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## CERD-ECRI joint statement International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

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**Michał** Balcerzak, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the United Nations anti-racism body, and Bertil Cottier, Chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Council of Europe's anti-racism body, call for renewed commitment to address racism and racial discrimination in and through school education.

The exposure of new generations of children and young people to structural or institutional forms of racism and inequalities in access to education and in the school environment remains a critical issue in various parts of the world, including Europe, in societies that can be described as increasingly polarised. While educational systems can play a pivotal role in preventing and combating racism and various forms of racial discrimination, those systems may not only mirror, but also perpetuate racism and inequalities in the society at large.

Michał Balcerzak, Chairperson of CERD, said "Education is one of the most powerful tools available to States to dismantle racial discrimination at its roots, yet too often we see that schools continue to reproduce patterns of exclusion and inequality rather than transform them. Under Article 7 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, States parties have a clear and immediate obligation to ensure that education systems are inclusive, equitable and free from both direct and indirect discrimination. This requires not only eliminating segregation in all its forms, but also addressing structural inequalities, equipping teachers to respond to racism, and embedding human rights, equality and diversity as core components of curricula."

"Through its country monitoring work, ECRI has kept a watchful eye on the situation of children belonging to groups of concern to CERD and ECRI in schools. It stressed the importance of ensuring that school environment is free of racism and racial discrimination and that children and young people are effectively protected against racially-motivated bullying and cyberbullying", said Bertil Cottier, ECRI's Chair. "It has become vital for schools to build future generations' resistance to racism through teaching on equality and diversity addressed to all children. School curricula should pay sufficient attention to diversity and to transmitting knowledge and awareness of the history of racism and racial discrimination, including the understanding of the continued impact of colonialism and slavery on structural inequalities in contemporary societies", he continued.

It is also crucial for the states to ensure equal access to quality education and eradicate all forms of direct and indirect discrimination in schooling. In this context, CERD and ECRI are deeply concerned about the persistent phenomenon of *de facto* school segregation which impacts Roma children and children with migration backgrounds. Such segregation generates patterns of social exclusion. Both CERD and ECRI have therefore repeatedly called on governments to take decisive measures to ensure that school segregation is prohibited and effectively eliminated.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Chairperson of CERD and the Chair of ECRI urge States parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Council of Europe member states to redouble their efforts to address racism

and racial discrimination in and through school education, notably by urgently acting on CERD and ECRI recommendations in this area. They call on governments to take all measures at their disposal to ensure that education is used as an effective tool of elimination of racial discrimination and empowering children and young people belonging to racialised communities in the continued effort to develop just, equal and peaceful democratic societies for the next generations.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination ([CERD](#)) is the United Nations treaty body that monitors the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by its 182 States parties. It is composed of 18 independent experts.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance ([ECRI](#)) is a specialised human rights expert body that monitors action against racism and intolerance across the 46 member states of the Council of Europe. It is composed of 46 independent experts from each member state and two independent observers from observer states to the Council of Europe. All 46 member states of the Council of Europe are parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

*The United Nations designated 21 March the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1966, in memory of the 69 people killed by police officers six years earlier in Sharpeville, South Africa, during a peaceful demonstration to protest against the apartheid "pass laws".*