

UN and Council of Europe experts join forces to fight racism and hate speech in Europe and beyond

STRASBOURG (21 March 2014) – Two key international expert mechanisms for the fight against racism, intolerance and xenophobia have combined forces to strengthen this fight in Europe and beyond, on the occasion of the International Day on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mutuma Rutere, and the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) held their first meeting yesterday in Strasbourg, France, to discuss their work and ways of cooperation in the fight against racism and intolerance, which have reached alarming proportions in many parts of the world.

"I welcome unrelenting efforts of the European institutions to promote zero tolerance to racism and hate speech and to render this visible through political leadership," Mr. Rutere said. "The first seed for a fruitful and long-standing collaboration has been planted today and I hope that its full potential will be realised in the years to come."

"I look forward to the appointment of the General Rapporteur against racism and intolerance of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe who will be a key ally in this fight," the UN expert added.

For Christian Ahlund, Chair of ECRI, "enhanced co-operation is vital as progress in the fight against racism and intolerance is often the result of the combined action of all intergovernmental organisations. We should also take advantage of all available expertise to develop useful tools for all stakeholders."

"This is particularly true at a time when ECRI has undertaken the preparation of a new general policy recommendation on irregular migrants which will provide a conceptual and policy framework to improve the precarious situation of this vulnerable group," Mr. Ahlund stressed.

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The United Nations designated 21 March the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1966, in memory of the 69 people killed six years earlier in Sharpeville, South Africa, during a peaceful demonstration to protest against the apartheid system.

ECRI is a human rights body of the Council of Europe, composed of independent experts, which monitors problems of racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, intolerance and

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discrimination on grounds such as “race”, national/ethnic origin, colour, citizenship, religion and language (racial discrimination); it prepares reports and issues recommendations to member States.

For more information on ECRI: www.coe.int/ecri

Mr. Mutuma Ruteere (Kenya) was appointed by the Human Rights Council as Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in November 2011. As Special Rapporteur, he is independent from any Government or organization and serves in his individual capacity. Learn more, visit: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Racism/SRRacism/Pages/IndexSRRacism.aspx>

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The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/IDERD/2014/>