**End Racism.** **Build Peace**

***By Dr Angela Lusigi, UNDP Resident Representative in Ghana on International Peace Day***

Millions of people around the world face racism, racial discrimination, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and related intolerance. The 2022 International Peace Day theme 'End Racism. Build Peace' is a timely reminder of the importance of appreciating our differences and acknowledging our common humanity.

Racism is a threat to human security. Sadly, it persists and is being expressed in new [forms](https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-racism). The United Nations has noted that three-quarters of the world’s major conflicts have a cultural dimension. Persistent stereotyping, prejudice expressed in discriminatory actions by a majority group towards minority groups can degenerate into mutual distrust. UNDP’s [Human Development Report 2021](https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22) shows that there is a steep rise in polarization globally. Implementing the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) that commits all State parties to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and to promote understanding amongst all races is now more important than ever.

Ghana is a culturally diverse state with over 70 ethnic groups. Over the years, education, work, and marriage have led to a mix of cultures that promotes learning and development. It is important that Ghanaians continue to build on this foundation to interact with each other as individuals rather than their ethnic identities or other social groupings. Perceiving people based on their ethnic origins sometimes leads to exclusion. This is exacerbated by hate speech, negative labeling and stereotyping that could lead to violence. What we say and how we express ourselves matters.

Racism affects the well-being of an individual or group. It could lead to denied job opportunities or promotions as well as limited access services such as health care and education. This marginalization, perceived injustice and exclusion could be used by violent extremists’ groups to recruit, radicalize, and perpetuate violence.

Yet cultural diversity is a driving force for development. Bridging the gap between cultures can help to foster the peace and stability that underpin economic growth. A key lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic is that our collective survival emanates from our interdependence. This year’s Peace Day theme is therefore an urgent call to action. We must act decisively in three key areas to stop all forms of racism and advance peace and move together for a faster recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, climate and the cost-of-living triple crisis.

**Implement non-discriminatory laws and policies**

First, government must ensure that laws and policies are not discriminatory in their formulation and application. Ensuring that governance processes are democratic, inclusive and that the rule of law and rights are respected will lead to increased trust in institutions. The Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, National Commission for Civic Education and the National Peace Council are already playing a critical role in this regard and should be supported.

**Promote tolerance and respect for diversity**

Secondly, citizens must promote a culture of tolerance, mutual understanding, and respect for diversity. Civil society, the media and all of us as individuals can work to amplify the good aspects of our culture and traditions. We can work together to overcome labels and stereotype so we can deal with each other as individuals and not groups. Let us promote inter-cultural exchange towards building peaceful societies where we live well with others regardless of where they come from or who they are.

**Teach value of diversity at early age**

Finally, we must engage the next generation to prevent racial discriminatory attitudes and behaviors that are learned and not genetic. Children must be taught as early as possible, in the home, in school and in society the value of diversity. Our educational programs and social content could be used to deepen the appreciation of difference and build tolerance for pluralism. These are essential components of a culture of peace and for building sustainable and resilient societies.

To conclude, I leave you with the words of wisdom of Kofi Annan. He said “ignorance and prejudice are the handmaidens of propaganda. Our mission, therefore, is to confront ignorance with knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be defeated.”

Peace is at the core of achieving the sustainable development goals and one of the ways to reaching these goals is by promoting respect and tolerance for cultural diversity. Let us embrace tolerance and inclusion to create the enabling environment for development.