

ENGLISH only



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### OSCE Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination U.S. Closing Intervention

Delivered by the Honorable J.C. Watts  
September 05, 2003

Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for organizing such a successful conference on racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Thanks to the hard work of the Dutch Chairmanship, we have had excellent speakers and a truly meaningful dialogue this week. The significant participation from all corners of the OSCE confirms this conference as another landmark event in the history of our organization. I am heartened that our colleagues around the table have made so many constructive recommendations to more fully implement our OSCE commitments in this area.

At the very outset of the creation of the OSCE, we recognized as a founding principal that human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, "for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion" are birth rights from the "inherent dignity of the human person."

OSCE Commitments since the Helsinki Final Act further stated that the protection and promotion of these rights are the "first responsibility of government." Participating States are accountable to their citizens and responsible to each other for their implementation of their OSCE commitments.

We need to make sure that the very valuable discussion in which we have engaged in the past two days does not remain a one-time event, but transforms into commitments for the future. We must ask ourselves and our governments: Do we fully afford all of the rights of our society to everyone in our communities, without racial or ethnic prejudice, and without discrimination?

As this conference draws to a close, I would like to offer the following recommendations for follow-up in the coming months.

Our national political leaders have the primary responsibility for combating prejudice and discrimination. I urge national authorities throughout the OSCE region to speak out against injustices. Second, authorities must fully investigate and prosecute all hate crimes. In this regard police have a special role in addressing acts of intolerance.

In June, former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani of New York City proposed that the OSCE play a lead role in collecting of hate crime statistics throughout Europe and Eurasia. I endorse fully this proposal, for hate crimes involving anti-Semitism and for all other hate crimes. This initiative would require participating States to submit statistics on hate crimes attributable to racism, xenophobia or discrimination to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, to be analyzed to assist us in further developing programs to stamp out injustices.

Authorities also have the responsibility to protect individuals from the desire of some hate-filled segments of the public to do harm to others. However, public officials must not respond to hatred in society by repressing free speech. That is not only wrong; it is counterproductive. People should not be persecuted for mere expressions of national identity. Radical views should be met in the marketplace of ideas and should be countered in public debate.

Education must and should be a cornerstone of protecting individuals and spreading respect for all persons throughout societies. Equal access to education, regardless of race or religion, is not only a fundamental right, but also a priority for our common future. However, to establish the long-term social change that we are seeking, victims of discrimination must be able to use the political system to establish change. We, as political leaders, must not only respect their right to do so, but welcome it with open arms. It is the participation in our political and economic systems of our entire societies—not just the majority population, or those with common backgrounds or ideologies—that will ultimately make our societies and economies stronger.

I hope the examination of these recommendations and our implementation of our OSCE commitments continues in the coming months, at the October Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, at the December Ministerial in Maastricht, and beyond. We also look forward to reading the Rapporteur's Report, which will allow us to study more fully the recommendations of all participants.

I would like to close by thanking Ambassador Minikes, his staff, and my delegation for their hard work on this conference. I also applaud the work of the OSCE Secretariat and interpreters, without whom this conference could not have taken place. Lastly, I would like to thank each of the governments and NGOs that have taken part here this week. Your presence and active participation made clear your genuine interest in the topic at hand. The road that we must travel to prevent discrimination is long, but it is a road that must be traveled with strength of conviction and commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.