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ENGLISH only

United Kingdom Delegation

To the Organisation for Security and
Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
Vienna

UK statement to the closing plenary of the OSCE Conference on Racism, Xenophobia & Discrimination held on 4-5 September 2003

The UK fully supports the statement delivered by the Presidency on behalf of the EU as well as the EU's recommendations listed in its contributions to this conference. I should like to make the following additional comments in a national capacity. The UK Government welcomes this conference as an opportunity for the OSCE and its participating states to confirm their commitment to combat racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Dialogue between communities and faiths is vital to foster equality, mutual respect and prevent discrimination. The UK welcomes the statements made by participants at OSCE anti-Semitism conference in June, including Lord Janner and Mayor Giuliani, which emphasised the importance of dialogue. We also welcome the emphasis placed on monitoring and improving our collection of statistics on hate crimes.

The United Kingdom is proud of its racial and religious diversity. The UK has a comprehensive body of legislation to combat racial discrimination, which we have recently strengthened by fully implementing the EU Race Directive within the 19 July deadline. The Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000 has taken our law in a new direction by placing a duty on public authorities to promote equality and opportunity, rather than simply reacting to discrimination once it has happened. More than 40,000 public bodies are now subject to such a duty. Racist crime strikes at the heart of people's right to feel safe and protected by the law. A racially or religiously motivated attack is an attack on the whole community.

Speakers have referred to an increase in violence and racial hatred directed against certain religious and ethnic groups, particularly Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim, following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The UK was no immune to this phenomenon. Government Ministers took the lead in condemning anti-Muslim attacks and the Government extended the Crime and Disorder Act to include offences motivated by religious hatred. It also increased the maximum penalties for incitement to racial hatred from 2 to 7 years' imprisonment, and prohibited incitement to racial hatred against groups abroad. We would like this issue to be taken forward in the OSCE and have tabled a recommendation, which reads, "In planning its activities to promote tolerance and combat racism and xenophobia, the OSCE should take account of trends as demonstrated by monitoring. It should for example target the upsurge in attacks on Muslims and members of other faiths, linked to recent international developments."

The UK hopes that future OSCE work on racism, xenophobia and discrimination will look broadly at different forms of discrimination and intolerance. There can be no hierarchy of hatred, no suggestion that some forms of racism are more unacceptable than others. The OSCE should combat all shades of racism impartially, defending its reputation as an organisation for comprehensive security.