

United States Mission to the OSCE



**Statement on Fighting Racism,
Xenophobia and Other Forms of
Intolerance and Discrimination**

As drafted for delivery by the Honorable Jennette Bradley
to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism
and on Other Forms of Intolerance
June 9, 2005

Thank you Madame Moderator.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This gathering of OSCE and its member states provides a terrific opportunity to discuss issues that are profoundly important – the issues of tolerance and acceptance.

My small place in history as America's first female African American Lt. Governor was secured because of the bold actions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders like him.

Reflecting on history is critical to understanding the future. But reflection is passive participation when there is still much to be done to truly embrace the benefits of diversity and put into action a vision of inclusion under a global umbrella.

In Ohio, we have much to celebrate as a culturally diverse state. Several state and local entities focus their efforts to enforce anti-discrimination policies and remove the barriers of racism and equal access.

Ohio's Civil Rights Commission was created 46 years ago, to combat discrimination in the workplace. The Commission's primary task is to enforce Ohio's Fair Employment Practices Law. However, it also protects equal opportunity in the areas of public accommodations, housing, credit and institutions of higher education. The commission is diligent in its approach to ensure state law is followed and, when necessary, it is comprehensive in pursuing allegations of discrimination.

The commission is also involved in promoting cultural diversity. Just this past year, it was instrumental in hosting bi-lingual trainings involving homeownership and good credit habits to leaders in Ohio's Somali and Hispanic/Latino Communities.

Presently, the Ohio Civil Rights Commission is working with the state's Education Department to develop a "Student U.N." This program will bring together Ohio youth from rural, suburban and urban communities and enable them to experience one another's cultures and help to dispel misconceptions and stereotypes.

The concept of breaking down barriers is carried over to younger students by interaction with the Commission's mascot, "Diversity Bear". Through role play, young people are taught about tolerance and embracing differences.

Another example of a governmental body involved with supporting Ohio's minority population is the state's Commission on Hispanic and Latino Affairs, created by Ohio's state legislature in 1977. The Commission serves as an advocate on behalf of the Hispanic and Latino community.

Currently, the Commission is focused on closing the academic achievement gap in schools for Hispanic and Latino Ohioans and on the expansion of greater cooperation across cultural and racial lines.

The issues of tolerance and acceptance have also been important priorities of mine. During the time I served as an elected member of Columbus City Council, I worked with the Community Relations Commission in bringing civic leaders, business leaders, citizens and elected officials together to address ethnic, racial and cultural issues.

Through education, training, and community outreach the Commission works to promote mutual understanding and respect among all racial, religious, and ethnic groups. We also empowered the Commission to enforce the city of Columbus' Civil Rights Code that prohibits discrimination and ethnic intimidation and requires equal opportunity hiring.

While governmental entities are working to improve Ohio's cultural environment, we are embracing our diversity through festivals held throughout the state. These local community festivals help showcase Ohio's diverse African American, Greek, Latino, Asian, Italian, Polish, German or Native American heritages.

However, we still do not live in a color-blind world where everyone is treated equally. The challenge for all of us is to work to bridge the cultural gaps that exist today and not be a spectator. We have to decide to reach out to others whose culture, race, ethnicity or religion is not the same as our own. We have to choose to treat people fairly – on our jobs, in our schools, and in our communities. We have to choose kindness over cruelty, caring over indifference, and understanding over ignorance.

Diversity enriches the lives of us all. That is why it is essential we continue the pursuit of cultural acceptance and tolerance, and racial equality for all our citizens.

Thank you.