# CCMARD AND THE UNESCO INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF CITIES AGAINST RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION: A STRONG AND PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP

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The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was created in the wake of Second World War to respond to the need for peace and solidarity among nations. It is composed of 203 member and associate member states and strives to promote peace and sustainable development through its five sectors- education, the natural, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information.

**Cities are places where people from different backgrounds, origins, religions, social classes, ethnic groups, and different nationalities live and work together. They are run by local authorities who are often close to their citizens, and generally have a certain level of autonomy, resources, support, and solidarity networks. They thus have the capacity to launch brave and innovative initiatives that can be effective against racism and discrimination. It is for this reason that UNESCO led the creation of the International Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination and its regional networks. As the originator of the International Coalition, UNESCO stands ready to keep supporting and encouraging the work of the many dedicated Canadian municipal officials and partners who work to eliminate racism and all forms of discrimination.**

## THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) contributes to the fight against racism and discrimination through advancing scientific research and reflection, revitalizing standard setting instruments, reinforcing education and awareness-raising activities, mobilizing opinion leaders and decision makers, and networking diverse actors. It was in the context of the 2001 World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa that the initiative to create an International Coalition of Cities against Racism (ICCAR) was first conceived. The project aims at assisting municipalities in developing and strengthening their policies for greater social inclusion.

Regardless of its origin and form, racism raises barriers against the development of its individual or group victims, corrupts those who practice it, and divides communities and nations. It is a serious threat to peaceful coexistence and exchange among communities that share the same space, and imperils democratic and participatory citizenship. Racism and discrimination entrench and aggravate inequalities within society. In view of the deep mental roots of the racial prejudice inherited from the history and persistence of discriminatory practices, the struggle against racism and discrimination is a long-term effort. It demands regular updating of antiracist strategies and policies along with coordination at international, national, regional, and local levels.

As a consequence of the treaties they have signed, it is the legal obligation of governments to ensure that racism and racial discrimination are banned in national legislation and that any act of racism or discrimination is considered a crime and prosecuted accordingly in the courts of law. However; legal action is not enough. We all know that governments alone cannot combat discrimination, since it permeates all levels of our societies around the world. The United Nations diagnosis requires the mobilization of actors throughout society: non-governmental organizations, educators, religious leaders, business leaders, politicians, parliaments, and increasingly, cities.

## WHY CITIES?

In a few years' time, 50 percent of humanity will be living in cities. It is in cities that the greatest diversity prevails. When migrants arrive in a country, they not only go to rural areas, but to cities as well. Cities are places where people from different backgrounds, origins, religions, social classes, ethnic groups, and different nationalities live and work together. They can be places where fear, hatred, and discrimination prevail or, conversely, where inclusiveness, harmony and mutual respect flourish. Therefore, even though state governments have responsibilities and legal obligations, cities can play a major role in building inclusive societies.

Cities around the world are increasingly becoming international actors and developing their own international and regional relations. They also have growing capacities to formulate their own policies in the social sphere, education, policing, housing, mass transit, etc. Municipal policies can affect the lives its citizens, and the ways in which they interact. Thus, action taken by cities, along with government, non-governmental organizations, institution, etc., can take us a long way in the fight against discrimination.

Cities are run by local authorities who are often close to their citizen, and generally have a certain level of autonomy, resources, support, and solidarity networks. They have the capacity to launch brave and innovative initiatives that can be effective against racism and discrimination on the ground. Local authorities, especially at city level, play a key role in mobilizing forces, even in areas that fall outside their administrative capacity, and in implementing anti-discrimination policies that can make a real difference.

## THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF CITIES AGAINST RACISM (ICCAR)

Beginning in 2004, and given the specificities of each region, UNESCO facilitated development of the ICCAR initiative in different regions of the world:

• The European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR), created in 2004, has brought together 120 municipalities in Europe. In October 2014, during its Statutory Steering Committee meeting, an event to mark the ten years of ECCAR will be organized;

• In North America, the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD) was launched in 2005 in close collaboration with the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Over 60 municipalities have now officially joined the network;

• The African Coalition was launched in Nairobi, Kenya in September 2006 during the Africities 4 Summit and more than 55 municipalities have already joined, despite financial difficulties hampering its effective operation;

• In Latin America and the Caribbean, an official launch took place in October 2006 in Montevideo. More than 200 municipalities joined this network and are active on several thematic and public awareness issues;

• In Asia and the Pacific, the ASPAC Coalition was launched on the occasion of the 2nd World Congress of UCLG in the Republic of Korea in October 2007. So far about 30 cities and regional organizations from 13 countries have come on board;

• For the Arab Region, the regional Coalition was launched in Casablanca, Morocco in June 2008. It has had difficulty developing given the sensitive subjects in the region, and;

• Finally, in September 2013, as part of the Empowerment Week activities surrounding the 50th anniversary of the tragic (civil rights) events in Birmingham, Alabama, the United States Conference of Mayors, in cooperation with UNESCO and the United States Department of State, launched the U.S. Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination. American cities have been invited to sign onto it and to, become members of, this Coalition. In the few months following, almost 120 cities in the USA have signed on, making it the fastest growing regional Coalition.

