



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Martin Luther King Jr. Day

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 24, 2013

I take the floor today to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who tirelessly fought to end racial discrimination and advance civil rights in the United States. He remains a beacon for human rights across the globe, and we celebrate his legacy this year in part through the second inauguration of President Barack Obama.

As we celebrate his memory, we are also aware that Dr. King's work is unfinished in our own country and throughout the 57 countries in the OSCE space. Racism, including hate crimes and discrimination specifically directed against the more than eighty million persons of African descent living in participating States, remains a scourge.

Just a few weeks ago, a woman of African descent was pushed onto subway tracks in Vienna after a racist verbal assault. In late November, the Senegalese husband of an ODIHR employee in Warsaw was brutally attacked. These cases exemplify the continuing problems faced by persons of African descent. Unfortunately, the police are not always responsive in addressing these kinds of hate crimes.

In some OSCE countries, persons of African descent are routinely stopped by police up to ten times more than other people, which has prompted NGOs to mount "end racial profiling campaigns" in France, Germany, the United Kingdom and in my own country. In Greece, the U.S. Embassy advised U.S. citizens that persons of African descent and others had been detained by Greek police conducting sweeps for illegal immigrants. In many OSCE countries, racist incidents continue almost weekly at sports events and school children of African descent remain some of the most vulnerable targets of racist abuse.

Therefore, it is deeply disappointing that the OSCE was unable to strengthen its ability to protect diverse communities and improve specific commitments on racism and xenophobia at the 2012 Ministerial Council. However, we continue to welcome ODIHR's efforts to focus on the human rights and inclusion of people of African descent in recent OSCE meetings. I recall the courage of Charles Asante-Yeboah of the African Center in Ukraine who stood in this very room in 2011 holding a picture of his brutalized face following a horrific hate crime. I urge other participating States to join us in supporting the ODIHR's project "Building the Capacity of People of African Descent to Combat Discrimination and Hate Crimes."

We also urge the incoming Chairmanship's Personal Representative on Racism and Xenophobia to meet with African-descent communities and to raise with governments the issues of racial discrimination affecting their communities. Lastly, we stress the importance of including a focus on African-descent communities in the Chairmanship's tolerance initiatives through addressing segregation in education, bullying in schools, and stereotypical images of persons of African descent in curriculum materials.

In closing, Dr. King’s vision and struggle remain as relevant and universal as they were when he delivered his “I Have a Dream Speech” almost 50 years ago. Because, as President Obama stated in his inaugural address: “...peace in our time requires the constant advance of those principles that our common creed describes: tolerance and opportunity; human dignity and justice.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.