

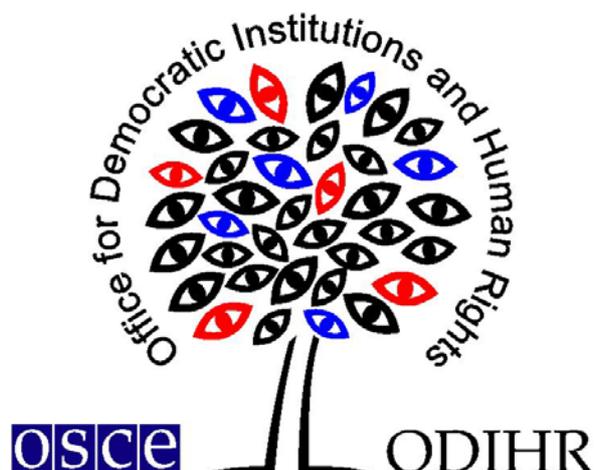
SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING

**THE ROLE OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AGAINST
DISCRIMINATION IN COMBATING RACISM AND
XENOPHOBIA WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON PERSONS
BELONGING TO NATIONAL MINORITIES AND
MIGRANTS**

**29 May 2008
HOFBURG, VIENNA**

**Opening remarks by Ambassador Christian Strohal
Director of the Office for Democratic
Institutions and Human Rights**

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to warmly welcome you all to this 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”*. We are here to examine the role of national institutions within participating States in responding to and combating racism and xenophobia, in particular where such cases involve persons belonging to national minorities and migrants and to discuss ways to overcome substantive challenges faced by National Institutions at the national and international level.

I would like to welcome especially the participation of representatives of National Institutions, OSCE institutions and field missions, the Personal Representatives of the Chairman in Office our partner international organisations and a significant number of civil society representatives.

At the outset, I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship for having chosen this important topic and to welcome the Ombudsman for Minorities of Finland, Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Ms. Johanna Suurpää and ask her to open this Meeting.

National Institutions against discrimination have a crucial role to play in addressing racism and xenophobia. These two phenomena present a major obstacle to the full enjoyment of human rights by marginalized groups including migrants and national minorities.

Through their independent position, and their first-hand knowledge of the problems faced by national minorities and migrants, National Institutions can play a key role in the development national strategies and action plans aimed at addressing the needs of these communities.

I would also like to highlight the excellent work being done by many National Institutions in the area of combating racism and xenophobia. These include the development of practical tools assisting victims of discrimination, or enabling their active involvement in the drafting of laws or policies dealing with these issues. Many examples of existing practical initiatives have already been submitted by National Institutions to the ODIHR and are now published on TANDIS, our Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System website. Currently there are 100 National Specialised Institutions, nine International specialised institutions and 21 initiatives included within the TANDIS website. A summary of this information has been made available for this meeting. I would like to use this opportunity to encourage all of you to use TANDIS and to regularly send us your good practices and reports so that we can make them available throughout the OSCE region.

One of the fundamental prerequisites for successful fulfilment of the role and mandate of National Institutions is their full independence from the government in accordance with the *Paris Principles*. Their independent position should be reflected in three aspects:

- legislation establishing such institutions
- funding
- composition of their governing structures

National Institutions are not the only actors engaged in combating racism and xenophobia. Work with civil society, academia and other state bodies and institutions is crucial for their success.

I would like to underline particularly the important role that civil society organisations have in combating racism and xenophobia. They often serve as the first contact points for victims from migrant or national minority groups and therefore their active involvement and co-operation should not be under-estimated. Their relevance to this meeting was also the reason for a special side event - roundtable for Civil Society, which was organised before this meeting. I welcome the recommendations resulting from this event, which will be presented shortly.

National Institutions are faced with three basic types of challenges in responding to racism and xenophobia:

The first group of challenges is connected to the mandate and position of National Institutions within the structure of other governmental bodies and institutions.

- Are they able to influence the formulation and implementation of policies related to national minorities and migrants?
- Are they able to effectively participate and contribute to the drafting of such policies?

Another set of challenges is related to the public perception of issues related to racism, discrimination and integration. We will discuss how National institutions have been able to develop effective strategies and programmes in order to address intolerant public attitudes towards migrants and minority groups as well as their efforts to promote mutual respect and understanding.

In addition, individuals who turn to National Institutions are often faced with structural barriers, which limit or even deny/prohibit their

access to legal remedies against racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

On the subject of remedies, National Institutions against discrimination can play a dual role - they can help the individual both by hearing complaints and by assessing them in their wider context. It is only after hearing individuals that National Institutions can translate individual cases into general action: action to improve the system, the legislation, the practices and the policies that lie beneath instances of racism and xenophobia.

National Institutions can help prevent the marginalization and exclusion of migrants and refugees and provide protection by developing legal frameworks or national strategies for the integration of migrants and refugees.

We will discuss how National Institutions can effectively contribute to the drafting and implementing of strategies and policies to combat racism/xenophobia including those related to integration. We will also discuss how interaction with other State institutions can further support implementation of national policies and strategies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before handing over to Alcee Hastings – President Emeritus of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I would like to welcome our keynote speaker Mr. Morten Kjærum. We are very delighted to have him at this meeting in his new capacity as the new director of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights as well as his past role as the executive director of the Danish Institute for Human Rights and member of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. His presence here underlines the importance given by the ODIHR to enhanced co-operation among inter-

governmental organizations active in this field. Mr. Kjærum was also present at the first inter-agency meeting here in Vienna in 2004, involving four major international organizations dealing with racism and xenophobia - namely European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the ODIHR and now his organization, the FRA.

For us at the ODIHR, this meeting will certainly prove most useful. The best practices shared today and tomorrow will enhance the ability of our programmes and activities to assist participating States more effectively in implementing their commitments in this field.

I wish us all a productive meeting, and encourage you to speak out freely and with concrete recommendations in mind.

Thank you.