

Article I

Psychology Bolsters the World's Fight Against Racism

APA's delegates at a UN conference underscored psychology's role in overcoming racism. It now falls to psychologists to carry on the effort.

BY BRIDGET MURRAY

Monitor staff

In the view of Corann Okorodudu, EdD, the recent United Nations (UN) conference on racism could not have called attention to the issue at a more fitting time. America's war against terrorism--spurred by religious and cultural differences--has brought racism's destructive effects to the fore, she says.

In recent months, fear and mistrust of ethnic groups have escalated, and accordingly, so have hate crimes. "We're seeing a rise of racism," says Okorodudu. "We have had deaths already--people from the Asian continent being murdered. This isn't just affecting people who are Middle Eastern--it's affecting people who look Middle Eastern, including blacks. One of my sons is even thinking of shaving off his mustache."

Fighting such destructive consequences of racism is one of the reasons APA sent a delegation led by Okorodudu to the Durban, South Africa-based meeting, held Aug. 31 to Sept. 7, officially called the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. APA's delegates attended the meeting to raise awareness of what they see as psychology's critical role in combating racism. Their message: Before nations can effectively fight the problem with law, politics, money and other such measures, they first need to understand its psychological underpinnings and effects.

Indeed, past UN conferences have looked at the problem from legal, economic and sociological perspectives. This time APA sought to ensure that psychology added its perspective. "While such aspects as law and discrimination are certainly central parts of racism, we wanted to point out that there is also very much a psychological dimension," says Bertha Holliday, PhD, APA's director for ethnic minority affairs. "And if we don't address that dimension, we won't really solve the problem."

While the conference was embattled by politics--at the last minute, the United States pulled out due to debate over Palestinian concerns and reparations for slavery and colonialism--the well-publicized disruption did not interfere with APA's work. In fact, according to Holliday and Okorodudu, the delegation's efforts on behalf of psychology were largely successful.

APA was able to add language about the relationship of race to mental health in key conference documents--an important achievement, say those who represented APA, because nations that sign the documents are expected to comply with their recommendations. Representatives also succeeded in networking with international

groups, raising their awareness of psychology's role in preventing and remedying racism and pushing for more racism-focused research and public education by professionals, including psychologists.

But psychology's work is far from over, says Okorodudu, who is also one of APA's official representatives to the UN. In fact, she says, it is really just beginning, and it will be challenging. "We need to work together and across disciplinary lines," she says, "on where to take our research, education and practice on racism and xenophobia."

Exposing racism's roots

Leading up to the UN meeting, APA's Council of Representatives authorized the preparation of APA's official conference documents, and delegates attended three preconferences, the first two in Geneva, Switzerland, and the third in Washington, D.C. Okorodudu attended one of the first two meetings, while James Jackson, PhD, representative for APA's Committee on International Relations in Psychology, attended both of them and was joined by four other APA representatives at the third. At the meetings, the representatives distributed resolution and justification statements on psychology's role in overcoming racism.

For the main conference in Durban, APA crafted a declaration on racism, which its delegation of six psychologists and a psychology student circulated to non-governmental (NGO) and government officials. Among the declaration's main points: Racism serves to rationalize one group's psychological, social and material domination over others; racist behaviors are learned; and racism is systemic and cross-generational.

APA delegates emphasized those points at NGO caucuses addressing the effects of race in such areas as health, education, poverty and criminal and environmental justice. For example, delegate Anderson J. Franklin, PhD, president of APA's Div. 45 (Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues), explained the role of institutional racism in such practices as dumping toxic waste in minority communities.

Delegates also offered up mental health-related language, some of which appears in the final conference documents that are available on the Web, and they held a two-hour symposium on psychological aspects of racism. Finally, Jackson read--and entered into the official conference record--a three-minute paper based on APA's declaration.

Among the specific recommendations the paper offered to governments:

- * Acknowledge racist practices and urge major institutions to fight them.
- * Establish institutes on racial equity and mental health promotion.
- * Eliminate racist bias in research.
- * Reduce racism-related physical and mental health disparities.

* Conduct more research on perpetrators.

"To fully understand the various 'isms' of the world--racism, sexism and related atrocities--it is important to learn about the experiences of the perpetrators as well as the victims," says William Parham, PhD, conference representative for APA's Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs.

Socializing people for tolerance and peace

Besides entering the three-minute paper into the official conference record, the delegation also won mention of psychology and mental health in several areas of the conference's final "Program of Action." For example, the document urges nations to:

* Collect statistical data on race that takes into account "economic and social indicators, including...mental and physical health care" to help close social and economic gaps.

* Bolster measures "to fulfill the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" by working to eliminate racism-induced health disparities.

More generally, other sections of the document call on nations to:

* Promote fair treatment and respect for migrants, refugees and indigenous peoples.

* Increase tolerance and diversity.

* Stop trafficking of women and children.

* End racial profiling and discrimination on the part of law enforcement and government officials.

* Fight xenophobia, gender and racial discrimination and other forms of intolerance.

