

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

New York, 10 December 2009

No country is free of discrimination. We see it everywhere, in many forms: old and new, covert and blatant, public and private. It may appear as institutionalized racism, as ethnic strife, as episodes of intolerance and rejection, or as an official national version of history that denies the identity of others.

Discrimination targets individuals and groups that are vulnerable to attack: the disabled, women and girls, the poor, migrants, minorities, and all those who are perceived as different.

These vulnerable people are frequently excluded from participating in the economic, political, cultural and social lives of their communities. The bigotry that stigmatizes and excludes them can be exploited by extremists. In some countries, we are witnessing the rise of a new politics of xenophobia.

But these victims of discrimination are not alone. The United Nations is standing with them, committed to defending the rights of all, and particularly the most vulnerable. That is our identity and our mission.

The international human rights community continues to counter bias and hatred. Public awareness has led to global treaties offering legal protection from discrimination and unequal treatment.

But abstract commitments are not enough. We must continue to confront inequality and intolerance wherever they are found.

On Human Rights Day, I invite people everywhere, at all levels, to join the United Nations and human rights defenders around the world in the fight against discrimination.