

Combating Racial Discrimination

Racism and ethnic discrimination can occur anywhere – in schools, in the provision of goods and services and their supply, in the neighbourhood, and in workplaces. Each and every one of us can stand up against racism and disrespectful attitudes.

In this context, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly resolution 2142, adopted on 26 October 1966, proclaimed 21st March as the **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** to be commemorated annually. This date was chosen to commemorate the killing of 69 people when in 1960, the police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid pass laws.¹

Racism is also present in our country. In fact, in 2017, as the NCPE Commissioner, I concluded an investigation regarding alleged discrimination on the basis of race and ethnic origin.² The complainant explained that while in a bar, he realised that his friend and his brother were arguing with two bouncers outside the bar when the latter started hitting them. The complainant tried to intervene to calm the situation. However, other bouncers from nearby clubs joined the fight.

The complainant, although injured, managed to escape, however these bouncers chased him and continued beating him. At some point, the complainant lost consciousness and was later taken to the police station, where he filed a report. Subsequently, he was taken to hospital by ambulance.

During the investigation, the complainant claimed that this beating happened solely because of his race. The version of events given by the complainant was not only corroborated by his witnesses, but also by other third parties and by circumstantial evidence made available during the investigation. These facts indicated a clear case of discrimination based on race and ethnic origin.

¹<https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-racism-day>

²[https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our Publications and Resources/Annual Reports/Annual Report 2017.pdf](https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Annual_Reports/Annual_Report_2017.pdf)

Such racist incidents and racial discrimination in general have been exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns and other restricted measures had a disproportionate impact on workers in precarious employment situations, self-employed, and informal workers globally, the latter being mainly made up of racial minorities and migrant workers in many countries. There was also a significant increase in racial verbal abuse, harassment, and violence in public spaces, mainly targeting people of Asian descent in the context of the current crisis. This shows that racism, xenophobia, and intolerance are prevalent in all societies. However, there are many ways to take action.³

In fact, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) was established in 1993 by the Council of Europe as the official, independent human rights monitoring body in the field of combating racism and intolerance. ECRI works to combat discrimination on the grounds of race, national/ethnic origin, colour, citizenship, religion, and language (racial discrimination) and intolerance, sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. ECRI's statutory activities cover country monitoring of state parties including Malta, work on general themes covering this remit and fosters relations with civil society and equality bodies.⁴

At a domestic level, the first-ever National Anti-Racism Strategy was launched in 2021 to tackle discrimination experienced by individuals with racial or ethnic backgrounds. This Strategy aims to confront and eliminate racism in all its forms, individual, systemic, and societal, and to stimulate and support intercultural inclusion.⁵

Moreover, in Malta, the NCPE as an equality body, investigates complaints on the grounds of race and ethnic origin in employment, education, vocational/professional training, banks and financial institutions, as well as on access to and supply of goods and services.⁶

³https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/COVID-19_and_Racial_Discrimination.pdf

⁴<https://rm.coe.int/leaflet-ecri-2019/168094b101>

⁵<https://cdn-others.timesofmalta.com/3b7516ec2255f8fc1b264dd2f9b0ed24a1d55e63.pdf>

⁶https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Pages/About_Us/NCPE-Remit.aspx

To address such discrimination, the NCPE provides training on diversity, equality, and non-discrimination to any organisation that requests it and creates awareness-raising campaigns for the general public

As stated by Muhammad Ali, *“hating people because of their colour is wrong. And it doesn’t matter which colour does the hating. It’s just plain wrong.”* Let’s all work together to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2276 8200 or equality@gov.mt or our Facebook page.

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