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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement submitted by Servas International, a non-governmental organization on the roster*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[6 February 2026]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The 25th Anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action (DDPA)

As Servas International joins the global community in commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action, we reflect on a milestone that continues to shape the international struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. Adopted in 2001, the DDPA remains a cornerstone of the global human rights architecture, offering a comprehensive framework for addressing both the historical legacies and the contemporary manifestations of racism. Today, a quarter of a century later, its vision remains as urgent and relevant as ever.

Servas International, founded more than seventy years ago, is built on the conviction that peace is nurtured through human connection. Our global network of hosts and travelers fosters intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and solidarity across borders. These values lie at the heart of the DDPA, which calls on governments, civil society, and individuals to work together to dismantle discrimination and to build societies grounded in equality and respect for human dignity. As an organization dedicated to promoting peace through people to people encounters, Servas International recognizes the DDPA as a powerful guide for our mission and our daily work.

Over the past twenty five years, the world has made important steps in acknowledging and confronting racism. Yet we must also recognize that progress has been uneven and, in many places, fragile. The persistence of systemic discrimination, the rise of xenophobia, the spread of hate speech, and the deepening of social and economic inequalities remind us that the commitments made in Durban remain unfinished. Conflicts, forced displacement, and global crises continue to expose our fragile world. In this context, the DDPA stands not only as a historical document but as a living call to action.

Servas International believes that combating racism requires more than policy reforms; it requires transforming the ways in which people perceive and relate to one another. Prejudice thrives where there is distance, fear, and misunderstanding. It diminishes when people meet, share stories, and discover their common humanity. Through our programs, exchanges, and community initiatives, we create opportunities for individuals to encounter cultures different from their own, to challenge stereotypes, and to build relationships rooted in empathy and respect. These encounters may sometimes be small in scale, but contribute to the broader societal change envisioned in the DDPA.

On this anniversary, we reaffirm our commitment to advancing the principles of the DDPA through concrete action. Servas International will continue to:

- reaffirm and fully respect the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- develop a multi-year program of activities to fully and effectively implement the Durban Declaration and Program of Action
- strengthen civil society that promote non-violence and cooperation of all groups of society
- invest in (political) education and international exchange
- strengthen the law-based international order by complying with and holding accountable any violation of international law
- keep up, strengthen and reform all United Nations organizations to operate even more and better worldwide in order to meet the requirements of dignity, equity and justice of all human beings
- Promote intercultural dialogue by facilitating meaningful encounters that encourage listening, learning, and mutual respect.
- Support youth leadership in peacebuilding and anti racism efforts, recognizing that young people are essential to shaping inclusive and equitable societies.

- Strengthen partnerships with organizations, communities, and institutions working to advance human rights, social justice, and equality.
- Advocate for the dignity and rights of all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, or background.
- Encourage critical reflection within our own network to ensure that our practices embody the values we promote.

We also acknowledge that the fight against racism requires confronting uncomfortable truths, including the historical injustices that continue to shape present realities. The DDPA calls for recognition and education — essential components of reconciliation and healing. Servas International supports efforts to address these legacies through dialogue, awareness raising, and the promotion of historical understanding. Only by acknowledging the past can we build a future grounded in justice.

As we look ahead, we are reminded that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of fairness, inclusion, and opportunity. Racism undermines peace by eroding trust, deepening divisions, and denying individuals their full humanity. The DDPA challenges us to confront racism not only in institutions and societies but also within ourselves — in our assumptions, our biases, and our daily interactions. This work is ongoing, and it requires courage, humility, and persistence.

The vision of the DDPA — a world free from racism and discrimination — is ambitious, but it is not unattainable. It calls for collective action, shared responsibility, and unwavering commitment. Servas International stands ready to contribute to this global effort, drawing on our long tradition of fostering peace through human connection. We believe that every encounter, every conversation, and every act of solidarity brings us one step closer to the peaceful world that we all dream of and strive for.

As we commemorate this important milestone, we renew our dedication to building bridges across cultures, promoting understanding, and standing firmly against all forms of racism and intolerance. Together, with our partners around the world, we will continue to work towards a future where every person is valued, respected, and able to live in dignity and peace.
