

UN rights chief calls for dismantling systemic racism

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Geneva, June 29 (RHC)-- Racism against people of African descent remains systemic in many parts of the world, the United Nations human rights chief has said, calling for states to dismantle discrimination and prosecute law enforcement officials for unlawful killings.

Michelle Bachelet, in a global report on Monday in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis in May last year, said the police use of racial profiling and excessive force is entrenched in much of North America, Europe and Latin America.

Bachelet added that structural racism creates barriers to minorities' access to jobs, healthcare, housing, education and justice. "I am calling on all states to stop denying, and start dismantling, racism; to end impunity and build trust; to listen to the voices of people of African descent; and to confront past legacies and deliver redress," she said in the report to the UN Human Rights Council.

The UN official welcomed a "promising initiative" by US President Joe Biden in signing an executive order in January to address racial inequity across the country. Her report cited 190 deaths of Africans and people of African descent worldwide at the hands of law enforcement officials who are "rarely held accountable."

The report selected seven "emblematic cases," including that of Floyd. A judge sentenced former police officer Derek Chauvin on Friday to 22 and a half years for his murder, video of which galvanised the national Black Lives Matter protest movement.

Other victims include an African Brazilian boy, 14, shot dead in an anti-drug police operation in Sao Paulo in May 2020 and a 24-year-old Frenchman of Malian origin, who died in police custody in July 2016.

"Racism and racial discrimination against Africans and people of African descent are often rooted in policies and practices grounded in the debasement of the status of individuals in society," the report said.

The scourge is most prevalent in countries with a legacy of slavery, the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, or colonialism resulting in large communities of people of African descent, it added.

"Systemic racism needs a systemic response," Bachelet said. "There is today a momentous opportunity to achieve a turning point for racial equality and justice."

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