



**Statement by
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

**Plenary Session 3: Combating racism, xenophobia and
discrimination, also focusing on intolerance and discrimination
against Christians and members of other religions**

**OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and
Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding**

Bucharest, 08 June 2007

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite a solid history of combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, these phenomena still thrive and continue to threaten security and stability throughout the OSCE area. Discrimination and violent attacks against persons of 'different' national or ethnic origins continue to take place in OSCE states. Moreover, in some parts of the OSCE region, racially-motivated attacks have become increasingly systematic and severe, and are targeting the most vulnerable groups, including children and women. Migrants and members of their families are often victims of harsh discrimination or deliberate violent attacks.

Freedom of speech and access to electronic sources of information and communication are often being abused in order to spread hatred and prejudice toward particular groups. Xenophobic and racist language is increasingly used in political discourse, thus instigating more discrimination and violence against specific communities.

Racially-motivated crimes and incidents against Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area also continue to be of concern. On a consistent basis, Roma and Sinti are identified as the most disliked minority and the continued use of pervasive negative stereotypes and anti-Roma prejudice provide fertile ground for hate-crime incidents. Limited legal action or inaction by law enforcement and justice institutions in incidents against Roma and Sinti contributes to their feeling of insecurity and victimisation.

In some parts of the OSCE region, Christians and members of other religious and belief communities continue to face restrictions of their religious freedoms, such as various forms of administrative harassment, which in some cases also turn into direct physical violence against the individuals. Property belonging to Christians and other religious groups is also continually to be targeted by vandals: there were cases of desecration of Christian churches and cemeteries and religious buildings belonging to other religious denominations. Other acts of discrimination against Christians and members of other religious groups have included imprisonment of persons on the grounds of their religious objection to military service or lengthy alternative service are other manifestations of discriminatory against.

In the context of discussing hate-motivated incidents and other forms of intolerance, one cannot ignore the attacks and abuse that gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered people encounter throughout the OSCE region simply because of who they are, or are perceived to be. Homophobic hate motivated incidents and hate crimes continue to be among the most under-documented hate crimes. Such incidents, which tend to be among the most brutal acts of hatred and often involve severe beatings, torture, mutilation, castration and sexual assault, constitute clear acts of hatred against individuals and a gross violation of the inherent dignity of all human beings.

In recent years, OSCE participating States, in a number of Ministerial and Permanent Council Decisions and at high-level conferences have addressed and reiterated the importance of combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination in all their manifestations. Specific commitments were also made to:

- introduce relevant educational programmes for combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination,
- combat discrimination of migrants and migrant workers,
- promote freedom of religion or belief,
- establishing appropriate bodies to promote tolerance and to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

The ODIHR has been given an increased number of taskings to provide support and assistance to participating States in implementing their commitments. The ODIHR has developed expert-to-expert assistance programmes in the areas of education, legislation, law enforcement training, data collection and civil society capacity building about which you will hear more in the sessions this afternoon. The ODIHR has also been mandated to closely follow and report on incidents motivated by racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. It is implementing this task through the publication of an annual report on “Challenges and Responses to Hate-Motivated Incidents in the OSCE Region.” The first report for the first half of 2006 (which is available on the documentation tables outside) is now being updated to include incidents and responses for the second half of 2006. The report, which is being prepared in close consultation with the nominated national points of contact from each participating State and representatives of civil society will be officially launched at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in late September.

The ODIHR was also tasked by the Ministerial Council to promote best practices and disseminate lessons learned in the fight against intolerance and discrimination. I would like to use this opportunity to highlight TANDIS, the ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System which provides access to reports and publications, practical initiatives of governments and civil society and specialised corners for experts with practical tools and resources.

Finally, I would like to mention an important resource of the ODIHR for providing assistance and support to governments and civil society in their efforts to promote religious freedom and address religious-based discrimination. This resource is a 60-member Advisory Panel of Expert on Freedom of Religion or Belief, number of whom are here today and who will, also in the course of this session, be able to provide more information on their work and activities.

Thank you.