

United States Mission to the OSCE



Session 2: Intolerance against Migrants

As prepared for delivery by Dr. Mischa Thompson
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Moderator,

There continues to be a marked increase in prejudice, discrimination, and violence directed against migrants, persons perceived to be migrants, and human rights defenders in the OSCE region. This intolerance has been exacerbated by the economic crisis, national security concerns, and conflict within the OSCE region.

High profile incidents that characterize the extremity of violence include a 16 year-old Ecuadorian girl being repeatedly kicked and beaten on a Barcelona train in Spain in 2007, the decapitation of a Tajik worker in Russia accompanied by a note calling to halt immigration in 2008, and attacks on African migrant workers in Italy leading to large scale riots in January.

This intolerance has been marked by racial bias or skin color prejudice. In particular, persons who are easily identifiable or “visible” because of their darker-skin or hair color or other distinguishing physical features are targeted. The recent EU-MIDIS survey found that the highest levels of discrimination were reported by visible minorities and migrants, such as Africans and Roma. In our own country, hate crimes towards migrants and perceived migrants (e.g., Latinos) have increased, despite an overall reduction in hate crimes. The OSCE ODIHR Annual Hate Crimes Report notes heightened attacks against Central Asians in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, with the Russia-based SOVA center reporting more than twenty deaths and two hundred injuries as a result of racist and neo-Nazi attacks against migrants, human rights defenders, and others since January. For this reason, we support a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in 2011 on racism and discrimination.

Discriminatory policing has contributed to the problem, with police failing to assist victims and even targeting migrants for extortion and abuse in

Kazakhstan, Russia, and elsewhere in the OSCE region. Similar to an investigation by our own Department of Justice into the failure of police in Suffolk, New York, to respond to hate crimes against migrants, governments must investigate and prosecute violence and abuse against *both* documented and undocumented migrants whether committed by private citizens or authorities. Additionally, migrants and human rights defenders must be protected from retaliation during these proceedings.

Xenophobic political platforms and the ensuing rhetoric that demonizes migrants has not only fueled intolerance linked to attacks on migrants, but also the adoption of broad sweeping policies that could negatively impact the rights of both migrants and citizens. My government has taken note of expulsions of Roma and other persons in the OSCE region. Such practices could also result in the wrongful detention and deportation of citizens, asylum-seekers, potential victims of trafficking, and others in need of protection and legal migrants.

While we recognize the challenges faced by OSCE border countries such as Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain, and France, we remain concerned by some countries' continued use of policies that are overtly discriminatory, overly rely on detention and expulsions, fail to distinguish asylum seekers, and inadequately address the special vulnerabilities of unaccompanied minors. As such, we urge all to implement reforms and also strongly welcome any increased support from the European Union for border countries to address this humanitarian concern.

While migration presents numerous challenges, it is incumbent upon all of our governments to ensure that debates and policy prescriptions for migration are based on facts and not rhetoric. We encourage participating States to utilize the 2009 publication "Review of the Implementation of OSCE Commitments related to migration by OSCE participating States" and "2008 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Astana Declaration Resolution on Recognizing the Economic, Cultural, Political and Social contributions of Migrants" offered by now U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis. We also call for the increased adoption and implementation of laws addressing discrimination in work settings, as numerous abuses throughout the OSCE region, including in my own country, have been documented and also linked with negative attitudes towards migrants.

Our long term objective should be to strengthen the international dialogue on migration by dispelling stereotypes about migrants, speaking out against intolerance, reducing community tensions around migration, and ensuring the

implementation of fair and equitable migration procedures, including at our countries' borders.