The Coalitions presented above are regional, or even sub-regional, because each area has its own specificities and challenges to be addressed within cultural and political contexts. The Coalition allows cities to exchange experiences and information, learn from one another, evaluate the impact of certain policies, and commit to undertake certain actions collectively. Cities that work together in a coalition enable joint action and have

greater incentive to keep developing, implementing, and evaluating policies that will ensure the peaceful coexistence of different groups.

UNESCO acts as the International Technical and Scientific Secretariat of the Coalition. It supports the regional networks with capacity-building activities such as conducting policy-oriented research to identify and collect good practices and developing tools to inform the formulation of city policies and their monitoring. Moreover, UNESCO coordinates exchanges among the six regional Coalitions and fosters connection with relevant actors of the UN system. Finally, UNESCO also contributes to the dissemination of information about activities. It has, for instance, signed a partnership agreement with FC Barcelona or Juventus FC to raise awareness of the role of sport in combating racism and discrimination and promoting human rights and mutual respect among children and youth. The Coalition of cities, in particular its European component, has been actively involved in this partnership, through the project "Youth Voices against Racism." Many similar activities put forth by the Canadian Coalition have also been very effective.

The regional 10 Commitments[1], once adopted, become open for signature by cities wishing to join. The signatory cities integrate within their strategies and action programmes the Plan of Action and commit to it the human, financial, and material resources required for its effective implementation. Each city authority is free to choose the policies it judges most relevant or urgent. However, for reasons of consistency, each city is invited to implement at least one action in each of the commitment areas as soon as possible. City authorities that have already implemented, or are currently implementing, some of the proposed actions are invited to enhance them or to supplement them with further actions in the Commitment areas. Signatories then establish a focal point with responsibility for follow-up and coordination of the Plan of Action.

Based on annual reports sent by cities, UNESCO can evaluate progress made by ICCAR cities and has compiled a "best practices" study[2] which draws upon the experiences of ECCAR members as well as cities on all continents. This study was published online in 2012 with the approval of the participating cities. It covers practices aimed at fighting discrimination in such diverse areas as access to housing, public services, transportation, public and private employment, etc. Over 50 cities have contributed reports and much of this information has been used in this study. In 2014, UNESCO is working on updating this document based on reports which continue to be received. Finally, the important work carried out by UNESCO in this field was recognized at the 2009 Durban Follow up Conference, where a specific mention and support of ICCAR is included in the Outcome Document (para.142)[3].

Cities have the capacity, networks, and means of support to facilitate innovative and effective initiatives against racism. As such, each municipality is invited to undertake its own planning to implement the 10 Commitment Plan according to its priorities and capacities (including financial, material and human resources). Civil society organizations also have a dual role to play: providing technical/scientific advice/experience to cities in the implementation of the Ten-Point Plan of Action and monitoring implementation of commitments by the cities.

## TAKING THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION TO CANADA

CCMARD was not only one of the first UNESCO regional Coalitions to be created, it is also one of the most active, consistently providing examples and experiences of good practices to other regional networks. Opportunities for further cooperation, in particular with the European, Latin American and Caribbean and the recently established USA Coalitions, are endless. UNESCO, as the originator, international secretariat, and main stakeholder in this important initiative stands ready to keep supporting and encouraging the work of the many dedicated Canadian (and other) municipal officials and partners who work on a daily basis to eliminate racism and all forms of discrimination and build a stable, peaceful, and productive society based on the principles of human rights.

Regardless of the origin or the forms they take, racism and discrimination represent a serious threat to co-existence and the peaceful exchange across communities that share the same living space, and jeopardizes the possibility of democratic and participatory citizenship in jeopardy. Racism and discrimination consolidate and aggravate inequities within society. We must envisage the fight against racism and discrimination as a long-term activity. This action requires a permanent review of anti-racist strategies and policies, coupled with coordination efforts at the international, national, regional and local levels.

### NOTES

[1] The 10 Commitments are contained in the "Plan of Action."

[2] The UNESCO Report (2012), "Fighting racism and discrimination. Identifying and sharing good practices in the International Coalition of Cities" can be found online at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002171/217105E.pdf.

[3] Paragraph 142 of the Outcome document states: "the important role of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and encourages it to pursue its work aimed at mobilizing municipal authorities and local governments against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, particularly through its Coalition of Cities against Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance initiative and its integrated strategy to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance."