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Measures to Combat the Rise of anti-Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the world, a hate crime epidemic plagued the lives of millions of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) people. Hate crimes are defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary as “any of various crimes (such as assault or defacement of property) when motivated by hostility to the victim as a member of a group (such as one based on color, creed, gender, or sexual orientation)” (“Hate Crime”). Following the start of the pandemic in China in early 2020, crime rates rose exponentially against AAPI communities, and COVID-19 was no longer the only threat to their lives. The origins of the pandemic instilled xenophobia and racism in many, who ultimately took it upon themselves to “punish” AAPI people for the pandemic in general.

Racism against Asian persons has long been a prominent issue in societies, however with the rise of a pandemic originating in China, 15 American cities endured a 169% increase from the first quarters of 2020 to 2021, according to research published by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino (“New Report”). The city of Vancouver, in Canada, also experienced a 717% increase in anti-AAPI hate crimes (“Attacks Make”), with over 890 reported incidents (“Reports of Anti-Asian”), and countries such as France, The Netherlands, Germany and New Zealand have also reported increases in hate crimes (“From BTS to Britain”).

The UK also witnessed a 300% rise in AAPI hate crimes in the first few months of 2020, as compared to those of 2018 and 2019 (“It’s Time”)

There are a few pertinent concepts that must be understood to generate a fluent debate – one of them being: what leads to hate crimes and how to stop said issue at the source. The American Psychological Association states that “offenders may not be motivated by hate, but rather by fear, ignorance or anger” (“The Psychology”). Frequently used racist rhetoric implied that Chinese people were to blame for the pandemic – in December 2020, a man in Tustin, California, was recorded telling an AAPI man “Thanks for giving my country COVID” (“The Painful”). Misinformation and the abovementioned rhetoric caused racism to run rampant throughout the globe – especially against AAPI groups. According to UC Berkeley professor Lok Siu, who teaches Asian American Studies, a crumbling economy also leads to a rise in hate crimes, as people tend to scapegoat Asian Americans. “You have spikes of just outraged White workers who are claiming that Chinese are taking over jobs and therefore need to be gotten rid of”, she said, referring to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act passed in the United States, seeking to prohibit immigration from China, only being revoked sixty-one years later (“The Painful”). The AAPI community continued to be scapegoated with follow-up acts that created rifts between AAPI and other minority groups, given that they were portrayed to be what Professor Siu described as “model minorities”, who had the “correct cultural values”. All that did was pit minorities against each other, thus fuelling the rift and incentivizing using AAPI communities as scapegoats to blame for problems that were not caused by them (“The Painful”).

Researchers Turkmen and Dionne revealed to the Washington Post that “in a context of racial inequality, pandemics further marginalize oppressed groups” through a phenomenon named “othering”, occurring when “one group of people – usually a majority group – treats a marginalized group as if something were wrong with them, pointing to perceived “flaws” in the out-group’s appearance, practice or norms” (“There’s a long”). This is precisely the occurrence underway with AAPI people, as thousands of incidents ranging from verbal to

physical violence. A survey conducted by AAPI Data and SurveyMonkey by social scientists Jennifer Lee and Karthick Ramakrishnan found that over 2 million AAPI adults in the United States have endured hate crimes since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic – a spike linked to the racist rhetoric frequently utilized by political leaders. This is not the first time that, during a pandemic, minorities are targeted with othering and scapegoating. The SARS epidemic in 2003, also originating in China, brought about a decrease in movement in Chinatowns in places such as New York and Toronto, as Asian communities were instantly associated with the new emergent disease wreaking havoc across Asia at that point in time, thus causing them to face othering and discrimination by association. Furthermore, this could also be witnessed during smallpox outbreaks in the 1800's, as Chinese immigrants were discriminated against and associated with said outbreaks. Hate crimes occurred even back then, with a riot caused by a mob in Calgary, Canada, after a case of smallpox was tied to a Chinese laundry in 1892 (“There’s a long”).

Delegates must do extensive research on the anti-AAPI sentiment present in their respective delegations, as research has shown that this is not a regional, but a global cause of concern. Countries such as the United States, Australia, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom have witnessed exponential increases in anti-AAPI hate crimes, thus making them some of the key players throughout the debate.

Another pertinent concept to be explored by delegates in their research, and again during the debate, encapsulates the actions being taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of AAPI communities across the globe, as well as what has been done in past hate crime epidemics in order to counter the effects of scapegoating and othering by majority groups. In the United States, President Biden has signed legislation in May 2021 named the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, seeking to “create a new position at the Justice Department to expedite review of potential COVID-19 related crimes and incidents reported at the federal, state or

local level”, as well as “direct the Justice Department and Health and Human Services to work with community-based organizations to issue guidance raising awareness of hate crimes during the pandemic” (“Biden signs”).

The group “Stop AAPI Hate” is a coalition that aims to “track and respond to incidents of hate, violence, harassment, shunning, and child bullying against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States” (“About”). Their penta-lateral approach consists of collecting said anti-AAPI incidents, provide multilingual resources and technical assistance, as well as support the implementation of safety measures and advocate for the protection and wellbeing of AAPI communities and people (“About”). It is a very valuable source, as they have collected over 6,000 incidents since their start on March 19th, 2020. Member states should use said initiatives as inspiration to achieve an effective solution, given that COVID-19 is no longer the only epidemic threatening Asian lives across the world.

This debate aims to find an amicable and efficient solution to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of AAPI communities worldwide, as xenophobia and racism against AAPI people have gained traction globally over the course of the pandemic and it is fundamental that Member States contribute to keeping marginalized communities safe in times of uncertainty.

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