) a.i, and Chair of the IASC Deputies Forum explained that the objective of the meeting was to follow up on the action point from the IASC Principals meeting held on 10 July, which requested the IASC Deputies Forum to discuss and determine how best to tackle the issue of racism and racial discrimination in the workplace. He made reference to the recent call to action by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on addressing racism and racial discrimination within the UN. He noted that several IASC members had already taken actions internally to address this issue. Against this backdrop, the goal of the meeting was to develop an action plan to address racism and racial discrimination within IASC organizations and in the humanitarian sector.

The Chair thanked Deputies and their organizations for their feedback on the draft Statement by IASC Principals on Racism and Racial Discrimination in the Humanitarian Sector, noting that the revised statement had been submitted to the Emergency Relief Coordinator for his consideration. He noted, there has been a readiness by a majority of IASC members and standing invitees to sign up to the statement.

In addition to the statement, the Chair commented that the IASC's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group (OPAG) had worked on a survey to capture best practices and to explore how organizations work to prevent and eliminate racism and racial discrimination within IASC members and standing invitee organizations. This survey has a focus on three key areas; i) Inward facing, within organizations; ii) relations with affected populations; and iii) towards local organizations.

The Chair stressed the importance of learning from other system-wide experiences. In this regard, he invited Ms. Shireen Dodson, the UN Ombudsman and the co-chair of the UN Task Force established to tackle racism and racial discrimination within the UN Secretariat to share her observations thus far. The UN Ombudsman stated that the Secretary-General had taken a bold step by initiating an inward-looking exercise through the work of the Task Force, which was undertaking several actions around three core areas, on i) knowledge; ii) awareness; and iii) analysis and action.

On the knowledge component, the UN Ombudsman noted that the Task Force had launched a UN staff engagement survey to collect information about the knowledge and experiences of staff on racism and racial discrimination. The survey will establish a baseline that will enable a comparison in 18 months' time, on staff knowledge and attitudes on racism and racial discrimination. While the survey has a focus on the UN Secretariat, it will also be shared with

UN Agencies, Funds and Programs, as well as organizations outside the UN system. The UN Ombudsman noted that the Task Force had consulted several experts on the questions and categories used in the survey. The survey will be complimented by a dedicated page on the UN intranet (iSeek) platform with testimonials on positive and negative experiences of staff, as well as of managers on how they plan to tackle racism in their work and offices; and a list of resources, such as TED talks, books, and articles.

On awareness raising, the UN Ombudsman noted the importance of self-education and reflection to address unconscious biases on racism. The Task Force will suggest books and encourage book club style discussions to increase awareness. These will be accompanied with a discussion guide to facilitate such discussions. The UN Ombudsman noted that she recently used “Everyday Ubuntu” by Mungi Ngomane to discuss racism with her team which helped staff to open up on the issue and learn from one another’s experiences. The Task Force will also develop programs around themes, such as on intersectionality, privilege and more, with panel discussions, focus groups and TED talks. This would enable the Task Force to leverage easy wins, such as the inclusion of racism discussions in mandatory trainings which human resource colleagues were already considering, as well as look into reviewing human resource policies and procedures to deal with unconscious bias. The UN Ombudsman encouraged IASC Deputies to consider book club-style discussions with their staff in small or large settings. These discussions would be supported by the Task Force through the provision of discussion guides.

Regarding the third area of work on analysis and action, a review of existing policies and their implementation would be undertaken based on the survey. This would enable the Task Force to explore systemic issues and make recommendations to the UN Secretary-General on required actions, including changes to policies and how they may be implemented.

