

## **WORLDWIDE PERSPECTIVE ON RACISM**

by Nick Sanders

Every year since 1966, March 21 has been an “International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.” It was proclaimed in a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly in remembrance of that day in 1960 when police killed 69 people in Sharpeville, South Africa at a peaceful demonstration against that country’s apartheid laws.

Although South Africa’s apartheid system has been dismantled and in many other countries racist laws and practices have been abolished, the U.N’s General Assembly continues to recognize that too many individuals, communities and societies suffer from racial discrimination. Since 1966, there have been U.N. conferences to assess progress in the elimination of racial discrimination. In September 2011, world leaders met in New York City and adopted by consensus a declaration proclaiming their “strong determination to make the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and the protection of the victims thereof, a high priority for (their) countries.”

Of course, like many other proclamations of the U.N., nation members cannot be compelled to take specific actions. The U.N. succeeds only by moral suasion and whatever peer pressure the nations exert on one another. Promotion of this International Day to U N member nations is a responsibility of the U N’s [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#).

Some years this UN office has also conducted targeted studies and organized specific events. Most recently the Office commissioned research on contemporary forms of racism as manifest in “nationalist populism that advances exclusionary or repressive practices and policies that harm individuals or groups on the basis of their race, ethnicity, national origin and religion...” (<https://www.un.org/en/events/racialdiscriminationday/>)

The principal researcher for this study, UCLA Professor E. Tendayi Achiume, reports instances of racism fostered by national populism from many nations, including—but not at all focused on—the United States. In summary, she writes: “Perhaps the most visible impact that resurgent nationalist populism has had on racial equality has been to escalate incidents of racist and xenophobic violence, crimes and speech all over the world. It has also aided the spread and mainstreaming of messages of intolerance that had typically been confined to marginal, extremist platforms.” Pursuant to this last statement, she devoted another report completely to the role of the Internet in the relatively instantaneous worldwide reach of hate speech. (<https://undocs.org/en/A/73/312>)

Last month there was documentation of the increasing use of the Internet to incite deadly violence by individuals operating without direct coordination in an organization, referred as “lone wolves.” It appeared on April 3rd in the *New York Times*: “[Attacks by White Extremists Are Growing. So Are Their Connections.](#)” This article illustrates the influence on others around

the world of perpetrators of hate-driven violence, using perps' own social media descriptions of the inspirations from earlier perps for their acts of violence.

In her report on hate speech on the Internet, Professor Achiume not only recounts the particulars of hate speech worldwide. She also suggests how counties and companies should be engaged in establishing laws and codes of conduct to reduce the occurrence of hate speech on the Internet.

As you may have heard, in the wake of the massacres by an Australian of Muslims in New Zealand, the government of Australia did pass sweeping legislation that threatens huge fines for social media companies and jail for their executives if they fail to rapidly remove "abhorrent violent material" from their platforms. This dramatic action can be seen as a trial run for strong governmental response to hate speech on the Internet, clearly a major problem in need of a solution. I hope we will learn quickly how this Internet-influenced development in racial and other xenophobic violence can be countered ... most difficult, I think, in the case of the "lone wolf" type.