



Human Rights Council – 44th Session
Geneva, Wednesday 15 July 2020

Item 9 - ID with the Special Rapporteur on racism

Madam Special Rapporteur,

MRG and IMADR warmly welcome your comprehensive report on racial discrimination and digital technologies. We wholeheartedly agree with the Special Rapporteur that technology is neither neutral nor objective, but rather that digital technologies reflect, reproduce and reinforce racial inequalities. We are concerned that, under the COVID-19 pandemic, digital divides among and within countries would further undermine the racialised groups' access to the UN human rights mechanisms including this Council.

In your report, you highlight the 'diversity crisis', in terms of lack of gender and minority representation in technology sectors. In MRG's forthcoming report on technology, we emphasise the need for meaningful participation in the development of new technologies. At present, however, minority and indigenous employment in fields such as computing remains low.

Your report also highlights the degree to which machine learning is now applied to determine policing and public service outcomes which can have a stark discriminatory impact. A key issue is lack of transparency, with often limited means to appeal negative decisions.

Looking towards the future, 'smart cities' will lead to even more data-gathering and use of algorithms to steer daily life. A question we would therefore like to pose is:

How will we ensure that States live up to their human rights obligations to ensure that companies meet due diligence standards, if it is the governments themselves that are often the end-users of emerging technologies?

I thank you.