



# THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE

## SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN, AND CULTURAL

### PURVIEW OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE

While the Committee's areas of concern and its work often overlaps with other United Nations organs, the Third Committee focuses its discussions on social, humanitarian and cultural concerns that arise in the General Assembly. The Third Committee discusses issues with, recognizes reports of, and submits recommendations to the General Assembly in coordination with other United Nations organs, such as the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For more information concerning the purview of the UN's General Assembly as a whole, see page 21.

**Website:** <http://www.un.org/ga/third/index.shtml>

### UNITED NATIONS LITERACY DECADE: EDUCATION FOR ALL

Literacy is an essential tool for social and human development. It has been linked to higher levels of economic growth, improved social cohesion, and better knowledge of effective health practices. Yet for 793 million adults around the world, the ability to read and write remains elusive. Women, who comprise over 64% of the world's illiterate adult population, are particularly hard hit.

The United Nations has long worked to end illiteracy. Since its first meeting in 1946, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has made literacy a core part of its work. In its first decades, UNESCO helped to advocate for effective national policies on literacy and increased investment in addressing illiteracy. Early efforts were focused on mobilizing mass campaigns to promote literacy, though these efforts were largely ineffective at actually improving literacy rates. As individual countries and the United Nations system gained a deeper understanding of literacy and its impact on education and workforce participation, UNESCO refocused its efforts on including literacy in formal education systems rather than mass movements. Through the 1970s and 1980s, new research suggested a positive association between literacy rates and economic development. As the ties between high literacy rates and economic development became more apparent, more countries and international organizations, like the World Bank, began to invest in literacy efforts under the aegis of human development. As this evidence base has grown, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations agencies have also taken an interest in literacy and joined UNESCO's efforts.

With an increasing international focus on the importance of literacy, the United Nations system works in several ways to further the goal of universal literacy. Today, the United Nations continues to serve as a key advocate for literacy, making a case about its importance to governments around the world. In 2003, the General Assembly proclaimed 2003-2013 the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) with the aim of increasing literacy levels and empowering people through literacy. UNLD aimed to raise public awareness and to make literacy a political priority around the world. It also aimed to focus the international community's efforts on ending illiteracy around the world. Since 2003, the General Assembly's resolutions on literacy have worked on monitoring activities under the UNLD.

The United Nations has also increasingly served as a platform for setting international development goals in literacy and education. Under Millennium Development Goal Two, States agree that by 2015, all children will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Under the Education for All (EFA) Goals, States have agreed to reduce literacy rates by 50 percent by 2015.

UNESCO continues to lead the United Nations system's technical work on literacy, serving as an advocate, a source of expert knowledge on effective policies, and a monitor of progress on literacy around the world. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics also publishes the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (GMR), an annual report on the status of literacy and education around the world. The GMR includes statistical information that assists governments in tracking progress, as well as analysis on the current challenges in education. Other agencies, like UNICEF, manage and fund programs aimed directly at improving literacy rates.

Recently, UNESCO has also announced a World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education. This publication helps to illustrate the extent to which gender disparities in education have changed since 1970 and offers some brief analysis on the state of education for women and girls. Future actions of the Atlas of Gender Equality will, if successful, be able to help put together a comprehensive set of data which would be crucial for monitoring and evaluating progress in gender parity in education.

Despite these concerted efforts, illiteracy continues to be a major challenge and will likely persist unless new strategies are developed. While there has been some progress in reducing illiteracy, many countries are not expected to meet their commitments to increase access to education and decrease illiteracy by 2015. Two areas present a particular challenge for the international community: the rural poor in South and East Asia – who comprise the bulk of the world's illiterate persons – and the residents of countries affected by armed conflict. Women represent a disproportionate number of the illiterate in both groups. These two groups present different challenges, and concerted efforts to reach both groups must be made if the world is to achieve universal literacy. The General Assembly must also consider the United Nations system's role in promoting literacy after the end of the UNLD in 2012 and what the next actions of the international community should be.

In addressing all of these challenges, Member States will need to consider why past approaches have failed, how to reach marginalized groups and, critically, how to fund programs at a time when national education budgets and international development assistance are both stretched thin.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- With the United Nations Literacy Decade ending this year, what actions should the United Nations take to promote literacy beyond 2012?
- What strategies can the United Nations use to bring literacy training to those affected by armed conflict and other emergencies?



- How can the United Nations help to address the gender gap in literacy?

[www.uis.unesco.org/literacy](http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy) – UNESCO Institute for Statistics Literacy Data

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “Education for All,” 2012, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/> - *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Institute*.
- “Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006: Literacy for Life,” 2006, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2006-literacy/>.
- “Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011: the Hidden Crisis: Armed conflict and education,” 2011, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2011-conflict/>.
- “Global Report on Adult Learning and Education,” 2009, [http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UIIL/confinitea/pdf/GRALE/grale\\_en.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/INSTITUTES/UIIL/confinitea/pdf/GRALE/grale_en.pdf).
- “Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education,” *United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/education.shtml>- United Nations Millennium Development Goals.
- “Indicators on illiteracy,” *United Nations Statistics Division*, 28 January 2005, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/socind/illiteracy.htm> - United Nations Statistics Divisions.
- Jones, Phillip W. “UNESCO and the Politics of Global Literacy,” *Comparative Education Review*, Feb 1990.
- “Literacy vital for beating poverty and disease and reinforcing stability – UN,” *UN News Centre*, 09 September 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39485&Cr=literacy&Cr1>.
- “Millennium Development Goals: 2011 Progress Chart,” *United Nations* [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/\(2011E\)\\_MDReport2011\\_ProgressChart.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/(2011E)_MDReport2011_ProgressChart.pdf).
- “New York Launch of World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education,” *UNESCO - Gender Equality*, 29 March 2012, [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/themes/gender-equality/single-view-gender/news/new\\_york\\_launch\\_of\\_world\\_atlas\\_of\\_gender\\_equality\\_in\\_education/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/themes/gender-equality/single-view-gender/news/new_york_launch_of_world_atlas_of_gender_equality_in_education/).
- “United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012,” *UNESCO – Education*, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/education-building-blocks/literacy/un-literacy-decade/>- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

## UN DOCUMENTS

- A/RES/65/183  
 A/RES/63/154  
 A/RES/61/140  
 A/RES/56/116  
 A/57/218  
 A/RES/64/290  
 E/2011/L.28 (2011 ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration on “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education”)  
 177 EX/8  
 186 EX/5  
 186 EX/Decision 5

## ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES

- [www.unesco.org/en/literacy](http://www.unesco.org/en/literacy) – UNESCO: Literacy  
[www.proliteracy.org](http://www.proliteracy.org) – Proliteracy

## GLOBAL EFFORTS FOR THE TOTAL ELIMINATION OF RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND RELATED INTOLERANCE AND THE COMPREHENSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF AND FOLLOW-UP TO THE DURBAN DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION

Since its creation, the United Nations has considered the elimination of racism and intolerance a core part of its mission to promote human rights and support personal dignity. Despite persistent efforts by the United Nations and its Member States, hate crimes, genocide, and xenophobia continue to be a problem today. The United Nations first discussed racism and racial intolerance in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948.

In 1963-65, the United Nations adopted two documents aimed specifically at addressing the issue of racial discrimination: the 1963 Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination and its legally binding successor, the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. Under the Convention, Member States are obligated to guarantee equal rights for all people, regardless of race, as well as take steps to punish public and private entities that promote racial intolerance. The Convention also created the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which monitors how States implement the Convention and receives national reports on efforts to combat racism. The United Nations General Assembly designated three decades from 1973 to 2003 to take action against all forms of racism and intolerance and support all those struggling to find equality.

In 2001, the United Nations convened the World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The conference was a response to growing concerns within the international community that racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia were on the rise and that international action would be needed to address them. The agenda was focused on concrete national and international actions that could end racism, though it was also asked to review the history and context of modern racism. Nonetheless, the conference created the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which represented a plan of action for addressing racism in the 21st century.