In the discussions, IASC Deputies emphasised the need to address racism and racial discrimination in the workplace more directly and not only as part of a broader aspect of inclusion and diversity. They requested the UN Secretariat survey and discussion books to be shared with their offices; and many expressed support for the draft statement by IASC Principals, as well as for the questionnaire. Most members indicated they had engaged in internal consultations at various levels within their organisations. WFP and SCHR highlighted the importance of ensuring a clear focus on racism. WFP outlined its initiatives, including the appointment of a new Assistant Secretary-General whose portfolio includes reviewing workplace culture, inclusion, and racial discrimination. In addition, WFP has hired of external expertise to facilitate dialogue and knowledge-building among staff, and to support efforts to take agreed actions forward. WFP also indicated that their Executive Board is keen to have a specific survey for the organisation and hence sought advice on how to balance internal and external conversations.

SCHR shared several reflections from discussions among its members. This includes, the importance of making space for diverse voices to be heard, through for example, inviting challenging speakers to contribute to this discussion; and the need of individual organizations’ concrete actions that go beyond statements, as opposed to a collective response – a point echoed by UNHCR and InterAction.

OHCHR highlighted that it was tackling the issue of racism and racial discrimination in the workplace through various initiatives, including, the establishment of a specific working group on racism, alongside other working groups on gender and diversity; the recruitment of a senior

adviser (P-5 level) on inclusion and diversity and, review of policies on human resources, noting this is , where unconscious bias plays a role in the understanding of job descriptions, qualifications and selections. Also, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on racism and the High Commissioner will continue to report on human rights violations and abuses.

UNDP noted that their Administrator was fully supportive of the IASC statement on racism. Like other agencies, UNDP has also started an internal reflection initiative, which included a town hall focused on racism; the review of racism related questions in staff surveys over the years to understand the trajectory of racism in the organization; the setting-up of a dedicated and well-resourced team to support on racial discrimination; and an open dialogue in the organization. Findings from these processes would feed into recommendations to be presented to the Administrator.

UNICEF described its initiatives, including the setting-up of a task team to identify and take forward evidence-based actions to address discrimination at UNICEF. The task team has met virtually on a weekly basis since the first week of July, and developing terms of reference and work plan. They have also launched a dedicated Anti-Racism and Discrimination SharePoint page with resources, good practices and updates, while also providing opportunities to share experiences anonymously. UNICEF also analysed feedback and inputs received from staff during an event in June 2020. Moving forward, the task team will hold focus group discussions with key Black constituents and regional stakeholders, develop an action plan on anti-racism and discrimination as well as identification of options for mentoring for groups that are more likely to be discriminated against, starting with Black staff.

UNHCR cautioned on the risk of survey fatigue with the number of surveys on the increase. UNHCR called for enhanced information sharing among IASC partners, to promote awareness and learning from the work done and good practices developed by other organisations. UNHCR drew participants' attention to the lessons learnt and good practices on the dissemination and utilisation of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment prevention and response tools and products, as a basis for a common approach with shared resources to facilitate discussions around racism, a point echoed by InterAction and IOM. Drawing from its organisational experience, following the creation of the Senior Advisor position on Inclusion, Diversity and Gender, four years ago, UNHCR cautioned against approaching racial discrimination in a siloed manner, given the intersectionality between culture and race and its impact on behaviour in relation to other people and affected populations. UNHCR will undertake an evaluation to understand the experiences, backgrounds and thoughts of its workforce.

FAO noted that its global staff survey had not clearly demonstrated issues of discrimination and racism. Related feedback had featured issues around diversity. FAO was therefore embarking on a culture change initiative.

UNFPA stressed the importance of self-reflection, self-education and awareness. Its activities included engaging with its Board and organizing a town hall to discuss the issue. Highlighting the importance of long-term commitment to this issue, InterAction noted that its efforts focused on engagement with its staff; the development of a strategy; and the appointment of dedicated staff.

IOM has facilitated discussions at the country, regional and headquarters levels, and suggested to bring in staff and stakeholders from various races into the World Humanitarian Day social media campaigns.

