

Think over – Appreciate diversity!

March 21st has been proclaimed international day against all forms of racist discrimination by United Nations. This day was chosen because on March 21st 1960 South-African police opened fire on the peaceful anti-apartheid demonstrators in Sharpeville, South Africa.

Is attention for the international day against racism and a complete week of united European attention for the struggle against racism still necessary? Are there not too many days against or for something? Should the church be involved in this?

If racism is concerned, that is certainly still necessary. As it happens racism is not history.

A few examples:

Research shows that it is hard to get a trainee post if your name refers to another continent and you might be a Muslim. Fear for Islam and fear for fugitives that come to our country are sometimes have the upper hand. Someone with another colour of the skin traveling in Europe gets controlled more often. After all, you could be a foreigner without papers.

We also observe it in the work of Kerk in Actie (*Church in Action*). If we organize international conferences, it is the question if people from Africa get a visa. The authorities have great fear that they will not return. These are some new forms of discrimination and racism by which exclusion from work and impediment of traveling is facilitated.

Should the church fight against this? Sometimes she does. Where obvious discrimination takes place churches are up in arms; simply because people need help. Diaconia is helping. Amongst others in Waspik, where a family from Somalia was harassed away and in Raamsdonksveer where something similar happened to another African family. Just before young people stalked the family for the hundredth time, churches came to their defense and offered help and participate in a local platform against racism.

Searching for new forms to fight against racism – everyone can devote her/himself in her/his neighbourhood. At that time you build a world where there is room for all of us, a world in which there are no discriminated groups. The theme of the European week against racism is: **Look further – Appreciate diversity!**

Now we often let ourselves be guided by fear for diversity. Therefore we do not (no longer) see the enrichment the living together and the encounter with people of different ethnic, cultural and geographical background offers.

But fear still is a bad consultant.

Evert Jan Hazeleger, assistant program-manager Kerk in Actie, March 13, 2009.

P.S.: Examples of new forms of racism will be published in an article in the upcoming issue of Diakonia.