



## **OSCE BRUSSELS CONFERENCE 13<sup>th</sup> September 2004**

### ***Statement to plenary session 1 by Mrs Fiona Mactaggart, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Race Equality, Community Policy, and Civil Renewal at the UK Home Office.***

Chair, my Government subscribes to the statement of Minister Verdonk on behalf of the European Union. I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of the United Kingdom.

First of all, I would like to thank the Belgian Government for hosting this conference, and Foreign Minister Passy for his work as Chairman in Office. I would like to pay particular tribute to his contribution to the success of the OSCE Berlin Conference on anti-Semitism in April. The high level representation we see in the conference room today is evidence of the importance that we all attach to tackling racism, xenophobia and discrimination in all its manifestations.

Governments across the OSCE area are facing similar challenges of how to promote integrated societies within increasingly diverse and mobile populations. The United Kingdom has a long tradition of inward and outward migration that has brought, and continues to bring, real economic and social benefits which are shared by all. Eight per cent of our population describe themselves as being a member of an ethnic minority and five per cent as following a minority faith. Eight per cent of the population was born outside the United Kingdom. And of course, the United Kingdom is a multinational State itself. We expect globalisation, new patterns of migration and the welcome expansion of the European Union to contribute further to the changing nature of our population. We expect new migrants to continue to bring new talents and skills and to contribute to our economy and enrich every aspect of social and cultural life.

Nevertheless, migrants and people from minority ethnic and faith communities continue to experience racism, discrimination and exclusion - and no State is immune from this. As Governments, we must work at the national and international level to promote the conditions necessary for migrants and minority ethnic and faith communities to integrate into our societies. Integration, not assimilation, must be our goal. We must build legislation and policies that provide protection against discrimination and racist and religiously motivated violence and which promote equality.

In recent years we have been particularly concerned about rises in acts of violence and intolerance directed against members of the Muslim community, a phenomenon to which

the UK has regrettably not been immune. We have therefore introduced higher penalties for crimes of violence motivated by religious hatred and we intend to legislate to prohibit incitement to religious hatred. We strongly condemn those who stir up hatred and intolerance by attempting to link terrorism with particular religious groups. We have made particular efforts to engage with members of the Muslim community and to encourage interfaith dialogue. In Europe and the wider OSCE we follow many faiths, and none. No one group has the right to claim this continent as their own.

In 2000, we took the law in Britain in a new direction by placing a positive duty on public bodies to promote race equality, rather than simply react to discrimination once it has happened. We have further strengthened anti-discrimination law by transposing the EU Race Directive into domestic law. We have also introduced the concept of religiously and racially aggravated offences into the criminal law, with higher penalties for such hate crimes. We have increased the penalties for incitement to racial hatred and extended the law to prohibit incitement to hatred against groups abroad.

At the European and international level, we support the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, and the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in their work to monitor States' performance in tackling racism and to highlight good practice. We are fully committed to the Berlin and Brussels Declarations and will work in the OSCE to bring them both to life.

Legislation against racial discrimination and racist crime is an essential component in building an integrated society. But on its own it is not enough. To build a successful integrated society, we also need to promote an inclusive concept of citizenship which goes beyond legal definitions – one which articulates the rights and responsibilities we share, but which nonetheless allows people to express their cultural identities.

When we welcome migrants we expect them to integrate into our society, but we do not expect them to give up their identities. We believe that Governments and established communities have nothing to fear from this. We have a long tradition in the United Kingdom of people having more than one identity. On the contrary, suppressing expressions of cultural and faith identity by minority communities can in fact create the very opposite of integration – by contributing to the alienation, segregation and exclusion of individuals from those communities from the wider society. As a minister in the Government department responsible for the police, I am proud to see the adaptation of police uniforms to allow people to wear Sikh turbans, Jewish kippahs or Muslim headscarves. Expressing culture or faith identity in this way does not make the individual any less British or less European - or any less of a police officer. Nor does it detract from the primary purpose of the police to protect the public. In fact it strengthens it. A police force which reflects the community around it is better able to serve it.

Later this year we intend to launch a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy which will form the basis of a renewed national programme of action across Government and more widely to build community cohesion and reduce racial inequalities. It will be a Strategy led by Government, but it will require the engagement of civil society – of individuals, communities and organisations. In July this year, we launched a consultation

called “Strength in Diversity” which describes the issues and challenges that need to be addressed through the Strategy and seeks to engage those individuals, communities and organisations in that debate.

In conclusion, our vision is one of a successful integrated society that recognises, celebrates and draws strength from its diversity. Racism and extremism have no place in that vision. Strong and effective legislation against racial discrimination and racist crime is the essential foundation for building this integrated society, underpinned by a shared sense of citizenship and belonging which allows individuals to express their identities in different ways.

Chair, we all have much to say on these issues. We all have much to learn. I hope this conference will help advance our thinking and produce concrete action against racism, xenophobia and discrimination across the OSCE area.

Thank you.