ICVA has started a deep reflection on the issue of racial discrimination including within its Board and in preparation for ICVA's 2030 Strategy by considering humanitarian principles, and Core Humanitarian Standards, as an entry point for this conversation. ICVA noted that this discussion provides an opportunity to review and update organisational practices, processes, policies and standards. This may require external expertise to facilitate discussions on unconscious bias, culture and embedded structures that undermine the knowledge and ability to combat discrimination. In addition, ICVA highlighted that this discussion is very much about organizations work but also how they partner with local and national organizations, and, how risk is transferred, and mutual duty of care is shared. Finally, ICVA noted a proactive approach and process prioritizing discussions and embedding learning is key.

WHO highlighted its zero-tolerance policy towards racism, and expressed readiness to support other racism related initiatives.

In summary, the UN Ombudsman acknowledged that this work would require partnership across the system. Second, organizations need to manage expectations of staff while leveraging low-hanging fruits and devising sustainable strategies. With regard to the definition of race, the UN Ombudsman noted that her office had received some push-back on categories used in the survey and acknowledged that defining and classifying race was a complicated and sensitive issue.

The Chair acknowledged the various contributions made by participants, noting the critical work that is already underway by IASC member organizations to address the issue of racism and racial discrimination in the work place, which is key to inform collective and/or coordinated action. In that regard, he noted that the IASC survey will be key to capture best practices and could inform the concrete actions being taken by IASC member organizations on the issue. The Chair also echoed the need to learn from the PSEA and SHA work stream and build upon existing tools and procedures to address this critical area of work. Furthermore, he noted the important work being done by the OPAG on this issue and sought their support to consider further concrete steps to address the issue of racism and racial discrimination in the work place. He was encouraged by the ongoing work by the OPAG on localization (taking place under the co-leadership of ICVA and UNHCR) and noted the importance of considering approaches to mitigate racism and racial discrimination towards local partners.

## Session 2: Concrete Actions to Address Racism and Racial Discrimination

The Chair informed IASC Deputies that the focus of this second session was to come up with concrete actions IASC organizations could take unilaterally or bilaterally to address issues of racism and racial discrimination in the work place. The Chair highlighted the seven commitments outlined in the IASC statement and invited IASC Deputies to share their thoughts and reflections on proposed actions to take the work forward in the next six months:

- 1) zero tolerance to racism and racial discrimination and commitment to eliminate such behavior within all humanitarian work environment and operations;

- 2) working at all levels within and among organizations to identify and address structural barriers to inclusion to eliminate all forms of racism and racial discrimination including systemic and institutional racism
- 3) creating an environment where all colleagues feel safe to speak about and report on incidents of racism and racial discrimination without fear of retaliation.
- 4) strengthening our actions and capability and policies to foster diversity and inclusion to ensure zero tolerance for racial discrimination in the human workforce.
- 5) nurturing an inclusive environment necessary for a diverse workforce to flourish and promote values including respect for diversity.
- 6) ensuring that all our staff are aware of their rights and comply with their responsibilities.
- 7) ensuring that the IASC Deputies Forum takes forward further actions during the next six months to address racism and racial discrimination at the workplace as well as mitigating unconscious biases towards vulnerable populations and or local partners.

The Chair noted that the draft IASC survey was a good first step to facilitate sharing of best practices from different organisation. He acknowledged feedback received from the OPAG to date, and requested the support of the IASC Deputies in the completion of the survey over the next month. The IASC survey is divided into three sections: i) organizational dialogue and strategy; ii) policies and guidance, and iii) managing complaints, investigations and consequences.

The Chair also noted a few of the proposals received from members on how to move forward concretely. One suggestion was to appoint a core group drawn from the IASC members which would design an action plan with clear benchmarks; support training and awareness raising to all staff on anti-racism and discrimination; and reviewing and strengthening the channels available to affected populations to report incidents of racism and racial discrimination by IASC organizations or staff.

In the discussions, WFP commended the structure of the draft Survey, categorized along the three thematic areas. However, noted the statement by IASC Principals on racism and racial discrimination, was fairly silent on the affected populations. InterAction sought clarity on whether the proposed core group would oversee the work or do the work itself noting that a core group of specialists within organizations may be better placed to take this forward.

