

ECRI

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
Commission européenne contre le racisme et l'intolérance



Joint statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – 21 March 2008

Today we commemorate the tragic events of 1960 in Sharpeville, which led to the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.ⁱ On this symbolic day, we - the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) – stand united in calling on political parties to combat racism. In the words of Nelson Mandela, we call on political leaders to build “a society of which all humanity will be proud”.

Our organisations jointly condemn all discourse that spreads ideas of superiority on grounds of race, colour, language, religion, nationality, or national or ethnic origin. Racist discourse is opposed to the basic equality of all people.

Public perception of different minorities, cultures and religions as well as attitudes towards issues such as immigration, integration and the fight against racism are to a great extent influenced by political discourse. By speaking out against racist acts and incidents, political representatives can play a positive role in the promotion of mutual respect and understanding in society, and can have a significant impact in defusing tensions.

Racist political discourse contributes to dehumanising individuals, denigrating certain ethnic, religious or cultural groups, perpetuating stereotypes, and creating a climate in which racist violence may flourish. Racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic political discourse is no longer the sole preserve of extremist political parties, but is to be found in the overall political environment in many states. Such developments may lead to the legitimisation and trivialisation of this type of language. Concern over the increasing use of racist discourse in politics has been expressed in numerous reports, statements and documents adopted by the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Based on the existing standards and commitments of our organisations and, in light of the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Societyⁱⁱ, which could serve as a blueprint for other similar initiatives, we call upon all political leaders for continued leadership in the fight against intolerance and discrimination. We:

- Call on political leaders to defend basic human rights and democratic principles and to reject all forms of racist violence, incitement to racial hatred and harassment and any form of racial discrimination;
- Call on political parties to deal responsibly with sensitive issues related to race, ethnic and national origin and religion;
- Encourage political parties to adopt concrete policies against all forms of racism and xenophobia in their party programmes;
- Encourage political parties to strive for the fair representation of racial, ethnic, national and religious minorities within and at all levels of their party system;

- Urge political representatives to act responsibly and refrain from providing simplistic explanations with racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic connotations to complex social, political and economic problems or phenomena;
- Recommend political parties to work closer with civil society to combat racism and xenophobia and form partnerships in order to reach this goal.

Notes to editors

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- ⁱ 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 UN's General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.
- ⁱⁱ The [Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society](#) was signed on 25 September 2003 by the President of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and the President of the European Parliament. The Charter calls on political parties to act responsibly when dealing with issues related to race, ethnic and national origin and religion. The EUMC, the Fundamental Rights Agency's precursor, worked on promoting the Charter. ECRI in March 2005 adopted a [Declaration on the use of racist, antisemitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse](#), making reference to the Charter.