

21 March 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,  
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,  
on the International Day for the Elimination of Racism and Racial  
Discrimination**

Our commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination comes just a few short weeks before the people of South Africa celebrate their triumph, a decade ago, over institutionalized racism and racial discrimination - the abhorrent system of Apartheid. Democracy and freedom now stand in place of gross and systematic violations of human rights in South Africa, even as we remember those who lost their lives at Sharpeville.

The injustice of Sharpeville is the starting point from which we launched the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a Day that, since 1966, has served to remind us of the horrific consequences that can result from racism and racial discrimination. It also reminds us that efforts to eliminate all forms of racism and racial discrimination must be sustained.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we are asked to focus on migration and discrimination. This is an apt and critical topic, at a time when the movement of people within countries and across borders is more commonplace than in any other period of human history. Even as migration may make our societies more pluralistic, it exposes individuals and groups to some of the worse forms of racism and racial discrimination, and challenges us to be tolerant of ethnic, religious, cultural and other differences.

Eliminating racism and racial discrimination will allow us to celebrate the richness of our diversity. It will allow us to reject blind prejudice and hatred based on colour, race, national or ethnic origin. It would allow us to reject racially motivated injustices that deny so many their human rights and fundamental freedoms, fuel civil conflict, endanger friendly relations among states and threaten international peace and security. Indeed, much of the conflicts that have challenged us, and with which we continue to grapple in the twenty-first century have roots in ethnicity, religion and cultural differences.

The imperative to eliminate racism and racial discrimination has underpinned our adoption, at the regional and international levels, of covenants, conventions, declarations and numerous resolutions and decisions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism and Racial Discrimination. We have, indeed, made progress. Racism and racial discrimination however are not problems we are able to resolve once and for all, particularly as they pertain to the growing number of migrants worldwide.

We must, therefore, on this Day that the international community has set aside for reflection on the evils of racism and racial discrimination, reaffirm our commitment to the United Nations

Charter, which urges us to "practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another". We must live up to both the letter and the spirit of international instruments, to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms of every individual and every group in society, including those in migratory flows, are upheld.

Eliminating racism and racial discrimination is a cause for which many gave their lives at Sharpeville. Many, including migrants, continue to lose their lives as a result of racism and racial discrimination. We must honour the memory of all the victims and those still victims by support by supporting efforts at the national, regional and international levels to eliminate racism and racial discrimination. I urge all to join me in renewing our commitment on this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.