Referring to other UN structures already engaged in the issue, such as the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), and its High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), UNHCR suggested that the role of the IASC Deputies Forum needs to be better defined. Accordingly, UNHCR noted that OPAG may be the body to take forward this discussion, given its focus on policy. WFP voiced support for OPAG to take forward this initiative.

In response, the Chair explained that he would consider how aspects of the draft IASC survey could be reflected into the statement by the Principals. He emphasized the need for the survey results to inform the next steps to be undertaken by the Deputies Forum and OPAG. He called for the provision of options for IASC members to engage in the focus groups discussions organized by the UN Ombudsman's team.

The Chair further observed the need to link to existing and established structures to move the work forward. He asked the OPAG to take the work forward, and develop an action plan with clear benchmarks against it, in consultation with the IASC Deputies Forum. He noted that the key function of the IASC Deputies Forum is to address issues that may not come up in other

forums. To this end, he noted the need for a brainstorming discussion and develop a way forward on the future of this forum.

The IASC Deputies Forum recommended:

- Liaise with the Ombudsman's Office to advise on how IASC members may engage in the UN system-wide consultations/ focus groups being organized by the Task Force on Racism and Racial Discrimination. [*IASC Secretariat*]
- Consider how best to capitalize on the SEA/SHA infrastructure to capture and address issues of racism and racial discrimination. [*OPAG*]
- Lead efforts to complete the IASC survey to capture best practices. (members of the Deputies Forum).
- Devise an action plan to better address the issue of racism and racial discrimination with clear benchmarks, for consideration by the Deputies Forum. [*OPAG*]

### Session 3: AOB

A number of participants noted the need to discuss and consider the role of the Deputies Forum. UNHCR asked for a discussion on defining the role of the Forum and how it could be better utilized. SCHR noted that the role of the IASC Deputies Forum required its own stand-alone discussion, given the varying views expressed in a previous meeting. The Chair reminded the Deputies that the Forum was an informal body and hence its purpose is to complement and not duplicate what other structures are doing, such as the Principals, OPAG and EDGs. Nevertheless, the Chair welcomed a discussion on the role of the Deputies Forum and encouraged the Deputies to share their thoughts with the Secretariat. The Chair requested the IASC secretariat to produce a paper on the role of the Forum for discussion at an upcoming meeting. The Chair concluded the discussion by noting that following discussion within the Forum, the proposal would be taken up by the ERC and IASC Principals for their consideration and agreement.

The IASC Deputies Forum recommended:

- Develop an options paper to better define the purpose of the Deputies Forum for discussion (IASC secretariat).

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### List of Participants

1. Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator a.i
2. Ms. Shireen Dodson, UN Ombudsman
3. Mr. Louis Germain, UN Ombudsman's Office
4. Ms. Maria Helena Semedo, FAO
5. Mr. Dominique Burgeon, FAO
6. Ms. Clare Dalton, ICRC
7. Ms. Jane Backhurst, ICVA
8. Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi, ICVA
9. Mr. Julien Schopp, Interaction
10. Ms. Kate Philips-Barasso, Interaction

11. Mr. Justin Byworth, World Vision
12. Ms. Cecile Aptel, IFRC
13. Ms. Victoria Stodart, IFRC
14. Ms. Laura Thompson, IOM
15. Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, OHCHR
16. Ms. Emilyya Cermak, OHCHR
17. Mr. George Conway, UNDP
18. Ms Diene Keita, UNFPA
19. Mr. Raf Tuts, UN-Habitat
20. Ms. Kelly Clements, UNHCR
21. Ms. Annika Sundlund, UNHCR
22. Ms. Meritxell Relano, UNICEF
23. Ms Valerie Guarnieri, WFP
24. Ms. Annalise Conte, WFP
25. Mr. Rudi Coninx, WHO
26. Mr. Michel Yao, WHO
27. Ms. Maria Dimitriadou, World Bank
28. Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, IASC Secretariat