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United States Mission to the OSCE
Videotaped Remarks by the
Secretary of State Colin L. Powell
To the OSCE Conference on
Discrimination, Racism, and Xenophobia

September 4, 2003

Distinguished delegates. I would like to congratulate the Netherlands Chairman in Office for organizing this conference on discrimination, racism, and xenophobia. And I would like to thank all of you for assembling in Vienna, to devote your time and your passion to this critical problem.

Nearly 30 years ago, the Helsinki Final Act lit a beacon of hope in a world frozen by Cold War suspicions. When the fall of the Iron Curtain ended the chill, it brought a new spirit of possibility to Europe and all corners of the globe. But it also brought to our OSCE region the ugly specter of bloody conflict in the name of ethnic purity.

Still, we stayed the course. We never lost sight of our vision, and today we are in sight of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

But, for all our progress, we have not rid our societies of intolerance. Despite the march of democracy and free markets, too many of our brothers and sisters face discrimination and violence because of the way they look, the way they speak, or the way they worship.

Everyday, somewhere in our countries, a man is beaten, a woman is humiliated, or a child is denied schooling – all for the sin of being different.

On September 11, 2001, we saw intolerance transformed into the most terrible hatred. And we saw that hatred turned into murderous attacks which sought to turn us against each other – but ended by uniting us all against terrorism.

There is no place for such hatred in our world. We must cleanse our planet of the pollution of intolerance in all its forms.

Americans have just celebrated the 40th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s stirring "I Have a Dream" speech. Dr. King's dream of equality and respect for all finds an echo in the words of the Helsinki Final Act. Both affirm the fundamental dignity of every human being, regardless of race, creed, or color.

We need inspiration, but we also need action. That is why you have gathered here in the heart of Europe – to share your experiences, to learn from each other, and to find right mix of public and private action to promote tolerance and diversity. You come from Europe, North America, North Africa, the Middle East and Asia to fight the scourge of intolerance which still afflicts our societies.

The United States is committed to standing at the forefront of this battle. We are fortunate indeed to have our distinguished former-Congressman, J.C. Watts, at the head of our delegation. He, along with our Ambassador to the OSCE, Stephen Minikes, and the outstanding leaders of the American delegation look forward to sharing their insights into combating racism and intolerance. And, they also look forward to learning from you.

Delegates, I wish you every success in this Conference. Godspeed as you work to banish the sins of discrimination, racism, and xenophobia.