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## United States Mission to the OSCE

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### OSCE Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination Introductory Remarks for Session 3

Delivered by the Hon. Michael Steele  
Lieutenant Governor of the State of Maryland  
September 04, 2003

Thank you, Madame Chairman.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This gathering of OSCE and its member states offers us a unique opportunity to “take stock” of our progress as people who often times succumb to our worst fears about ourselves and our neighbors.

Dr. Martin Luther King put it very succinctly: “We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.” Some would argue the “fools” have had the upper hand, if history is a measure of our success.

Mankind’s unwillingness to learn from history, and more importantly, to teach new lessons in tolerance has lead to societies across the globe living in fear and ignorance of each other. The result, generation upon generation, country after country, engaging in a brand of racism, xenophobia and discrimination that has produced some of the most loathsome and violent demonstrations of man’s inhumanity to man.

While governmental and institutional interventions to reduce blatant forms of prejudice and discrimination are needed, such institutional mechanisms and government action are hardly enough to address the disease of racism effectively. Likewise, enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and public denunciations are important parts of any plan to combat discrimination and racism, but not sufficient by themselves.

Something more is needed -- something obvious and yet elusive: Education. Education is a primary tool in the war on bigotry. It strengthens society and improves the opportunities for all citizens to participate fully. In addition to improving knowledge, it breaks down the stereotypes and fears of those in our community we do not know.

The United States has learned and continues to learn from its 150-year experience with racism and discrimination. However, it has been the past 40 years in which political, business and social leaders have opened their minds to the use of educational tools, both traditional and nontraditional, to raise the

consciousness of the American people. We know, however, that there is still much to do, and so much more to learn. This gathering affords America, and all OSCE participating States, the chance to work and learn together.

Our collective efforts to educate, inform, and yes, transform our respective countries should motivate us to do not just what is safe and easy, but to seriously learn from each other and to make an honest assessment of our abilities to stem the growing tide of racist and xenophobic attitudes at home.

We know the U.S. is not alone in its concern for and appreciation of diverse communities within its borders. More and more OSCE states are experiencing the transformation of their societies and cultures through immigration and migration.

This transformation will only succeed, however, with the leadership of OSCE member states -- educating first themselves and ultimately the citizens of their home countries.

The U.S. has implemented a number of educational strategies in support of social cohesion, respect of diversity and the promotion of tolerance. The most significant lesson we have learned from our experience with such programs is the importance of government leadership and participation.

To that end, as OSCE moves forward in the weeks and months ahead, I would encourage OSCE and its structures and institutions to assist participating and partnering States in using education as a means to counter discrimination, racism, and xenophobia. In order to do so, the OSCE must first educate governing bodies on the need to address these issues on the national and local levels. We need to convey the importance of equality and integration as essential to the well-being of every nation for the following reasons:

1. As OSCE participating States have recognized, human rights and security are inextricably linked. Discrimination and racism have been the primary cause of violent crime worldwide. The OSCE needs to continue to remind world leaders of the importance of combating racism as a means of maintaining an orderly and productive society.
2. The segregation and oppression of any given population also has dire consequences on the economy of that nation. By depriving a portion of the nation's population of the ability to fully integrate itself into society and the workforce, you are in effect denying that nation the opportunity for economic success and a competitive place in today's global market. The OSCE should take the responsibility to educate world leaders on the perils of segregation and discrimination as well as the importance of providing all citizens/residents equal access to education and economic opportunity.

Further, we recommend that the OSCE task the [Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights](#) and/or the [High Commissioner for National Minorities](#) with keeping records of anti-discrimination educational policies

implemented in OSCE states and reviewing their effectiveness by collecting and analyzing statistical data.

Finally, OSCE should structure and help states to facilitate, as part of a National Action Plan (NAP), the establishment of national standards in the following areas:

1. The classroom:
  - a. Start young: Administer antidiscrimination programs and seminars in K-12 classrooms in order to teach youngsters the importance and richness of diversity and the consequences of intolerance.
  - b. Offer global studies/multicultural courses on the subjects of racism, xenophobia and discrimination.
  - c. Teach realistic history courses on the atrocities resulting from intolerance.
  - d. Promote study abroad programs in diverse, non-traditional communities.
  - e. Require teachers to go through special training courses on antidiscrimination and objective teaching.
  - f. Encourage and solicit cultural awareness projects, including participation in cultural festivals and ceremonies.
  
2. The Media:
  - a. Conduct educational campaigns on cultural awareness, history, diversity, and the repercussions of prejudice and discrimination, which can be launched in the form of documentaries, televised or radio programs, or short anti-discrimination advertisements or public service announcements.
  
3. On the job:
  - a. Encourage employers to offer in-house or retreat style seminars on discrimination, and on acceptable and unacceptable workplace behavior.
  - b. Enforce strict antidiscrimination policies.
  
4. Religious institutions
  - a. Our pulpits should be effective “bully pulpits” in preaching the importance of equality, human rights, and tolerance.
  - b. Faith-based organizations should offer educational seminars on the reality and effects of racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

In closing, I leave you with the words of John Adams who said “Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people”. Our nation’s leadership understands, as does the leadership of this body, that there exists for all of us a responsibility to foster among the people the “general knowledge” that discrimination and bigotry is unacceptable. To do otherwise, destroys the very essence of liberty.