

Addressing Discrimination in the Workplace

Good afternoon, I wish to begin by thanking the secretariat for giving me this opportunity. My name is Nicholas Riasanovsky and I am student from the United States of America, more specifically Edison High School in Huntington Beach, California and the topic I will be addressing is discrimination in the workplace. Many people consider my nation as a world leader in addressing discrimination, yet admittedly, we must do much more if we are to truly provide equality in the workplace.

Discrimination in the workplace can exist in many different forms. These types of discrimination include discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, religion, disability, and pregnancy. As of 2013, there were nearly 94,000 cases of workplace discrimination in the United States. Of these cases, over 33,000 were on the basis of race, 27,000 were on the basis of gender, and nearly 11,000 were on the basis of national origin. As if these statistics are not troubling enough, these are only those that have been reported. There are likely thousands more that have gone unreported.

In order to make substantial progress in ending discrimination in the workplace, the ideal place to start is to improve those policies that are already in place. Some policies that companies and governmental agencies in the United States currently utilize include legislation directly prohibiting discrimination, the establishment of regulations requiring that both employers and employees undergo diversity training, and opportunities for those discriminated against to officially list their workplace grievances without repercussion. An important step to ending workplace discrimination requires expanding the implementation of these policies and improving their effectiveness.

However, these measures may not go far enough if we wish to eliminate discrimination in its entirety. To do so, we need to address discrimination among fellow workers. Many individuals may enter the workforce with preexisting biases and adding those biases to the competitiveness associated with the American workforce can lead to discriminatory practices. One course of action that could be taken in order to eliminate these biases and discrimination between fellow workers would be to suggest to employers that they create greater diversity amongst their employee groups whenever possible. These groups would help foster significant collaboration amongst their members. The goal of such a strategy is to force people to confront diversity. Studies have shown it is much more difficult to hold biases towards individuals or groups when one is consciously aware of and interacting with these individuals or groups. Therefore, such a strategy could significantly reduce bias and discrimination in the working environment.

In the workforce, a significant amount of discrimination occurs specifically in regards to job promotion. Unfortunately, a large portion of this discrimination is subtle and often even done subconsciously. Since no employer wants to be accused of discrimination and face the possibility of a lawsuit or government sanction, they actively seek to eliminate this form of discrimination. One action that could help to eliminate this

type of discrimination is a strategy that many teachers employee at my school. When grading an essay, many of these teachers have students remove their names and instead use their student identification numbers. This way, the authors of the essays are nearly anonymous to the teachers who now can better avoid bias in their assessment. A similar strategy could be employed in the workforce. Having employee files be anonymous when upper level management is reviewing them for promotion; removing names, race, and pictures can help diversify the candidacy. While this may not end the problem, it will help to create a more diverse pool of candidates and could alter employer or managerial mindsets.

From a governmental perspective, the most important action that needs to be taken is that countries need to improve their legislation on this topic. The United States of America has largely used the 1964 Civil Rights Act to prosecute cases of discrimination, but it is actively working on improving it's legislation. For example, President Barack Obama signed an executive order in July 2014 prohibiting discrimination based upon sexual orientation or gender identity in companies working on behalf of the government. Legislative acts such as this need to be implemented in all countries in order to do as much as possible to eliminate discrimination in the workplace. In addition, these countries need to ensure theses legislative acts and programs are adequately enforced. Having laws to prevent discrimination in the workplace does little if the government turns a blind eye to violations of these laws.

Although my nation and much of the world have made tremendous strides in creating equality in the workplace, the problem does still exist and needs to be actively engaged in the coming years. If we place forth the proper effort, the problem of discrimination in the workplace can be eliminated. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak.