



United States Mission to the OSCE

Prevention of Discrimination, Racism and Xenophobia

Statement of Representative Benjamin Cardin
U.S. Delegation to the OSCE Implementation Meeting
October 14, 2003

The United States found great utility in the Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, as demonstrated by our distinguished delegation, by President Bush's and Secretary of State Powell's remarks and the commitment and strong interest of the U.S. Congress. The history of the United States is far from perfect, as our country supported the most horrific form of discrimination in the treatment of Native Americans and through slavery. It was just 40 years ago that Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his "I have a dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, as he and thousands others marched to protest segregation and discrimination in so much of my country. Therefore, we were pleased by the valuable discussion and hope that the conference will serve as a platform for further activities in the fight against racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice.

In addition to effective law enforcement, national leadership is vital in the fight against racism, discrimination and xenophobia. For example, less than one week after September 11, President Bush visited the National Mosque in Washington, a signal event emphasizing the President's strong belief that racism, xenophobia and discrimination are un-American, just as terrorism does not represent the tenets of Islam. The President emphasized in his remarks that millions of loyal Americans practice the Muslim faith, noting: "They lead lives of honesty and justice and compassion."

The focus of this day on the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting should be to discuss which of the recommendations made at the September Conference we want to move forward, specifically with a view to preparing the Ministerial documents.

Accordingly, we fully endorse the recommendation that all participating States, their governments, elected leaders should speak out against racism and to ensure that laws are adequate to prosecute the perpetrators of these hateful acts. Vigilant police response and vigorous prosecutions will make it clear that acts of hate will not go unnoticed or unpunished. At the September Conference, former congressman J.C. Watts, who headed the U.S. delegation, proposed that the OSCE play a lead role in aggregating crime statistics for incidents involving all types of hate crimes. This is consistent with commitments made by the participating States at the 1991 Meeting of Experts on National Minorities in Geneva and several subsequent summits. It is time to take more deliberate action to fulfill these commitments. As my colleague, Congressman Christopher Smith, will discuss further this afternoon, it is time for participating States to collect, share and respond to statistics on hate crimes as a central part of the OSCE's efforts to address this problem.

We also support recommendations urging efforts to focus on education as a means of promoting respect for others. Hand-in-hand with comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, active law enforcement engagement and public denunciations, we all must promote the creation of educational efforts to counter intolerant stereotypes and attitudes among young people. We must be leaders in this effort, and we would call on the OSCE to help participating States to facilitate, as part of a National Action Plan, the establishment of national standards in the classroom. The OSCE should task the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and/or the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) with keeping records of anti-discrimination educational policies implemented by OSCE participating States.

In addition, the ability for all groups to participate in their countries' political and economic systems is critical for the creation of inclusive societies. We would also like to forward to the Ministerial the recommendation that participating States form structured civil and human rights commissions and agencies at the national level, as part of government structure, and urge local authorities to do likewise.

We would hope participating States will also act on the recommendation to develop community-based assessments of civil rights, which can be conducted in a voluntary, non-judgmental way for a community to evaluate its own conditions, according to its own terms and perspectives.

A last specific recommendation that came out of this conference, which we believe should be forwarded, is the idea that the OSCE can encourage the media to create a voluntary code of conduct, or self-policing mechanism for dealing with acts of racism and discrimination. We look forward to the side-event today hosted by the French Delegation and the International Network Against Cyber Hate to further discuss this idea.

In closing, there has been much discussion about how to ensure that this conference is the beginning and not the end to the OSCE effort to fight racism, xenophobia and discrimination. The United States therefore would welcome a follow-up conference on these issues. I know we are joined by other Delegations in this request. Issues of racism are of such importance that a second meeting to discuss how to increase OSCE activities on this in our day-to-day work is warranted.

We would therefore encourage language at the Maastricht Ministerial welcoming a separate OSCE follow-up conference on racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

We look forward to seriously addressing these distinct and longstanding human rights issues in concrete and practical ways. We urge all participating OSCE States to seriously address these issues so that we can see an end to these hateful acts.