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UN rights expert hails UK for anti-racism action but raises serious concerns over Immigration Policy, Prevent programme and Brexit

Brexit and racism

11 May 2018

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GENEVA / LONDON (11 May 2018) – The UN Special Rapporteur on racism, E. Tendayi Achiume, has commended the UK Government for its policies aimed at preventing racism, but is urging further action to end discrimination, raising concerns over the Government’s immigration law and policy, its anti-terrorism Prevent programme, and Brexit-era hate crimes and immigration consequences.

She also pointed to concerns over widespread discrimination faced by ethnic minorities

ethnic minorities.

“I am shocked by the criminalisation of young people from ethnic minorities, especially young black men. They are over-represented in police stop and searches, more likely to face prosecution under the country’s joint enterprise provisions, and are over-represented in the prison system,” said the UN expert at the end of a fact-finding visit to the UK*.

“I have been informed of so-called ‘gang matrix’ databases held in several cities in England which are used as the basis for surveillance operations against young men and boys who are predominantly black and are listed as potential future violent offenders, sometimes without any basis,” Ms Achiume said.

“I echo calls for a unified UK-level policy that lays out a comprehensive strategy and benchmarks for systemic and systematic elimination of unlawful racial disparities. The creation, implementation, and oversight of such policy must meaningfully include ethnic minority communities in decision-making roles,” she insisted.

The UN expert said austerity measures were having a disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities who were most likely to be living in poverty.

“One measure that would mitigate this would be to subject all proposed fiscal policies to publicly available, and properly designed and implemented equality impact assessments that would reveal any projected racially disparate effects on racial and ethnic minority communities,” she suggested.

The Rapporteur was alarmed at the stark increase in hate crimes and incidents across the UK during the post-Brexit era. She also heard firm commitments to combat expressions of hatred and promote integration strategies across the country.

She called for the collection of appropriate data to document trends and stressed the importance of building trust with affected communities.

The UN expert also expressed concern over the normalisation of hateful

The UN expert also expressed concern over the normalisation of hateful, stigmatising discourse including among high-ranking officials with no accountability. The anti-migrant, anti-foreigner rhetoric developed around the campaign in favour of Brexit had become widespread in society.

The visit came amid intense political debate around the Windrush generation crisis affecting primarily people from Caribbean backgrounds whose status as citizens was being officially questioned.

Ms Achiume described the decision to outsource immigration enforcement to private citizens and public service providers as predictably resulting in the exclusion, discrimination and subordination of groups and individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity or related status. She cautioned that immigration policy in the UK was deeply connected to racial equality and that the Government must take this connection seriously.

While she acknowledged the right and duty of every state to take necessary measures to protect the population against violent extremism, the Special Rapporteur deplored the policy in the UK's Prevent Programme, which mandates civil servants, social workers, care-givers, educators and others, to make life-altering judgments on the basis of vague criteria in a climate of national anxieties in which entire religious, racial and ethnic groups are presumed to be enemies. Across the UK, this has led to high levels of anxiety and mistrust affecting the Muslim community especially.

The Special Rapporteur found that British laws and policies prohibiting both direct and indirect forms of racial discrimination were commendable.

"This is a firm basis for tackling structural and institutional racism and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender and other protected categories, even in the absence of prejudice," affirmed Ms Achiume.

She commended Prime Minister Theresa May who had commissioned the Racial Disparity Audit in August 2016, which is available [here](#). The audit

highlighted stark disadvantages for ethnic minorities, which points to deeply ingrained issues of structural racism against ethnic minorities ranging from access to education to early childhood expulsions from school.

The Special Rapporteur also found that access to employment and health and the over-criminalisation of young men from ethnic minority communities were big issues, along with an alarming increase in hate crime and a normalisation of hateful discourse.

“I hope that this is only the first step towards transforming formal Government commitments into reality, especially for those who experience the highest levels of exclusion, subordination and discrimination on the basis of their race or ethnicity,” Ms Achiume stressed. She also noted inconsistency in the data collected by departments and its current limitations in scope, including its failure to account for the racial impact of immigration and counterterrorism law and policy.

The Rapporteur deplored the invisibility of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities which, despite formal recognition and intensive consultation, still do not benefit from adequate national integration and suffer high levels of prejudice from the population at large.

Ms Achiume, whose visit came at the invitation of the Government, had a number of meetings including with representatives of civil society from various communities in London, Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Belfast.

The Special Rapporteur will present a report on the findings and conclusions of her visit to a forthcoming session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

(*) Check the Special Rapporteur’s full end-of-mission statement:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23073&LangID=E>

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Ms E. Tendayi Achiume (Zambia) was appointed by the Human Rights Council as **Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance** in September 2017. Ms. Achiume is currently a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Law, and a research associate of the African Center for Migration and Society (ACMS), at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa.

The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the **Special Procedures** of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

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This year is the **70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. The Universal Declaration – translated into a world record 500 languages – is rooted in the principle that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” It remains relevant to everyone, every day. In honour of the 70th anniversary of this extraordinarily influential document, and to prevent its vital principles from being eroded, we are urging people everywhere to

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