



**Testimony by Mr. Doudou Diène, United Nations Special Rapporteur
on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination,
Xenophobia and Related Intolerance at the
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Excellencies, members of the Government, representatives of civil society organizations and the media, thank you for your interest on the issues pertaining to my mandate and for the opportunity to share with you my views regarding racism and xenophobia.

Over the past years, I have given a large amount of attention to the rise in racism and xenophobia. In particular, I have expressed my concerns regarding three alarming trends that are clearly visible worldwide.

The most serious manifestation of the setback in the campaign against racism is the current phenomenon of a “shift from words to action” in manifestations and expression of racism and xenophobia, as shown by two recent, associated developments: the resurgence of racist violence and the “democratic” legitimization of racism and xenophobia.

The resurgence of racist violence can be seen in the growing number of acts of physical violence and murders targeting members of ethnic, religious or cultural communities or national minorities, which the perpetrators - neo-Nazi, nationalist or extreme right-wing groups - openly claim to be motivated by racism and xenophobia. The “democratic” legitimization of racism and xenophobia results from the ability of political parties advocating racist and xenophobic platforms to apply these platforms directly through a growing number of government alliances, which gives them democratic legitimacy and enables them to use the State’s legislative, administrative and budgetary means.

Intellectual and political resistance to multiculturalism is one of the root causes of the resurgence of racist and xenophobic violence. In the context of globalization, such resistance reflects the central role that identity constructs play in the resurgence of racism and xenophobia. The profound crisis that is drastically changing identity constructs is caused by the conflict between old national identities and the profound multiculturalization process in societies. The defence of identity that embodies this conflict is based on the rejection of diversity reflected in two sensitive areas of national identity constructs: the value system and cultural expressions and symbols. With regard to value systems, defence of identity is reflected, particularly in Europe, in the dominant integration-assimilation approach which, by making an immigrant’s integration exclusively dependent on his or her acceptance of and compliance with the values of the host country, assumes that the immigrant or asylum-seeker has no human, cultural or religious values that could enrich or contribute to the national culture. This approach, which amounts to the negation of the very humanity of the immigrant, foreigner or asylum-seeker precisely because of their diversity, is part of the old ideology of the hierarchy of cultures, races and civilizations, on which all subjugation of peoples and legitimization of racist mentalities and culture have historically been founded, creating a breeding ground for all old and new forms of racism and xenophobia.

In this context, the rejection of diversity - a root cause of the rise of racism and xenophobia - is manifested increasingly by intolerance, even repression, of cultural symbols and expressions that reveal the specific identity of various ethnic, cultural or religious communities. From the prohibition of religious signs or symbols to restrictions on and obstacles to the construction of places of worship or culture, this rejection of diversity is one of the main manifestations of the defamation of religions, particularly Islamophobia. Ideologically legitimized by the dominant concept of integration-assimilation, implemented through legal restrictions and exaggerated in the media, which have reduced spiritual traditions and religions to these external signs, the rejection of diversity fosters a culture of intolerance and defence of identity, which are fertile breeding grounds for xenophobia and racism. The globalization of such practices by their use in the media and politics creates a dangerous dynamic of conflicts between civilizations, cultures and religions.

The legal instrumentalization of the rejection of diversity is reflected, *inter alia*, by a hierarchical and political interpretation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is also reflected in the ideological pre-eminence of freedom of expression over the other freedoms and restrictions and limitations contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This has serious consequences: the legitimization, under the pretext of freedom of expression, of overt incitement to racial and religious hatred and the promotion of rhetoric about an inevitable clash of civilizations and religions, which sets “the West and other civilizations” against each other solely in the interest of defending freedom of expression.

The trivialization of racist and xenophobic speech and rhetoric - owing to its intellectual legitimization, democratic acceptability and tolerance - is a serious and worrying trend in contemporary racism and xenophobia. On the one hand, intellectual legitimization is reflected by a growing number of so-called “scientific” or “literary” publications or editorials in the media which, under the pretext of defending national identity and security, expound explanatory theories and concepts based on an ethnic or racial interpretation of social, economic and political problems. On the other, democratic acceptability is reflected by the increasing role of the rhetoric of racist and xenophobic platforms in the political programmes of democratic parties, particularly in dealing with questions relating to immigration, asylum and terrorism. Lastly, political, intellectual, media and popular tolerance of overtly racist and xenophobic rhetoric is a manifestation of the cultural trivialization of racism.

The growing expression of elitist racism and xenophobia is also a serious and worrying trend in the rise of racism and xenophobia. The extent of the political use and intellectual legitimization of racism and xenophobia can be seen among the ruling classes of many countries. The manifestations of this elitist racism are based on an ethnic and racial interpretation of social, economic and political events and violent and polemic verbal responses to any expression of ethnic or religious multiculturalism in elitist societies. Two aspects of the historical and cultural roots of racism are thus revealed: by its current resurgence, elitist racism confirms the essential role of identity constructs both in the origin and the development of all forms of racism, both new and old, and the crucial challenge of mounting a real intellectual front against racism.

Multicultural dynamics are upsetting old identity constructs by introducing the fight against racism and the notion of coexistence to the traditional markers of racism - social, economic and political - and, increasingly, to the more sensitive ground of the value system, memory and, therefore, national identity. This identity backlash on the part of elites - by its

repercussions at the regional and international levels and its “cold war rhetoric” of cultural and ethical polarization and “defence of our values” - encourages racist and xenophobic platforms and strengthens the ideological and political initiative of nationalist or extreme right-wing parties and movements that promote and form part of a dangerous drift towards a clash of civilizations.

To reverse these worrying political, legal, ethical and cultural trends, I promote, in all my activities, the development of a dual strategy - political and legal, on the one hand, and cultural and ethical, on the other - in order to identify and combat manifestations and expressions of racism and xenophobia, as well as their root causes. The political strategy aims to arouse and strengthen the political will of Governments to combat racism and xenophobia, and the legal strategy must enable States to adopt the legal and administrative instruments and mechanisms for this purpose, in line with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The cultural and ethical strategy must target the root causes of racist and xenophobic attitudes and culture, particularly identity constructs, foster acceptance of diversity and meet the central challenge of multiculturalism in order to promote coexistence in societies.

Thank you,