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The Terrors of Racism

Since the inception of time, the society has repeatedly faced many controversial political and social issues ranging from economic downturns to life claiming pandemics. However, a problem that tends to bedevil many communities is the issue rooting from diversity in race that is, racism. Racial discrimination is the result of hierarchical social distinctions between racial or ethnic categories within a society and is often established based on features such as skin colour, and other physical characteristics or an individual's place of origin, culture and religion. It is based on the idea that a particular race is superior to another. Although racism is assumed to be less grievous compared to other global issues, it is not a new phenomenon nor is it an issue exclusive to each and every member of the public as it is a clear reality that haunts everyone in the society.

Racism is a form of prejudice, discrimination, bias or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized. Racism is also referred to as racial discrimination, Xenophobia, racialism or racial prejudice. It is a belief that groups of humans possess different behavioural traits corresponding to physical appearance and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another. According to the 1965 United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, racism is any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin that has the effect of nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any field of public life.

Racism encompasses a web of economic, political, social and cultural actions and beliefs that ensure an unequal distribution of privilege, resources, and power in favour of the dominant racial group and at the expense of all others. As a form of bias, racism occurs in three stages which are prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. Prejudice refers to an emotional reaction to another individual or group based on predetermined ideas about them. Stereotyping is the projection of an individual's thoughts, ideas, beliefs and expectation onto another individual without obtaining an accurate impression about them. Discrimination is the action of denying equal rights based on prejudice and stereotypes.

In the 19th century, scientists advocated the belief that the human population can be divided into races. The division of the human race in turn motivated a notion that rights and privileges should be differentially distributed based on racial categories. In North America and the apartheid era in South Africa, racism dictated that different races (chiefly blacks and whites) should be segregated from one another; that they should have their own distinct communities and develop their own institutions. Generally, those who openly practiced racism held that members of the minority race should be limited to low status jobs and members of the dominant race should have exclusive access to political power, economic resources, high status jobs and unrestricted civil rights.

Racism virtually originated from slavery and the colonization and empire building activities of the Europeans, especially in the 18th and 19th century.The idea of race was invented to magnify the difference between the people of European origin and those of African origins whose ancestors had been enslaved and transported by the white men. By the 20th century, racism had matured and fully spread around the world. Leaders began to think of the ethnic components of their own societies, the religion and vast number of language groups, in racial terms and to designate the higher and lower ethnic groups . Those seen as low status were exploited for labour and discrimination against the minority became a common pattern. The feelings of racial superiority that came with colonialism generated hate from those who were colonized, these feelings continued even after most African countries became independent.

Racial discrimination causes harm as well as adverse effects on self concept, health and wellbeing of those who are on the receiving end. Not only does it hurt the individuals but also the communities and our society at large. Studies have shown that a number of people experiencing racial bias tend to have suicidal tendencies and experience depression, self hate, anxiety and feelings of sadness. Regular experience of racism can lead to withdrawal from work, study, friends and even family. The effects of racism can be detrimental to the education of children in certain neighborhoods and communities. Police violence and health disparities amongst people of colour are a byproduct of racism. Inequality in employment, unequal access to social services among many others are the effects of racism.

Racism in all its horrific forms is a problem that requires a solution. It is important that the individuals, government, religious, non governmental organizations and other civil society groups, most especially the United Nations work together to make racism a thing of the past. Some ways in which racism can become a concept long dead include acknowledging, protecting and promoting the quality of life of victims of the horrible belief, especially women, children, the elderly and those with disabilities. Establishment, endorsement and active support of institutes on racial and ethnic equality at the highest level is also a step to take. Another step in the right track includes recognizing and supporting the use of the current educational curricula and resources against racism at all levels of formal education to promote understanding of human rights. Establishment of a section on racial equality based in the UN office to oversee and monitor the integration of issues relating to racial equality can also mitigate the belief. It is also important to ban every form of racist books, music, movies and other forms of media that indicate racism and racial profiling.

Conclusively, it is apparent that as long as humanity is in the grasp of racism there can never be true equality of people and no true judgement of an individual's worth or capabilities. A person coming from a racist community will continue to be racist and considered hostile by other individuals. This is a result of the many years of racial discrimination that has been imprinted and engraved into our norms. Even though the concept has been part of human history for centuries, it has only acted as an hindrance and has never worked towards development. Therefore, it must be minimized and mitigated at all costs, as soon as possible or else it will halt our development even further. In a world where almost every belief is backed up by scientific evidence, something as groundless as racism has no place. To the next generation, even the utterance of the word will be absurd. This shows that the society is growing and its racist designs are remnants of past generations, dead and long forgotten. Thus, an awareness must be spread in people that clinging to the ideas of a generation long dead, is not only harmful but unintelligent.