



Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire

<http://assembly.coe.int>

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

AS/Ega/Inf (2020) 19

3 July 2020

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

Taking a stand against systemic discrimination and institutional racism in Europe: parliamentary response

Information document prepared by the Secretariat

This document is available on the Parliamentary Assembly Extranet website (restricted area for PACE Members)
<http://assembly.coe.int/extranet>

1. On 1 July 2020, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe organised a webinar on “Taking a stand against systemic discrimination and institutional racism in Europe: parliamentary response”.
2. Following the Black Lives Matter protests in the US and Europe, parliamentarians came together with Council of Europe anti-racism officials and European civil society campaigners during a PACE webinar to condemn the “denial of the painful reality” of an estimated 15 million people of African descent living in Europe, and to demand stronger action to end structural and institutional racism in European countries.
3. PACE President Rik Daems welcomed participants, pointing out that it often took a tragic event – such as the death of George Floyd in the US – to generate the momentum for change. Racism was very deeply ingrained in our societies – including in labour markets, the media, education, and popular culture – and eradicating it at its root would involve changing mindsets: “This is much more than a job, it is a moral duty. Healthy societies thrive on diversity and treat their citizens as equals.” The Assembly’s role, he pointed out, was to listen - distilling the elements that could lead to change – and then to take action in national parliaments. He pointed out that Europe was starting to question its own history, citing the recent apology by Belgium’s King Philippe for his country’s colonial past, and urged a focus on promoting equality for all.
4. Momodou Malcolm Jallow (Sweden, SOC), PACE General Rapporteur on combating racism and intolerance, pointed to the impact George Floyd’s death had had in Europe, where an estimated 15 million people of African descent live. “When people say to us: this is a problem in the US, don’t import it here, this reflects a denial we have seen for many years that minimises our pain and the historical injustices that we have endured for over 400 years. This is a denial of the reality of people who face structural and institutional racism in Europe.”
5. The sense of pain felt by people of African descent and other minorities in Europe has been neglected, he said: “There needs to be dramatic change, but this does not seem to be happening any time soon.” Mr Jallow pointed to EU data showing an increase in both the gravity and number of incidents of institutional and structural racism in recent years, including racist violence, ethnic profiling and exclusion, where black people were systematically treated as “the lowest on the hierarchy”. He called for the enactment of laws to stop these injustices and for their follow-up to ensure their full implementation in member States.
6. The brother of George Floyd had called on UN leaders and people across the world to watch the video of his brother and listen to his cry for help. “But there are George Floyds throughout Europe and, like him, many people of African descent here who can’t breathe,” Mr Jallow said. “It is time for European leaders to stop the constant denial of our collective and historical experiences as black people, recognise their blind spots, and listen to the demands for justice.”
7. As a guardian of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, the Council of Europe was obliged to ensure that member States recognised the existence of institutional and structural racism and took political action to address the consequences of this scourge, which continues to affect millions of European citizens. “When we choose to be silent in the face of bigotry [...], we create division rather than unity, we undermine the basic values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.” Mr Jallow referred to his forthcoming report for the Assembly on Afrophobia in Europe, which will list specific steps European governments can take to tackle racism more effectively.
8. Domenica Ghidei Biidu, Vice-Chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), said people were finally waking up to the struggle of many who have been working against racism in Europe for a very long time: “We should not feel alone – others are working with us.” She recalled the work of ECRI, the Council of Europe’s anti-racism monitoring body, which for 25 years has been advising States on legislation and other steps governments need to take to combat racism. She mentioned the 1998 Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society, and the need for the hearings to update this document, which are due to take place soon.
9. It was important to have solid representation in parliament and in places of power in order to achieve change, she pointed out. When viewed as a collective issue, rather than as a matter for individuals, trends were revealed which made clear that racism in Europe is an institutional matter: “Legal cases are about individuals, but racism is about far more than individual experiences – yet this wider context is always difficult to prove.”
10. She said there was a need for a recognition of history and its impact on everyday life in Europe today. She referred to the symbolism of tearing down of statues – but suggested there needed to be statues of heroes

too. People of African descent had participated in the liberation of European countries, sometimes at the cost of their lives. “It is important that each country has the institutions in place to dismantle racism, step by step, also by collaborating with minorities: ‘nothing about us without us’.”

11. Ojeaku Nwabuzo, Senior Research Officer for the European Network against Racism (ENAR), a European network of anti-racist organisations, explained her ten years of work on race equality, and spoke of some recent “encouraging developments” in European institutions. All of them, she pointed out, had underlined the continued problem with racist policing, which was “a crucial, life-threatening problem that must be addressed.” COVID-19 had highlighted existing problems, such as the increase in ethnic profiling, and the disproportionate targeting of minorities during stop-and-search operations. “The pandemic essentially gave the police the opportunity to enforce powers in a racially biased way – one that is restrictive, coercive, discriminatory, disproportionate and unlawful.”

12. Institutional racism had been recognised in some member states, such as the UK, but not in all, she said. This was much more than just racial profiling – it could lead to death, she pointed out, citing an incident in Belgium when a young black man fleeing the police was killed. She called for accountability, including sanctions against police officers who showed racist attitudes, improved police techniques, publicly available data collection, and a longer-term review of policing, in dialogue with those communities directly affected.

13. “We need to understand what structural racism is – by moving away from the idea of ‘a few bad apples’ in the police,” she said. National action plans against racism were a clear and easy way to make progress.

Appendix 1

Useful links

A. Council of Europe resources

Access to the webinar:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ParliamentaryAssembly/videos/222697855386207/>

PACE adopted texts:

[Resolution 2153 \(2017\)](#), *Promoting the inclusion of Roma and Travellers*

[Resolution 2144 \(2017\)](#), *Ending cyberdiscrimination and online hate*

[Recommendation 2098 \(2017\)](#), *Ending cyberdiscrimination and online hate*

[Resolution 2106 \(2016\)](#), *Renewed commitment in the fight against antisemitism in Europe*

[Resolution 2069 \(2015\)](#), *Recognising and preventing neo-racism*

[Resolution 1967 \(2014\)](#), *A strategy to prevent racism and intolerance in Europe*

[Recommendation 2032 \(2014\)](#), *A strategy to prevent racism and intolerance in Europe*

[Resolution 1968 \(2014\)](#), *Tackling racism in the police*

[A compilation of ECRI's General Policy Recommendations](#)

Including:

GPR No.11 on [Combating racism and racial discrimination in policing](#)

GPR No.12 on [Combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport](#)

GPR No.14 on [Combating racism and racial discrimination in employment](#)

GPR No.15 on [Combating Hate Speech](#)

GPR No.16 on [Safeguarding irregularly present migrants from discrimination](#)

[Charter of European political parties for a non-racist society](#)

B. European Union resources

[ARDI statement on the murder of George Floyd and police brutality \(9 June 2020\)](#)

[European Parliament recognizes discrimination and past injustices through adoption of inaugural resolution on the Fundamental Rights of People of African Descent \(26.03.2019\)](#)

C. Other resources

[ENAR: A roadmap for EU institutions to address structural racism](#)

Appendix 2

Programme of the webinar

Taking a stand against systemic discrimination and institutional racism in Europe: parliamentary response

1 July 2020, from 10.30 to 11.30 (CEST)

Welcome Remarks:

- Rik Daems, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Panellists:

- Momodou Malcolm Jallow, General Rapporteur on combating racism and intolerance, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- Domenica Ghidai Biidu, Vice-chair, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)
- Ojeaku Nwabuzo, Senior Research Officer, European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

Moderator:

- Petra Stienen, First Vice-chairperson, Committee on Equality and Non- Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe