

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
8 March 2009



Each year around the world, International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated on March 8. Hundreds of events occur not just on this day but throughout March to mark the economic, political and social achievements of women.

This year the global United Nation themes used for International Women's Day is: Women and men united to end violence against women and girls. The theme for Australia (UNIFEM) is: Unite to End Violence Against Women. Purple ribbons are worn by women and men on this day to symbolize a commitment to gender equality.

We pray with St Clare for those most vulnerable to oppression or neglect, for those who bring forth their children in uncertainty, for all those who go hungry while others feast in plenty, and for those who struggle to support families in the midst of economic injustice, we pray especially for women and children.



THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
21 March 2009

"Racism, Discrimination and poverty form a vicious cycle."

Louise Arbour

We all should be aware of the importance of combating racism in order to ensure a better future for people without any distinction. **The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** is observed annually on 21 March. On that day, in 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa, against the apartheid "pass laws". Proclaiming the Day in 1966, the General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination (resolution 2142 (XXI)).

Despite continued efforts, racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance and acts of violence persist. Some might say they have grown in magnitude. Poverty, underdevelopment, social exclusion and economic disparities are closely associated with racism, and related intolerance. The persistence of racist attitudes and practices, in turn generate more poverty.

St. Francis provides a model of tolerance and inter-religious dialogue in general with Christian-Muslim relations. *"When during his [Francis'] stay among the Muslims, he experienced how God had graciously accepted them in the otherness of their religion and culture and blessed them with good gifts, he knew that he too had to accept the Muslims in their otherness and approach them with respect for God's sake"* (Hoebrichts p.196). This is highly relevant in society today.

We need to learn from history to avoid future tragedies associated with racial discrimination and put into effect "a culture of prevention" rather than a culture of reaction.

We pray that leaders may be moved to work for peace and justice by ratifying the United Nations Convention, to eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women and forms of Racial Discrimination, and carry out its terms.

Loving God, you have heard the cries of your suffering people. Open our eyes to see the immensity of your love for us and the wonder of what you have done for us. Give us the courage to be your hands and heart for those who are in pain. Give us the wisdom to speak out for justice and righteousness. May your will be done in us today and always.

AMEN.

Sources: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/racial/index.html>
<http://www.un.org/ga/president/57/pages/speeches/statement210303-RacialDiscrimination.htm>
Francis and Islam by J. Hoeberichts (Franciscan Press, 1997)