

UN expert warns of “stark increase” in hate crimes across UK, post-Brexit

Sounding an alarm over a “stark increase” in hate crimes across the United Kingdom as well as “widespread discrimination” faced by ethnic minorities, a United Nations independent rights expert has called on the country to “comprehensively” combat racism and bias.

“I am shocked by the criminalisation of young people from ethnic minorities, especially young black men. They are over-represented in police stop and searches, more likely to face prosecution,” said E. Tendayi Achiume, the UN Special Rapporteur on racism, xenophobia and intolerance, adding that they are also “over-represented in the prison system”.

Summarizing her initial findings at the end of a four day visit to the UK, the expert echoed calls for “a unified national policy that lays out a comprehensive strategy and benchmarks, for a systematic elimination of unlawful racial disparities.”

“The creation, implementation, and oversight of such policy must meaningfully include ethnic-minority communities in decision-making roles,” she insisted.

The UN rights expert’s visit to the UK came as it prepares to formally exit the European Union, commonly referred to as “Brexit.”

Ms. Achiume said that it was worrying that the anti-migrant, anti-foreigner rhetoric, developed around the campaign in favour of Brexit had become widespread in society, going as far as to add that a hateful and stigmatising discourse had become “normalised” – even involving some high-ranking officials.

She also said that some immigration policies have resulted in the exclusion, discrimination and characterization of groups and individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity or related status.

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The Special Rapporteur highlighted that the UK’s Prevent programme – part of the government’s counter-terrorism strategy which requires faith leaders, teachers, doctors and others to refer suspects to a local body – enabled “life-altering judgments on the basis of vague criteria, in a climate of national anxieties in which entire religious, racial and ethnic groups are presumed to be enemies.”

Across the country, this has led to high levels of anxiety and mistrust affecting the Muslim community especially, she said.

There are, however, laws and policies in Britain that prohibit both direct and indirect forms of racial discrimination, and these are “commendable” said Ms. Achiume.

“This is a firm basis for tackling structural and institutional racism and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender and other protected categories, even in the absence of prejudice,” she stressed.

The Special Rapporteur, whose visit came at the invitation of the UK, met with Government officials, parliamentarians, civil society groups, and religious, ethnic and racial community representatives, and visited several prisons.

Ms. Achiume will present a report on the findings and conclusions of her visit to a forthcoming session of the Geneva-based UN [Human Rights Council](#) – the highest global intergovernmental body on matters related to human rights.

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