Psychologists can contribute to these initiatives by drawing on their knowledge of such areas as child and adolescent development, cognition and trauma recovery, says delegate Thema Bryant, PhD, also one of APA's representatives to the UN. For example, says Bryant, they can intervene with young women who are trafficked to Europe and made to become psychologically dependent on their abusers. They can also step up their efforts to do something else called for in the document: educating students and the general public "about the causes and consequences of racism."

"This really opens the door for psychologists to engage in lots of new types of activities that they're uniquely qualified for," says Holliday. "For example, in the educational curriculum, how do we socialize people for tolerance and cultures of peace? How can psychologists contribute to curricula for that?"

To build on the delegation's conference achievements, Holliday and other delegates challenge psychologists to work on new forms of racism education and research, both within APA divisions and with other health and mental health organizations nationally and across the globe. Indeed, says Bryant, the conference has set the foundation for a truly international psychology of racism.

"Our most far-reaching success," she says, "was getting psychology on the minds of people doing this anti-racism work around the world."

For more information on the official documents from the UN conference, go to the conference Web site at www.un.org/wcar or the NGO Forum Web site at www.racism.org.za/index.html. For more information on the official documents submitted by APA, go to www.apa.org/pi/oema/wcarplenary.html and www.apa.org/pi/oema/racismdeclaration.pdf.

Article II

Psychological Causes and Consequences of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances Intervention of the American Psychological Association Delegation to the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR)

Durban, South Africa 31 August to 7 September, 2001

Preamble

We respectfully thank the Chair of this United Nations' Plenary Session and the Conference organizers for this invitation to address the full body of this historic conference. As representatives of a United States Non-Government Organization, and several International Psychological Associations, we are especially pleased to have this opportunity to add our voice to the world-wide victims of racism.

We are members of a NGO committed to the eradication of the psychological torture and wasted human potential resulting from the barbaric, inhumane, and illegitimate, racist systems of human relationships. We are even more resolved to the development of a workable, vital, and living WCAR document; a document that reflects the legitimate concerns and human rights of hundreds of millions of people world-wide for improving the quality of their lives by removing the intolerable weight of racism, poverty, discrimination, and psychological torture.

Racism in all its horrific forms is transmitted across generations and is manifested in individual behaviors, institutional norms and practices, and cultural values and patterns. Racism serves simultaneously both to rationalize the hierarchical domination of one racial or ethnic group over other group(s), and maintain psychological, social, and material advantages for the dominant group. Both active racism and passive acceptance of race-based privilege disrupt the mental health and psychological functioning of both victims, and perpetrators, of racial injustice.

We strongly believe that respect for the inherent dignity and well-being of each member of the human family is the psychological foundation of freedom, human justice, and peace in the world. This important principle is recognized in the United Nations Charter (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and every subsequent human rights declaration and convention, including the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965). Therefore, we urge the integration of psychological and positive mental health concerns into the framework of the WCAR as a necessary condition for the effective implementation of remedies, and corrective and preventive measures and strategies.

Develop Remedies and Corrective Strategies

The causes of racism and related intolerance and the means for their perpetuation are complex, involving legal vulnerability and discrimination, economic and educational disadvantage, social and political marginalization, and psychological victimization. Thus, we urge governments, academic, and professional, philanthropic, religious, humanitarian, professional, and corporate institutions, non-governmental organization and other civil society groups, and the United Nations to:

Acknowledge, protect, and promote the quality of life of victims of racism and other forms of intolerances, especially women and children, migrants and refugees, members of multi-ethnic states, indigenous peoples, African and African descendent peoples, victims of disabilities, and physical and mental disorders;

Establish, endorse, and actively support financially, Institutes on Racial and Ethnic Equity and Mental Health Promotion, at the highest levels. These Institutes should place a high priority on research and public policy development and the promotion of research and program development related to tracking the effects of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerances; and the status of related racial and ethnic disparities in social, educational, economic, political, health, and psychological statuses;

Establish programmatic support for mental health on a par with physical health within the World Health Organization and the UN system. Give priority to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances as deterrents to psychological well-being and positive health and mental health, including discrimination in health and

mental health care access and treatment, and the lack of effective culturally competent education of medical and mental health care providers;

Eliminate biases in research and diagnostic instruments, methods and procedures that reflect and perpetuate racial and ethnic disparities and racism in medical, psychological and psychiatric, educational, employment and other institutional assessments;

Recognize and support using the impressive wealth of existing educational curricula and resources against racism at all levels of formal education to promote understanding of human rights, especially historical and intercultural approaches developed by UNESCO.

Establish a "focal point" on racial equality based in the UN Office of the Secretary General, to oversee and monitor the integration of issues relating to racial equality into the work of all functional bodies and special mechanisms of the UN, at least equal to those provided for women and children;

Establish an "International Research and Public Policy Institute" on the Program of Action adopted at the WCAR to monitor and evaluate capacity building for the fulfillment of WCAR goals.

Thank you for your attention to our analyses and recommendations. The system of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances is broadly entrenched and involves generationally transmitted material deprivation and disparities, institutional arrangements and norms, beliefs and ideologies of cultural superiority, and negative psychological consequences for the oppressed and oppressors. Each of these dimensions of the racism system must be addressed, if we are to reverse their influences in order to create a more humane, just, and peaceful world.