

Address by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič
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at the Opening Session of the
OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
on

*'Prevention of Racism, Xenophobia, and Hate Crimes Through
Educational and Awareness-Raising Initiatives'*

Hofburg, Vienna
10 November, 2011

Check against delivery!

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here at this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the *‘Prevention of Racism, Xenophobia and Hate Crimes Through Educational and Awareness Raising Initiatives’*.

This SHDM provides us with the opportunity to – **first** – examine contemporary forms of racist and xenophobic intolerance, including hate crimes and state responses to it; **second**, it will allow us to review what kind of measures states have put in place to prevent manifestations of racism and xenophobia.

Nearly fifty years since the adoption of the International Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, racist sentiments and behaviour continue to threaten social stability across the OSCE region. The tragic events in Oslo and Utøya in July are vivid reminders of this fact. Contemporary manifestations of racism, xenophobia and hate

crimes are, for some “minority” communities, daily realities as can be seen for example by incidents affecting many Romani communities across the region.

ODIHR's annual hate crimes report shows that despite the various efforts made by participating States, hate crimes remain a significant problem in the OSCE region. Every year, a large number of people are killed, attacked or injured, and many properties are vandalised and damaged as a result of racist and/or xenophobic sentiments. Preventing and combating hate crimes must therefore remain a priority for states in the OSCE region.

This places an extra burden of responsibility on state agencies to – now quoting from the MC Decision of 2006 – *“address the root causes of intolerance and discrimination ... through increased awareness-raising measures that promote a greater understanding of and respect for different cultures [and] ethnicities”* (MC Decision 13/06).

Measures in this field – to prevent acts of intolerance – are

necessary not only to protect the targets of hatred, but also to ensure social stability. Failure to do so can lead to deep-rooted social tensions and conflicts and, in the worst-case scenario, conflicts that may degenerate into broader ethnic-based violence and a breakdown of the political order.

This is an outcome we need to avoid and one of the many ways to do this is through raising collective social awareness of this threat.

Effective prevention strategies must include educational and awareness raising initiatives. At the same time, state authorities will also have to make sure that their prevention measures and responses are compatible with the right to freedom of expression. Our collective preference in this organization is to deal with these issues through **robust prevention programmes** premised upon education and raising awareness in society about the dangers of racism, xenophobia, and hate crimes – and **not through the criminalization of speech.**

Participating States have acknowledged this and have sought the assistance of ODIHR in implementing a number of programmes:

- Let me mention here TAHCLE, our Training Against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement;
- our Guidelines for educators to combat Anti-Semitism and Intolerance against Muslims, respectively, in school settings;
- and our ongoing hate crimes capacity-building workshops and trainings for state officials, NGOs, and civil society.

Other preventative measures include media awareness and monitoring, promotion of tolerance and mutual understanding through education, community engagement, and the promotion of rights-based approaches in education and awareness-raising initiatives. **Various educational programmes** addressing intolerance in schools and local communities have been designed and implemented in the OSCE region over the past few years.

In addition, **political leaders** bear a special responsibility in raising awareness about the dangers and unacceptability of

racism and xenophobia. They should vocally and clearly condemn racist and xenophobic sentiments when they are voiced in public and political discourse.

Adopting such a holistic approach can enable states to **counter calls** for the criminalization of speech as a response to intolerant public discourses which we see across the OSCE region. Any state intervention must be nuanced and sensitive enough to capture the subtleties and address the challenges involved.

Let me also mention that with the advent of major international sporting events in 2012 – the EURO 2012 and the Olympics -, it will be useful for us to hear about examples of awareness-raising and initiatives to **combat racism in sport**.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

This SHDM also serves to celebrate 2011 as the Year for People of African Descent (YPAD) as proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2009. In this regard, earlier today, ODIHR

organized, with the kind assistance of the US delegation, a roundtable event that brought together key participants focusing on issues affecting people of African descent and their communities across the OSCE region. We look forward to hearing their recommendations over the course of the next day and-a-half.

Thank you.