

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE DEPUTIES FORUM

SUMMARY RECORD AND RECOMMENDATIONS

18 March 2021

Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator (DERC) a.i, and Chair of the IASC Deputies Forum, convened the meeting to discuss the role and function of the Deputies Forum; and review progress made in the addressing and preventing racism and racial discrimination in the system, and reflect on system-wide efforts in this regard.

Session 1: Role and Function of the Deputies Forum

The Chair noted the critical role the Forum plays in addressing strategic issues, including the recently concluded discussions on PSEA, and emphasized the decision-making authority that the Forum has given the seniority of representation in the group. He noted that a decision on the IASC's strategic priorities and structures will take place later in the year to give the opportunity for the new ERC to shape the outcomes of this discussion. He sought members' views on suggested priority issues for the Forum to focus on including PSEA/SHA, racism and racial discrimination, humanitarian leadership, climate, duty of care, systems learning informed by the IASC's inter-agency humanitarian evaluations, and the Grand Bargain.

Discussion

Members noted that the Forum had tremendous potential, serving as a platform for Deputies to get together around issues requiring strategic decision-making. Furthermore, they stressed that the Forum should be a decision-making body and not for information sharing only. They also advised that the Forum should meet on an as required basis to address issues of a strategic nature that require collective action or decision. Members noted the value for critical issues such as PSEA and racism and racial discrimination and noted that the other proposed topics/issues could benefit from further consideration.

Conclusions and Follow-up Actions:

1. Agree on the critical role that the Deputies Forum plays as a decision-making body to address strategic issues and agree to meet on an as need basis to consider issues of common interest. (**Deputies Forum**)
2. Focus Deputies Forum efforts on the following areas: PSEA/SH, Racism and Racial Discrimination, Humanitarian Leadership and Duty of Care. Advise the IASC secretariat regarding other key issues/ topics that require the Deputies Forum's attention. (**Deputies Forum**)
3. Recognizing that the issue regarding the formalization of the Deputies Forum will be addressed during the IASC Principals meeting later this year, a revised terms of reference for the Forum should be developed to inform upcoming consultations/decisions on the structures. (**IASC secretariat**)

Session 2: Addressing Racism and Racial Discrimination: Action Plan and Next Steps

The Chair welcomed Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources to update the Forum on progress made by the UN to address racism and racial discrimination, including efforts by the UN Task Force on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All.

He informed members on progress made by the IASC to address racism and racial discrimination, inclusive of: the IASC [statement](#) issued by the Principals in September 2020; development of a [Compilation of Best Practices](#) from IASC members on how they have addressed racism and racial discrimination within their respective organizations; and the development of the Draft IASC [Action Plan](#) to address racism and racial discrimination targeting affected communities, workforce, and national partners. He highlighted that the Action Plan promotes a proactive approach in individual/ organizational and collective efforts, including by: raising awareness and taking preventative measures; better management of complaints; strengthening investigations as well as monitoring of progress. He acknowledged that, while there are critical elements in the Action Plan that can benefit from collective action, specific efforts, particularly those that pertain to addressing racism and racial discrimination in the workplace, are informed by organization-specific policies and governing bodies.

Learning from UN System-Wide Efforts

Ms. Marta Helena Lopez noted that the work of the UN Task Force on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All was underpinned by a robust communications strategy, which included listening to and learning from the experiences of staff. The UN Task Force, which included some of the members of the Forum, had launched an 18-month anti-racism campaign that held a series of inclusive dialogues to create safe spaces for open conversation, engaging leaders and experts, including from organizations of the UN common system, civil society and the private sector. Furthermore, efforts are being undertaken to identify the manifestations of racism in the UN, including intersectionality; and learning how to identify unconscious biases.

The Task Force launched a survey and preliminary analysis of the data, including some 80,000 comments received, found that almost three-quarters of staff report a positive perception of the performance management system and access to learning and development activities in the UN Secretariat. However, approximately one-third of staff members believe human resources regulations and rules can sometimes be applied unfairly based on race, nationality or ethnic background. More concerning was that more than one-fifth of staff disagreed with the statement that racial discrimination is not tolerated in their workplace. One in three mentioned experiencing discrimination based on national origin, racial identity or gender identity. The survey also found that over one-third of those who experienced this discrimination did not report it, mainly because they had a sense nothing would happen, lacked trust or feared retaliation. The results of the survey are being analysed against 13 racial groups and will be presented to each Secretariat entity for the development of individual action plans.

