

UNITED KINGDOM STATEMENT TO THE SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING ON COMBATING RACISM, INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION IN SOCIETY THROUGH SPORT

Delivered by Paul Welsh, UK Delegation to the OSCE on 19 April 2012

I would like to register the thanks of the United Kingdom Government to the Irish Chairmanship and to ODIHR for arranging this important event. It is particularly fitting that the event is concentrating on the way sport can be used as a catalyst for change. It is true that sport has played the unwitting host to some organized groups and individuals that have used it as a vehicle to share and play out their hatred and bigotry. It is a problem that has, at times blighted sporting events, including in the United Kingdom and it is vital that all participating States work to eradicate any remaining traces.

It is timely that this event should be held in 2012, just as the world's eyes focus on European sport both in terms of the Euro 2012 Championship in Poland and Ukraine and also on the Olympic and Paralympic Games which take place in London later this year. It is our responsibility not only to put in place security measures to prevent people suffering abuse, but to also seize the opportunity that the events provide, to show how such international friendships can eradicate the bias and discrimination that can lead to violence and exclude many from the joy of sport which should be universal.

Whilst it would be naive to suggest that racism and other intolerance does not exist within sporting venues in the UK, there has been a sea change in behavior that has been brought about through many years of cooperative relationships where government, industry and most importantly, supporters themselves have stood up against bigotry. It would be foolish to be complacent; there still exists pockets of unacceptable behavior, particularly

aimed at lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and we have seen recent high profile incidents that proved to us that the problem has not gone away - so we must redouble our efforts to eradicate it.

Our Prime Minister recently held an event in Downing Street to bring sporting bodies together to discuss how we can work collaboratively to reduce remaining hostility in sport and to demonstrate the determination of the government to create safe and inclusive environments for all.

Last month, the UK government launched an action plan setting out how we will improve our response to hate crime over the next 3 years. This plan includes a commitment to work with sporting bodies, to show leadership and change attitudes.

Events such as the Olympics in London provide us with a unique opportunity to build positive relationships. The Paralympics in particular will present the perfect forum to challenge the misconceptions and hostility that fuel disability hate crime and it is vital we use these events to help eradicate the hostility that exist in all communities.

Thank you