

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN UNION ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY

Reflections by the
Bahá'í International Community
Brussels Office

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Racism is one of Europe's—and indeed, the world's—most pressing challenges. Until we address this issue, our societies will struggle to make lasting progress on any front. The advancement of society depends on everyone working together, each contributing their unique talents and capacities, while also drawing from the richness of diverse cultures, customs, and experiences. A European Union (EU) that truly values “unity in diversity” is not about mere coexistence, nor is it about asking certain groups to fit into an existing framework. Instead, it is about harnessing diverse contributions, learning from one another, and co-creating something new.

The EU plays a crucial role in addressing racism—not only through its legal frameworks and policies but also by setting a moral standard, shaping narratives, and promoting specific practices. By doing so, it can help chart a path toward meaningful and lasting change.

The advancement of society depends on everyone, with the full range of their talents and capacities, working together.

Racism can only be addressed through the understanding of the oneness of humanity

Racism, rooted in ignorance and perpetuated by division, can ultimately only be overcome through a profound understanding of the inherent oneness of humanity. This understanding transcends the mere acknowledgment of our equal rights—it calls for a recognition that, regardless of our diverse origins, backgrounds, traditions, beliefs, or lived experiences, we are all members of a singular, interconnected family. It is precisely this diversity that enriches and beautifies the fabric of humanity.

Without a wholehearted embrace of the principle that humanity is indivisible, the perpetuation of arbitrary and imaginary divisions—of “us” versus “them”—will continue to deepen the fragmentation of society. The creation of an “other” fosters the dangerous inclination to view this or that group as inferior or threatening. Only by recognizing that there is only an “us,” can we dismantle the forces that sustain prejudice.

A long term process that requires transformative policies

The deep-rooted affliction of prejudice that permeates our society, and the comprehensive steps required to eradicate it, demand a sobering realization: this is a long-term endeavor, yet one that requires immediate action. It is a process that must be sustained and intentional, ensuring that every individual and every segment of society is nurtured with a profound understanding of our shared humanity.

Measures that are purely punitive, though necessary, will not address the root cause of racism unless they also foster a deeper understanding of our collective identity. Moreover, we should not be content with reducing the work ahead to a mere set of words or quotas. Vigilance must be maintained to prevent the promotion of oversimplified narratives and actions that may inadvertently deepen existing divisions. Efforts aimed at eradicating racism must be transformative, fostering a new understanding of who we are.

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A collective endeavor calling for universal participation

Addressing the root causes of racism also calls for a multifaceted intervention that extends across all levels of society. It requires not only the unwavering commitment of every institution and structure, from municipalities to sports organizations, but also the active and wholehearted engagement of individuals and communities alike.

It must not just include all, but also be accessible to all. Care must be taken to avoid dividing people into categories such as informed or uninformed, “with us” or “against us”. The predominant concern must be to gradually widen the circle of participation in the long-term, patient work of transforming society.

Communities must collaborate, not occasionally interact

Racism persists and thrives when diverse populations exist in social contexts where they merely live side by side, without meaningful opportunities for interaction, as is often the case in many European cities, towns, and villages. An essential element of any strategy to combat racism is, therefore, addressing the broader dynamics of community life within neighborhoods.

It is within neighborhoods that individuals from diverse backgrounds have daily opportunities to engage with one another. When these interactions are genuine and purposeful, rather than incidental, people can encounter different perspectives, forge connections, and gain a deeper understanding of one another's

lived experiences. For such engagement to be lasting, it often needs to center around a shared initiative that addresses the community's needs and contributes to its moral, intellectual, and material well-being.

Institutions play a crucial role in fostering and shaping interactions at that level and at the same time must ensure that grassroots perspectives inform their policies.

Education must foster commitment towards all of humanity

The character of a society is largely shaped by how its young members are taught to perceive the world and one another. If children and youth are educated in ways that, even subtly, reinforce the concept of an illusory "other," or fail to actively challenge and reshape this notion, eradicating prejudice will become an insurmountable challenge.

Thus, educational systems must foster the understanding of the inherent oneness of humanity, while also highlighting the unique and invaluable contributions that the diversity of individuals and communities bring to the advancement of society.

This should not be seen as a one-off initiative or occasional project within schools and universities or a mere course designed to convey facts. Rather, promoting this awareness should be viewed as one of the core responsibilities of education. Educational philosophy and curricula must therefore be reimagined with this principle at the forefront.

A commitment to recognizing humanity's oneness naturally leads to the responsibility of each student to identify and confront prejudice in all its forms, whether overt or subtle. Educational systems must equip students with the ability to critically assess their society—its flaws and opportunities for progress—and instill in them a sense of moral duty to act.

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The distinct role of youth

The unique role of youth in efforts to combat racism must be particularly emphasized. Their innate ability to be active agents of change and to lead these efforts should be fully nurtured and encouraged. Youth engagement in this context is boundless, but we would like to mention two key aspects here.

First, no effort should be spared to involve diverse young people in spaces where significant decisions are made, ensuring that Europe becomes a place where youth, regardless of their background, feel they belong and can actively contribute to shaping its future.

Secondly, as outlined in the previous section, youth must be at the forefront of initiatives to foster new relationships among diverse populations at the grassroots level. When adequately supported, youth have a remarkable capacity to bring people together, organizing and engaging in activities that enhance the well-being of entire communities.

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A foreign policy embedded in humanity's oneness and interconnectedness

Racism not only shapes how we perceive individuals and communities, but also influences how we view and engage with other continents. This calls for European institutions to critically examine the underlying assumptions and attitudes that inform their foreign policy, ensuring that international affairs are carried out with a full awareness of the oneness of humanity.

Viewing another continent through the lens of oneness means acknowledging that every part of the world offers valuable insights and plays an irreplaceable role in advancing humanity as a whole. It suggests that patterns of engagement are grounded in humility, recognizing that no region has perfected a model for others to follow. It also means ensuring that every part of the world does its utmost to enable all continents to advance.

This perspective has numerous concrete policy implications. For instance, it demands that development is seen not as a process carried out by one group or continent for the benefit of another, but as a collective endeavor grounded in the recognition that all regions are part of a shared journey of mutual learning. It requires that policies in areas such as agriculture, migration, development, trade, and finance aim at genuinely advancing global well-being, rather than benefiting one part of the world at the expense of another. It generally calls for moving away from paternalistic policies and language.

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