Ms. Lopez highlighted that while progress had been made towards gender equality and more diverse geographic representation, the strategies developed to achieve these goals required specific elements on how to enhance inclusion through addressing racism and racial discrimination. A review of human resources policies, practices, procedures and training, to determine how they may have contributed to ongoing bias would be undertaken. The work of the UN Task Force would culminate in September 2021 with a presentation to the UN

Secretary-General of a long-term strategic action plan, including for the promotion of diversity and inclusion and the development of policies and tools to create a safe environment to report and address discrimination without fear of reprisal. This will require cultural transformation and anchored in the changes made to human resource policies, and ultimately the selection of staff whose values truly reflect those of the Organization.

Discussion

Members highlighted the importance of knowledge-sharing and working collectively - including by discussing common approaches to sharing lessons and experiences, including on changes to policies on accountability frameworks. It was also expressed that consideration of workplace culture, implicit bias, and inter-sectionality, were important to understand the proxies used, including reviewing the normative framework that underpins the international civil service. This required changes in day-to-day practices, stronger communication, review of accountability frameworks, as well as the need to tackle inherent biases (including those that are part of management practices).

Members agreed on the need to ensure strong and explicit communication about the issue. In this regard, it was important to communicate through simple and clear messages on how racism and racial discrimination will be addressed, including what was being proposed, where staff can go to seek assistance, safe spaces, and the provision of simplified guidance. Consideration should be given to designate psychosocial case managers for staff beyond staff welfare functions to ensure dedicated support. Similarly, stronger efforts should be made to strengthen the ‘how’ in moving forward the recommendations proposed in the Draft Action Plan, which was an area in which the Forum could provide an added value. Members also stressed the need to instill trust in reporting violations through formal channels of organizations to ensure greater chance of success in addressing racism and racial discrimination.

Members noted the need to draw lessons from the considerable efforts made by the humanitarian system in addressing sexual exploitation/sexual harassment and abuse. In addition, building on discussions around decolonization of aid, the humanitarian system needs to take an inward look at its overall approach to assistance to address culture and unconscious biases. Current efforts on localization were particularly useful in this regard.

It was also noted that, to address the various manifestations of racism, it was important to consider lessons of the jurisprudence from the UN administration of justice to tackle issues head on, particularly those that related to human resources. Equally important was the need for community feedback and complaints mechanisms to be equipped to address racism and racial discrimination and the need for quality data, including from survey results, to support efforts in this regard.

Conclusions and Follow-up Action Points:

1. Review the Draft IASC Action Plan to address racism and racial discrimination to ensure that it is further narrowed down/focused and clarifies how the various action points will be taken forward (**OPAG**)
2. Rollout, within the next three months, a communication campaign with explicit messages on how racism and racial discrimination will be addressed, including on where to go to report allegations (**IASC Members**).
3. Convene a follow-up session on racism and racial discrimination by September 2021 to look at specific actions to be taken forward, share lessons/best practices, contribute to

the SG's Action Plan, and consider the results of the recently launched UN survey (**Deputies Forum**).

List of Participants

1. Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator a.i
2. Mr. Laurent Thomas, Deputy Director-General, FAO
3. Ms. Alexandra Boivin, Head of Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy Division, ICRC
4. Mr. Julien Schopp, Vice President, Humanitarian Policy and Practice, InterAction
5. Ms. Nena Stoiljkovic, Under Secretary General for Global Relations, Humanitarian Diplomacy and Digitalization, IFRC
6. Ms. Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General, IOM
7. Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner, OHCHR
8. Mr. Gareth Price Jones, Executive Secretary, SCHR
9. Mr. Justin Byworth, Global Lead – Disaster Management, SCHR-World Vision
10. Ms. Kim Mancini, Legal Adviser to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Office of the UN SR on HR of IDPs
11. Ms. Asako Okai, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of Crisis Response Unit, UNDP
12. Mr. Ib Peterson, Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA
13. Mr. Victor Kisob, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat
14. Ms. Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR
15. Mr. Amir Abdulla, Deputy Executive Director, WFP
16. Dr. Michel Yao, Dr. Michel Yao, Director, Strategic Health Operations, Division of Emergency Response, WHO
17. Ms. Maria Dimitriadou, Special Representative to the UN and WTO for the Geneva Office, World Bank
18. Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Human Resources, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance
19. Mr. Teddy Keya, Programme Management Officer, United Nations Office of Human Resources, Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance
20. Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head, IASC secretariat