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UN human rights expert spotlights suffering of Roma and victims of caste systems



Special Rapporteur Githu Muigai

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The Roma community in Europe and victims of caste systems in Africa, Asia and the Middle East are continuously subjected to deep-rooted discrimination, prejudice and intolerance, and deserve protection from those violations, the United Nations independent expert on racism stressed today.

“All victims should receive the same attention and protection, and all forms of racism and discrimination should be addressed with the same emphasis and determination,” [said](#) Githu Muigai, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism.

“It is essential to avoid establishing any hierarchy among the different manifestations of discrimination, even if they may vary in nature and degree depending on the historical, geographical and cultural contexts,” said Mr. Muigai as he presented his latest report to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

On the Roma community, Mr. Muigai assessed racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, particularly in Europe.

“While positive developments and good practices have been identified at the regional and national levels they have been insufficient,” he noted. “Important challenges remain that reveal

grave and deep-rooted problems of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance against Roma that need to be addressed in the most vigorous manner.”

He stressed that it is essential to develop a comprehensive approach based on stronger legal, political and institutional measures, taking into account the structural dimension of the problem, the interrelation between discrimination and socio-economic marginalization and political exclusion, as well as the situation of the most vulnerable Roma.

In his view, legislative measures should be adopted and complemented by key measures such as affirmative action to redress historical inequalities; training in human rights for State agents; and educational and awareness-raising measures to foster mutual understanding, respect and tolerance.

Mr. Muigai’s report also addressed discrimination based on work and descent in different regions.

“The vital first step is to recognize that discrimination on the grounds of descent constitutes a form of racial discrimination prohibited by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,” he says.

“However, certain governments have failed to implement effectively their obligations to protect against such discrimination, and have, in some instances, sidestepped the question of caste discrimination,” Mr. Muigai added.

He suggested that governments include information on the issue of discrimination based on caste and other analogous systems of inherited status in their reports to UN human rights bodies. He also called for the collection of disaggregated data, on a regular basis, to identify the number of people affected and design appropriate strategies to fight this kind of discrimination.

“Shortcomings do not stem only from governments and institutions but also from the population itself, including within communities considered of lower caste or status,” the independent expert noted.

In his view, any legal measure to outlaw discrimination should go “hand-in-hand with awareness-raising, with a special emphasis on the judiciary, police and civil service, to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the law by the police and civil service to ensure access to justice and effective remedies for victims.”

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