

## SCHEDULE OF SIDE EVENTS

To take place during the  
**SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING ON:  
THE ROLE OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN  
COMBATING RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON  
PERSONS BELONGING TO NATIONAL MINORITIES AND MIGRANTS**

*The Helsinki Document of 1992 (Chapter IV) called for increasing the openness of OSCE activities and expanding the role of NGOs. In particular, in paragraph (15) of Chapter IV the participating States decided to facilitate during CSCE meetings informal discussion meetings between representatives of participating States and of NGOs, and to provide encouragement to NGOs organizing seminars on CSCE-related issues. In line with this decision, NGOs, governments, and other participants are encouraged to organize side meetings on relevant issues of their choice.*

*The opinions and information shared during the side event convened by participants do not necessarily reflect the policy of the OSCE/ ODIHR.*

Thursday, 29 May	Friday, 30 May
<p><i>Title: "Roundtable for Civil Society"</i></p> <p><i>Convenor: ODIHR</i></p> <p><i>Time: 09.00 – 13.00</i></p> <p><i>Venue: Bibliotekhsaal</i></p> <p><i>Language: English</i></p>	<p><i>Title: "Is the right to asylum undermined by racism and xenophobia?"</i></p> <p><i>Convenor: UNHCR/ ODIHR</i></p> <p><i>Time: 12.15 – 14.00</i></p> <p><i>Venue: Ratsaal</i></p> <p><i>Language: English, Russian</i></p>

### OVERVIEW OF SIDE EVENTS

As submitted by the organisers

29, 30 May 2008

Hofburg, Vienna

Thursday, 29 May

Time: 09.00 – 13.00

Venue: Bibliotekhsaal

Title: "Roundtable for Civil Society"

Convenor: ODIHR

Language: English

Summary:

#### **Background**

In 2006 and 2007, the OSCE human dimension events related to tolerance and non-discrimination were preceded by civil society meetings where participants formulated recommendations to the OSCE participating States and to the OSCE institutions. These meetings gave civil society the opportunity to discuss current issues and priorities related to the topics of the OSCE conferences, to inform governments of the results of their activities, to share best practices and to engage in coalitions and networks across the region. Building on the important role of such meetings, the Supplementary Human

Dimension Meeting on The Role of National Institutions against Discriminations in Combating Racism and Xenophobia with a Specific Focus on Persons belonging to National Minorities and Migrants will be preceded by a Roundtable for Civil Society

Please see agenda at: [http://www.osce.org/documents/html/pdf/html/30896\\_en.pdf.html](http://www.osce.org/documents/html/pdf/html/30896_en.pdf.html)

#### **Purpose of the Side Event**

- To provide civil society with an opportunity to prepare recommendations, which will be presented at the opening of the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting;
- To discuss current issues and priorities related to the role of national institutions against discriminations;
- To exchange information on best practices;
- To facilitate and enhance coalition-building across diverse communities and civil society groups throughout the OSCE region;

#### **Programme**

Following the opening session, a keynote speaker will highlight existing issues and priorities regarding the role of national institutions against discrimination focusing on their relationship with civil society.

The questions that could be addressed during the thematic session are following:

- What are the prospects and challenges of partnerships between national institutions and civil society?
- Which challenges face national institutions in fulfilling all aspects of their mandate including legal support work, assistance to victims and monitoring, awareness-raising, and promotion of policy and legal reform?
- How can national institutions best identify and tackle systemic and structural discrimination?
- How can national institutions increase their effectiveness with regard to particularly vulnerable groups?

After the coffee break, the participants will gather in a closing session aiming at presenting, discussing and considering recommendations to be adopted.

Refreshments will be provided

### **Friday, 30 May**

Time: 12.15 – 14.00

Venue: Ratsaal

Title: "Is the right to asylum undermined by racism and xenophobia?"

Convenor: UNHCR/ ODIHR

Language: English, Russian

Summary: The right to asylum and the principle of non-refoulement are well established and non-derogable. Governments are obliged to ensure fair and effective asylum procedures and adequate conditions of reception. In practice the latter includes access to free legal and social counseling freedom of movement, accommodation and the enjoyment of civil rights.

In the past decade, asylum systems have come under great pressure. Several reports highlighted the inadequate conditions and abuses asylum seekers and refugees are sometimes subjected to. Governments have sometimes failed to take adequate steps to prevent and respond to this. In some cases, their policies such as restrictive immigration policies, and increasingly narrow interpretations of states' obligations towards refugees contribute to the problem

The public discourse surrounding the terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' has changed from evoking empathy, respect and a sense of obligation to evoking distrust and aggression. Populist rhetoric that use pejorative language such as 'bogus asylum seekers'; and

scapegoating asylum seekers and migrants as the cause of unemployment, and social problems all play a part in creating a hostile reception environment.

This side event will explore the gap between States' duties to protect the right to asylum and the practical impact of their policies on asylum seekers and refugees: Which policies and mechanisms have they put in place to ensure protection from racism, xenophobia and discrimination of this particular group? How can policies and practices be improved to ensure better protection?

This event brings together leading experts on asylum and refugee issues to discuss the need for a concerted effort to address racism and xenophobia against asylum seekers/refugees and the role national institutions and actors can play in this.

Refreshments will be provided