

ENGLISH only

United States Mission to the OSCE



**Statement on Legislative and Institutional
Mechanisms and Governmental Action,
Including Law Enforcement**

As prepared for delivery by Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
Alphonso Jackson
to the OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight Against Racism,
Xenophobia and Discrimination, Brussels
September 13, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman:

It is a great pleasure for me to be here representing President Bush and the people of the United States.

Despite our many successes in the U.S. over the past 40 years in affirming the fundamental dignity of every human being, regardless of race, creed or color, the struggle against racism, xenophobia, and discrimination continues. In some communities, it remains a daily struggle.

The U.S. is not alone in fighting this battle.

Abuses prompted by disregard for the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination occur in countries across the globe. Some come in the form of individual acts of racism that harm only small numbers of people at a time. Others come in the form of national policies that discriminate against certain segments of society. All pose a challenge that all countries must confront directly in order to guarantee the freedom, democracy, and prosperity that we hold dear.

In the U.S., the federal government fights these injustices with the support of a series of civil rights laws enacted by Congress. One major battle, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, was the struggle to end housing discrimination. Dr. King considered it a centerpiece of his fight for fairness and equality. Congress tried to pass a fair housing bill for two years, but supporters could never muster enough votes to move the legislation forward.

But that changed with Dr. King's assassination in April of 1968. President Johnson seized the moment to press for passage of the Fair Housing Act. He saw the legislation as a fitting memorial to the work of Dr. King and urged Congress to enact it immediately. Just seven days later, the Federal

Government made a new commitment to ensuring an America where equality and opportunity in housing is not simply a goal, but a right, by passing the Fair Housing Act.

The agency I lead – the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development – is the primary Federal agency charged with carrying out the provisions of the Fair Housing Act and protecting the housing rights of all Americans, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, familial status or disability. For 36 years, our work has ensured that fair housing is central to the American way of life.

The goal of the nation's fair housing programs is to ensure that all families and individuals have access to a suitable living environment free from discrimination. We support fair housing enforcement and education by directly enforcing the federal fair housing laws and by funding state and local fair housing efforts through two programs.

As the racial and ethnic makeup of the U.S. continues to evolve, the need for a strong commitment to fair and equal treatment in the housing market will become even more urgent.

Over two-thirds of the new households being formed this decade will be minority and immigrant. This of course means that an increasing number of minority and immigrant families will be involved in housing transactions. Federal fair housing laws ensure that these families have the right to own, use, and transfer real estate without regard to race, color, religion, sex, familial status, handicap, and national origin. They assure that each buyer, seller, and real estate agent is treated fairly.

While we have made steady progress in ridding our communities of housing discrimination, our nation has not yet reached the point where discrimination is a thing of the past. Recent studies tell us that minorities continue to face intolerable discrimination from mortgage lenders, real estate agents, and apartment rental agents.

We will continue to direct new financial resources, and new tools, to the state and local level until housing discrimination is a thing of the past.

The United States stands at the forefront of the battle against discrimination, racism, and xenophobia, but we do not pretend that we have all the answers. The American delegation looks forward to sharing with you their insights in combating racism and intolerance. And at the same time, we also look forward to learning from you.