



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 16 The Rights of Migrants I

As prepared for delivery U.S. Head of Delegation J. Brian Atwood
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According to the United Nations, there are more than 214 million migrants worldwide, constituting more than three percent of the world's population. The United States views the protection of migrants as essential for strengthening democracy and safeguarding basic humanitarian principles in the OSCE region and around the world. There are 40 million foreign-born persons living in the United States, representing nearly 13 percent of the entire U.S. population. Between 2009 and 2011, over 2 million immigrants chose to become citizens of the United States. The United States strongly supports the responsibilities of States to protect the human rights of all people, including migrants, in their territories regardless of their immigration status. We take this responsibility seriously and urge other States to do so. While governments have legitimate interests in enforcing their immigration laws, and we will continue our own efforts to strengthen enforcement, we should treat undocumented migrants with dignity while doing so.

The United States has been addressing an influx of migrant families and unaccompanied children along our southwest border that, at times, presented an urgent humanitarian situation. We have engaged with partner governments to communicate the dangers these migrants face along the journey and in the hands of criminal organizations involved in human smuggling. We have also worked to strengthen reintegration programs available for children who return to their countries of origin. The United States has expressed particular concern for those children, some of them very young, making the journey without a parent or legal guardian, who may become victims of violent crime or sexual abuse along the journey. Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson has emphasized, including in recent testimony to Congress, that the migrants involved in this influx must be treated "with dignity and respect."

Indeed, the dangers facing migrants around the world are deeply concerning. The UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have reported on the deaths of more than 3,000 migrants at sea in the Mediterranean this year – a staggering and tragic figure. Pope Francis's compassionate visit to Lampedusa last year helped shine a light on this suffering of migrant children and their families, who have often placed themselves in great peril and also face prejudice and discrimination both en route to their destinations and when they arrive. Particularly with a view to the hardship, violence, and strife around the globe that continues to compel people to seek a better life elsewhere, the United States urges all participating States to redouble their efforts to assist the IOM and the UNHCR in their humanitarian work.

Unfortunately, anti-migrant rhetoric persists throughout the OSCE region and is reflected in recent gains by xenophobic political parties in elections in EU countries this year. It is critical that mainstream parties and opinion leaders speak out against bigotry, continue to

support diverse and inclusive representation in parliaments, and foster representative governance of increasingly diverse populations. The United States condemns xenophobia and acts of violence against migrants, and has a strong commitment to enforcing policies and federal law to prosecute and appropriately penalize those who abuse migrants. The U.S. Congress has authorized special programs that extend protection and special immigration relief to human trafficking victims, crime victims, and others who would otherwise be reluctant to come forward for fear of deportation when they assist law enforcement efforts against traffickers and other criminals who exploit vulnerable immigrants.

African migrants are often the targets of hate crimes in the OSCE region. We welcome ODIHR's training of women of African descent in May, and the **European Union** Parliament's first ever hearing on anti-black racism in February.

In the face of more than 14 deaths and 77 serious assaults attributed to racist violence in **Russia** this year, we welcome the June sentencing in St. Petersburg of members of a neo-Nazi group for 10 murders and other violent acts committed in 2009 and 2010.

Finally, we note that race and ethnicity are sometimes unhelpfully conflated with citizenship – that is, Romani, Afro-European, or Asian-European *citizens* are sometimes referred to and treated as *migrants*. The United States reiterates our support for an OSCE Action Plan on Racism and Xenophobia to address this issue.