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**OPENING STATEMENT BY  
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FEDERAL MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF AUSTRIA,  
AT THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON  
RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION**

Vienna, 4 September 2003

Mr. Chairman,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be able to say a few words to you at the start of this important OSCE event. I should like to thank the Netherlands Chairmanship for giving me this opportunity.

In the run-up to this Conference I was asked on several occasions why we need another conference on racism in Europe. I was told that the countries gathered here had for decades been among those championing the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination at the local, national, regional and international levels; hence, they should rather devote themselves to other issues.

I should like to contradict that approach most resolutely: I believe that our meeting is extremely important. Even if our States have developed stricter rules and more comprehensive programmes against racism, xenophobia and discrimination, a glance at the news is enough to realize that none of our countries is immune to the phenomenon of racism. I therefore believe that it is very timely and important for the OSCE to pay greater attention to this issue. The Conference on Anti-Semitism - a form of racism which, especially in view of painful historical experience, imposes on us the obligation to remain alert and take preventive measures - has made it very clear that our Organization can make a contribution of its own to the efforts to combat these phenomena effectively and energetically.

Racism and xenophobia and the resulting discrimination represent a fundamental attack on the dignity of individuals and on the values that are common to us all in the OSCE. After all, respect in everyday life for this set of values, for human and minority rights and tolerance and equal treatment is a very important prerequisite for the safeguarding and strengthening of peace and stability - the *raison d'être* of the OSCE. Conflicts and crises can be traced all too often to the infringement of these values and standards.

Our experiences show that States which observe international human-rights standards are better able to secure peace, promote economic development, combat international terrorism and crime, cope with humanitarian disasters and improve the global environment.

As could be seen from the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance held by the United Nations in Durban (South Africa) in 2001, it is difficult to develop concepts that can be applied globally. Since the Durban Conference was not regarded as a success from a global point of view, it is even more important that we give a fresh impetus at a regional level.

The development of effective anti-discriminatory rules is without doubt an important step towards equal treatment. However, we cannot achieve our intended goal with laws alone. A change in attitudes and behaviour is needed to overcome discrimination. At the same time, I should like to emphasize that the fact that combating racism is a cross-sectoral task definitely represents a challenge for a developed State based on the rule of law such as Austria in connection with the necessary “mainstreaming” in all spheres of public and private life.

In this connection, human rights education has a key role to play because prejudices and behavioural patterns that have developed over time can be changed only through a long-term educational process at all levels. I therefore regard human rights education as the best investment we can make in our young people and as an indispensable component of a responsible education policy.

At this point, I should like to mention a specific example. On my initiative, the Human Security Network (HSN), which is made up of 13 foreign ministers from member countries from all five continents, developed a “Manual on Human Rights Education” and adopted it at the Ministerial Meeting held in May in Graz, the first European City of Human Rights.

Particular importance lies in its intercultural access to universal human rights instruments. Worldwide distribution and translation into other languages - I am actively involved in both - will help to optimize the desired specific application value. So far all the relevant international organizations whose mandates include aspects of human rights education have been approached. The response was positive in all cases. I might add that the OSCE was represented at the HSN Ministerial Meeting in Graz at a high level by Secretary General Kubiš and Mr. Duve, the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

In my view, this instrument should also be used in the OSCE area in a targeted manner. I have asked the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to examine the possibilities for employing this tool at all conceivable levels from schools and adult education to training of security forces.

I hope that this Conference can also contribute to a greater awareness that “being different” for ethnic, religious or other reasons is not a threat but is something positive that enriches society and counteracts tendencies of trying to interpret the conflicts of today as conflicts between civilizations. The OSCE is a good example of how against a background of many ethnic and religious groups and a broad cultural spectrum it was and is possible to agree on common values and principles.

Allow me to mention two other matters which appear important to me in the light of the subject matter of this Conference:

- In June of this year, the first European Conference of Chairmen of Islamic Centres and Imams also took place in Graz as part of an initiative developed by the Reis-ul-Ulema of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dr. Ceric, and the Islamic religious community of Austria on the occasion of my visit to Sarajevo. This Conference discussed in detail the relationship between European Muslims and Europe and adopted a declaration on tolerance and co-operation.
  
- For many years Austrian foreign policy has supported dialogue between cultures, religions and civilizations at different levels and particularly within the framework of the United Nations and Euro-Mediterranean partnership between the European Union and the southern Mediterranean States. In this coming November, there will be a second media seminar on the subject of dialogue between cultures, the aim of which is to involve the public of our countries in this dialogue as much as possible in order to reduce fears, prejudices, intolerance and racism.

Mr. Chairman,

I wish you and all the participants in this Conference every success. I hope that it will be possible to come to an agreement on practical and specific measures. May this conference also make it clear what wealth and potential of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity we have within the OSCE area.

Thank you very much for your attention.