

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 2001

This year, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will commemorate International Human Rights Day (10 December) in Geneva, New York and the field, with an initial stocktaking of activities and plans for the follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. The focus will be on how States, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations intend to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

Looking back on the Durban Conference, we were indeed fortunate to secure agreement on a strong Declaration and Programme of Action just three days before the shocking events of 11 September. Far from being overtaken by these events, 11 September has made the anti-discrimination agenda even more important. While welcoming the unanimous adoption of Security Council Resolution 1373, requiring all countries to take specific measures to combat terrorism, it is also important to safeguard against any erosion of human rights standards which might flow as an unintended consequence of such measures. In this context it has become even more important to promote the international anti-discrimination agenda and to ensure that this agenda is pursued in parallel with international action to combat terrorism. Therefore I see the initial stocktaking on 10 December as reviewing progress on the follow-up to the Durban Conference, against the background of these more recent developments.

In order to assist my Office in its preparations for 10 December, we would ask that national institutions briefly indicate to us, by 3 December 2001 if possible, any initiatives or activities that have taken place, or that are being planned that would be relevant in assessing the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. We would also appreciate any views that national institutions might have on how the new anti-discrimination agenda might be pursued in parallel to the international response to terrorism. For your information, my Office is planning to carry out a second stocktaking on 21 March, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in order to ensure that the momentum of implementation is not lost.

I look forward to hearing from national institutions on how best we can protect and promote the principles and commitments of Durban in the current international context. Please forward the information to Mr. Orest Nowosad, National Institutions Team, at facsimile 41 22 917 9021.

Mary Robinson
High Commissioner for Human Rights
and Secretary-General of the World Conference against Racism