Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan, 
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly, 
on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 
and Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling Against Racism and Racial 
Discrimination

On 21 March 1960, the massacre by police, of 69 civilian demonstrators against apartheid's "pass 
laws", in the township of Sharpeville, South Africa, is only one illustration of the heroic protest 
of the people of South Africa against racial discrimination. This day was designated by the 
United Nations General Assembly, as a landmark to commemorate the International Day for the 
Elimination of Racial Discrimination and we begin the entire week of Solidarity with the Peoples 
Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination.

The world community must be aware of the importance of combating racism in order to ensure a 
better future for all people without any distinction. In September 2001, delegates from Member 
States, representatives of NGOs and business community met to express their deep concern and 
to discuss the speedy and comprehensive elimination of all forms of racism, racial discrimination, 
xenophobia and related intolerance as stated in the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, 
adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993. The Durban Declaration and 
Program of Action adopted in September 2002, constitutes a solid foundation for further action 
and initiatives towards the goal of total elimination of the scourge of racism. Despite continued 
efforts, racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and acts of violence 
persist and have even grown in magnitude, incessantly adopting new forms, including tendencies 
to establish policies based on racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and national superiority or 
exclusivity. Poverty, underdevelopment, social exclusion and economic disparities are closely 
associated with racism, and related intolerance. The persistence of racist attitudes and practices, 
in turn generate more poverty.

Globalization and technology are ushering in an era of bringing people together as a human 
family based on equality and dignity of the individual regardless of where in the world he or she 
is located. We have to learn from history to avert future tragedies attributable to racial 
discrimination and put into effect "a culture of prevention" rather than a culture of reaction. 
Furthermore, the vicious cycle of poverty maintained through racial and class segregation has to 
be ruptured if we are to attain one of the most fundamental of the Millennium Goals, namely the 
eradication of poverty.

The prohibition of racial discrimination is a peremptory norm of international law from which no 
derogation is permitted. In practice, this norm is not always respected. Governments should 
implement and enforce appropriate and effective legislation to prevent acts of racism, racial 
discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and promote a culture of tolerance. I call upon
all Member States to resolutely bring to justice, the perpetrators of crimes motivated by racism and xenophobia. Today, Member States and international organizations must also be aware of their responsibility to ensure that measures taken in the recent struggle against terrorism do not perpetuate racial discrimination. I urge the leaders of every nation, every community to nurture a society that is tolerant and respecting of all cultures.