

'Stand up against intolerance and eliminate discrimination,' says UN chief Guterres

21 March 2017 – Against the backdrop of rising discrimination and violence against those perceived as different, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today urged the world to stand up against intolerance and build communities that recognize diversity not as a source of weakness, but a source of strength and richness.

“In a time of upheaval and change, it is easy to paint vulnerable communities as the cause of problems [...] people are being targeted because of their race, nationality, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation,” warned Mr. Guterres at an event at the UN General Assembly commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Highlighting the particular plight of migrants as well as those, especially women and girls, from minority communities who are often targeted as “scapegoats” and experience racial profiling by authorities, the UN chief underscored the collective responsibility “to do better” and to protect human rights of all.

“We all have a role to play [...] after all, racial discrimination destabilizes societies, undermines democracies and erodes the legitimacy of governments,” he said. “By acting together to end discrimination, we can lift humanity as a whole.”

In his remarks, the Secretary-General also reminded that international law requires States to take effective actions to prevent and eliminate discrimination on all grounds and in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.

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“They must be vigilant and respond immediately and appropriately, including by prohibiting incitement to racial, national and religious hatred and ending racial profiling,” he said, making a specific call on politicians and leaders to speak up and counter hateful speech.

“Let us stand up against intolerance and eliminate discrimination,” he noted, “Let us join forces in our global campaign – Together for Respect, Safety and Dignity for all.”

Marked on 21 March, the International Day commemorates the killing of 69 unarmed protestors in 1960 in Sharpeville, South Africa, who were staging a peaceful protest against the discriminatory pass laws of the racist apartheid regime.

Assembly honours memory of late Russian Ambassador Churkin

Also today at the General Assembly, UN chief Guterres paid a tribute to Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, the Permanent Representative of Russia to the United Nations who passed away last month, a day before his 65th birthday.

“Ambassador Churkin was truly one-of-a-kind – an outstanding diplomat, a man of many talents and interests, and a human being whose friendship touched many of us here in this hall today,” said Mr. Guterres in his message, offering his condolences to the late Ambassador’s wife, son and family as well as to the people and Government of Russia.