

Closing Remarks  
by Ambassador Christian Strohal,  
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and  
Human Rights (ODIHR)

at 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'*

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VIENNA

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This was a very productive meeting. I will not elaborate on the key issues that have been so well summarized by the moderators of the three working sessions on the role and mandate of National Institutions, challenges they face and good practices shared.

We have witnessed that national minorities and migrants are becoming an easy target for hate crimes and discrimination due to their marginalised position in many OSCE states. We have also heard how, based on the structural barriers that minorities and migrants often face, their access to legal remedies is often limited.

National Institutions against discrimination are in a unique position to bridge the gap between these groups and the rest of society and to facilitate their access to existing protection mechanisms against discrimination and racism. However, in order to do so, they should have sufficient capacity to assist victims.

But their role should not be limited just to helping individual victims of discrimination and racism. National Institutions also have the possibility to shape national policies and action plans addressing racism and xenophobia and to identify necessary structural changes aimed at preventing discrimination and intolerance.

We have also learned how National Institutions Against Discrimination can speak out effectively against racist or xenophobic public discourse targeting national minorities or migrant groups. Some speakers also noted the early warning role that National

Institutions can have in working with governments and civil society to prevent acts of intolerance from escalating into larger acts of violence and conflict.

The ability of National Institutions to act independently, without fear of restrictions by state authorities if they challenge policies or state inaction is especially critical. The independent position of National Institutions is therefore key to the successful and effective fulfilment of their mandate and role within society.

Many speakers during our meeting noted the diversity in mandates of National Institutions, particularly in terms of their degree of independence, their sources of financing, and their role and influence in policy development. It has also been noted that in some cases, there are differences in the way National Institutions address the issue of racism and xenophobia and apply different approaches to different victim groups. Finally, we have learned about the different ways in which National Institutions interact with government, civil society and the general public.

During this meeting, we also heard much about successful initiatives and good practices of National Institutions, including public awareness campaigns, training programmes for police, and educational programmes to prevent discrimination and promote a greater appreciation for diversity.

As President Alcee Hastings said at the opening session, enough has already been said about the importance of combating discrimination. It is important that this meeting leads to more than that, but to concrete outcomes. Let me take a moment to identify a few of the key results from this meeting:

**Firstly**, we hope that this meeting will result in an increased willingness by a larger number of OSCE States to establish and further strengthen National Institutions against Discrimination, in line with the commitment they made under the 2007 Ministerial Council Decision. In developing such bodies, States can take advantage of existing international and regional examples such as the UN Paris Principles, ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 9 and the EU Directive on Race Equality. States can also look to the ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System to access reports, tools and guidelines produced by other National Institutions Against Discrimination. We hope that the practical examples presented during this meeting will inspire more States to establish and further strengthen such Institutions.

A **second outcome** we expect from this Meeting is increased co-operation between National Institutions Against Discrimination. Meetings such as this one are good opportunities to network, and we hope that you have been able to exploit this SHDM to identify good practices. The rich recommendations from yesterday's civil society roundtable contain many suggestions on how National Institutions can strengthen their partnerships with civil society in assisting victims of discrimination and in working to affect change at the policy level.

**Finally**, I hope this meeting helped find solutions for national minorities and migrants to overcome structural barriers and to gain access to legal remedies.

We now not only have a wealth of useful recommendations, but also a clearer picture of regional and international standards as well as available tools and resources. What is now needed is the commensurate political will, on the part of OSCE States, to actively support and strengthen position of National Institutions Against

Discrimination and strengthen their dialogue and cooperation with governments and civil society.

I want to thank all speakers, moderators and rapporteurs, participants, and especially those from national institutions and NGOs, for your input and contributions and for carrying messages forward. A word of thanks to the interpreters for helping us understand these messages.

Let me also thank the Finnish Chairmanship for their strong support. Finally, let me thank Jo-Anne Bishop and her dedicated team from our TND Department, in particular Daniel Milo and Floriane Hohenberg, for the hard work they put into preparing this meeting as well as to the tireless colleagues in our Human Dimension meetings team for the logistical work.

We at the ODIHR look forward to a continued partnership with authorities, National Institutions and NGOs to support the implementation of the recommendations made today.

As this is my last SHDM as ODIHR Director, let me add only a few words at the end. I was privileged during my time as Director to host 16 Supplementary human Dimension Meetings, 5 HDIMs and 5 Human Dimension Seminars. I am convinced of the value of these meetings, in particular of the crucial added value brought to the table by civil society representatives. It is the contribution of NGOs that brings true reality into the otherwise quite hermetically closed Hofburg. It is only with such reality checks, however unpleasant the messages may be, that true implementation review can take place. It has been a pleasure and an honour to work with many of you and I can only urge you to remain in close contact with the ODIHR so that we can continue to benefit from your contributions.