Since 2001, most of the United Nations’ work on racial intolerance has focused on improving monitoring steps taken to implement the Convention and on follow-up activities to the Durban Declaration. Multiple United Nations agencies and bodies have continued their work to combat racism. In 2009 and 2011, the General Assembly held meetings to review progress on implementing the Durban Declaration. The Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action continues to monitor implementation by the United Nations, Member States and other stakeholders. The Human Rights Council regularly debates the issue and has created a Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, who reports on incidents of racism around the globe and on Member



State initiatives to combat racism. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) manages the International Coalition of Cities against Racism, which is renewing its Ten Point Action Plan to reflect the updates from the 2011 Durban High-level Meeting.

Moving forward, the United Nations faces difficulties in implementing the Durban Declaration and the Programme of Action. Some countries still lack the legal framework for appropriately addressing discrimination and intolerance. Others lack mechanisms to enforce laws that already exist. In addition, some Member States lack the will to enforce discrimination laws, particularly regarding historically disadvantaged minorities. Human rights organizations have also alleged that non-democratic governments have used bans on hate speech as a tool for censorship. A small group of countries continues to oppose the Durban Declaration due to concerns about freedom of expression. As an alternative, the United States has proposed an Action Plan with measures that states can take to address intolerance. This plan, however, has not been accepted by the General Assembly at large.

Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of social media presents a challenge. Increasingly, social media platforms are being used to spread intolerant rhetoric and occasionally incite racially or religiously intolerant violence. It is often unclear what laws apply when hate speech crosses borders via the Internet, or what extra-legal steps countries can take to address the problem.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:

- What mechanisms should Member States put into place to prevent intolerance, and how can the United Nations assist them in doing so?
- What can be done to help Member States that have ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination remain compliant with its provisions?
- How have new media platforms, such as social media, affected the spread of racism? What steps should States take to address racism and racial intolerance on the internet?
- What restrictions on freedom of expression can be justified to prevent racially intolerant speech?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “EU Presidency Explanation of the Vote-Elimination of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance and Follow-Up to Durban Declaration and Program of Action,” [http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_7581\\_en.htm](http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_7581_en.htm).
- UNESCO, “Strengthening the Fight against Racism and Discrimination: UNESCO’s Achievements From the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance to the 2009 Durban Review Conference,” 2009, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001848/184861e.pdf>.
- Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “International Action Against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Related Intolerance in the OSCE Region,” 2004, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/13995>.
- “On International Day, UN warns about link between racism and conflict,” UN News Centre, 21 March 2012, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=41595>.

“UN officials call for more action to ‘stem the tide’ of racism and intolerance,” UN News Centre, 22 September 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39688>.

“U.S. Statement on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action,” 27 September 2011, <http://geneva.usmission.gov/2011/09/27/durban-declaration-and-programme-of-action/>.

“U.S. Government Action Plan to Combat Racial and Religious Discrimination and Intolerance,” 2009, <http://geneva.usmission.gov/2009/11/09/complementary-standards/>.

Saragih, Bagus BT, “Unchecked hate speech ‘exacerbates intolerance,’” The Jakarta Post, 14 February 2011, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2011/02/14/unchecked-hate-speech-%E2%80%98exacerbates-intolerance%E2%80%99.html>.

## UN DOCUMENTS

A/RES/52/111

A/RES/57/195

A/60/307

A/ 60/339

A/61/337

A/63/366

A/65/454

A/RES/66/3

A/RES/66/143

A/RES/66/144

A/HRC/2/3

A/HRC/2/6

A/HRC/16/64

A/HRC/19/77

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

## ADDITIONAL WEB RESOURCES

[www.un.org/WCAR/](http://www.un.org/WCAR/) - World Conference against Racism, Racial Intolerance, Xenophobia and Related Discrimination

[www.un.org/durbanreview2009/](http://www.un.org/durbanreview2009/) - Durban Review Conference

[www.un.org/en/ga/durbanmeeting2011/](http://www.un.org/en/ga/durbanmeeting2011/) - 10th Anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org) - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

[www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/fight-against-discrimination/coalition-of-cities/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/fight-against-discrimination/coalition-of-cities/)