



United States Mission to the OSCE

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Each participating State has committed itself to respect what the Helsinki Final Act calls “the inherent dignity of the human person.” The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which was marked on March 21, provides an opportunity to reflect upon what each of our countries has done to uphold this commitment and what more we need to do.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is an appropriate occasion to consider the continuing impact of historical injustices on societies today. My country has struggled since its founding with ensuring the inherent dignity of its citizens, from finally ending slavery in the nineteenth century to overturning Jim Crow laws and other segregation policies in the 1960s. The election of our first African-American President in 2008 exemplifies the continuing effort our society has undertaken to begin to come to terms with our past, so that the democratic ideals of our nation truly apply to all of our people.

However, several disturbing incidents that occurred during the past year show that there is still much work to be done. While the overwhelming majority of the men and women who serve as police officers in the United States do their very difficult and often dangerous jobs with honor and distinction, questions of race, inequality, and discrimination have been raised in connection with the tragic deaths of African-Americans in police encounters in places including New York City, Cleveland, Ohio, and Ferguson, Missouri. This month, the U.S. Department of Justice published a report on the practices of the Ferguson Police Department, which we plan to share with the OSCE. President Obama also established a task force on 21st Century Policing, which issued recommendations on how policing practices can promote effective crime reduction while building public trust.

Events in the past year have sparked a national conversation about race in the United States—a conversation that includes citizens and civil society. Civil society has a large role to play in combating racial discrimination in the United States and elsewhere. As President Obama said, “the value of peaceful protests, activism, organizing, is to remind society: this is not yet done.” These conversations, whether on racial discrimination or other topics, can be difficult, but they must occur openly and publicly, in marches and meetings, and in media published online and offline.

Beyond talk, we must act. The United States is not the only country in the OSCE region that struggles with racial discrimination and issues of inclusion. To address longstanding issues of prejudice and discrimination faced by citizens and migrants of various backgrounds,

(including Roma, people of African descent, Central Asian migrants, refugees, and others), efforts such as ODIHR's engagement with African and Muslim women should be expanded. Additionally, an OSCE racism report and conference would be timely to complement anti-Semitism efforts agreed to at the 2014 Ministerial. In the wake of the Paris and Copenhagen attacks in Europe, and the social unrest in our own nation, we must do more than adopt 'tolerance' commitments. We must strengthen and implement them.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.