Excellencies, 
Ladies and gentlemen,

The International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC) greatly values this opportunity to offer reflections on achievements and lessons as we celebrate collectively the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Fifty years ago, NHRIs were not formally recognized by the UN and only a handful had been established. It is only in the past 20 years that NHRIs have become fully recognized as the natural partner of the UN at a domestic level.

Given the current world context, the work of NHRIs in promoting and protecting human rights is more important than ever before. Only by building societies based on the promotion and protection of human rights will we move towards a world in which the inherent dignity of all persons becomes a truly lived reality and in which there is global and peaceful co-existence.

Today, the ICC is the global alliance of more than 100 National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) with 72 of them being currently accredited with 'A' status indicating full compliance with the United Nations (UN) Paris Principles.

In the last two decades, National Human Rights Institutions have emerged as important contributors to the development and implementation of international human rights norms and standards. They bear a responsibility and play a critical role in assisting and facilitating the translation of these standards into local practices, policies and laws.

As independent institutions of the State with a broad human rights mandate, NHRIs are uniquely placed to serve an important bridging role between the national and international arenas. NHRIs assist in the local application of international standards due to their full understanding of the local context; and they are the trusted legitimate and independent partners when it comes to reporting on the human rights situation on the ground to international bodies.

With regard to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination specifically, the central role of NHRIs has been noted by several UN bodies and mechanisms. This includes the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms
of Racial Discrimination which has recommended that State parties establish national human rights institutions, or strengthen existing ones, to assist in the implementation of the Convention.

NHRIs can achieve this role through their diverse functions:

1. From monitoring, investigations, and complaints-handling of alleged cases of racial and other forms of discrimination;
2. To advising the State, including on domestication of the Convention and development of national action plans, and engaging with communities;
3. To reporting periodically to UN bodies including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on progress made in the implementation of the Convention;
4. To follow-up on the recommendations from the Committee and other bodies at the national level.

Key activities and achievements include:

- NHRIs promote ratification and provide advice on the domestication of the Convention into national legislation and policy development and implementation
- NHRIs work in a number of ways to enhance public awareness, about minority rights, promote cultural and religious diversity, and encourage harmonious relations between races, engage with communities, and build partnerships across all actors of society;
- In line with their monitoring mandates, NHRIs publish periodic reports on the situation of human rights and discrimination and offer recommendations, which are presented to government and Parliament, the general public and the UN and regional human rights mechanisms; and
- NHRIs with complaints-handling mandates or quasi-judicial functions work with victims of racism and racial discrimination, some may initiate legal proceedings, and others may have the power to investigate allegations of human rights violations related to racial discrimination.

At the international level, an important milestone has been the developing relationship between the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and national human rights institutions.

At the invitation of the Committee, NHRIs are actively engaged at all stages of the Committee's work, in their independent capacity, next to states and civil society. NHRIs provide the Committee with independent and authoritative information on national situations and are important partners in encouraging action on the Committee's recommendations in-country.

In turn the Committee through its concluding observations has played an important role in promoting across all regions the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions, to help ensure that NHRIs have the mandate and adequate resources to carry out their functions under the Paris Principles independently and effectively.

In conclusion, for NHRIs across all regions tackling racism and related discrimination, including multiple discrimination, and promoting cultural diversity remains a priority. The recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its pledge to leave no one behind thereby representing a commitment to equality and non-discrimination reinforces this priority.
The ICC together with our partners at the United Nations and the broader international community will continue to support NHRIs in their efforts to contribute to the elimination of racism and related discrimination.

I take a moment to paraphrase a statement by Nelson Mandela: “We must work for the day when we ... see one another and interact with one another as equal human beings ...united, rather than torn asunder, by ... diversity.”

Today’s celebrations are supported by the ICC’s global alliance of NHRIs representing thousands of domestic human rights advocates. We look forward to the fruitful discussions and exchanges which will take place here today.

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1 Nelson Mandela address to the UN General Assembly 3 October 1994 (also on the day South Africa acceded to the ICERD)