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**STATEMENT BY MR. CHRISTIAN DUPONT,  
BELGIAN MINISTER FOR EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY WITH  
RESPONSIBILITY FOR INTER-CULTURAL RELATIONS, AT THE  
OSCE CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST  
RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION**

Brussels, 13 and 14 September 2004

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me sincerely thank the OSCE and the organizers of this meeting for having invited me to speak on a subject of such essential importance to any humanist.

More than ever before, our societies need a calm dialogue between the different cultures, ethnic groups, faiths and philosophical views that exist within them.

Obviously, the outburst of violence throughout the world that we are witnessing today does not make this any easier but does make it all the more urgent.

It is therefore an honour for me to tell you here today about the initiatives taken by the Belgian Government to combat racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic behaviour and to enable the harmonious coexistence of the different groups that make up Belgian society.

Allow me to call attention to the two major components of the strategy formulated by our Government to face up to the new challenges of "living together". Essentially, this strategy reflects the absolute need to link prevention and repression. In formal terms, this strategy attempts to link together the resolute condemnation of all forms of racist or anti-Semitic violence, legal and educational initiatives against discrimination, and pedagogical work to combat prejudice.

Our first priority is the inter-cultural dialogue that we launched in February of last year and that is an intrinsic component of this concept of humanism and tolerance.

A commission made up of 22 personalities drawn from all walks of life is currently working on the issues connected with this dialogue and will submit in February 2005, after lengthy deliberations, a report setting out a frame of reference and specific measures dealing with citizenship and pluralism.

Under the chairmanship of two senior ministers, this commission will provide the authorities with a set of recommendations on the following subjects:

- The basic principles to guide the work of public agencies, namely equality, non-discrimination and neutrality, and the way these principles are to be given specific form in an inter-cultural context;
- Citizenship as an antidote to fear of the other and to a withdrawal into one's private sphere;
- Equality between men and women as a component of emancipation;
- The place and acknowledgement of the expression of religious affiliation in our democratic and pluralist society.

I sincerely hope that the implementation of the commission's recommendations will make it possible to strengthen the harmonious coexistence between the various groups making up Belgian society.

The second part of the Belgian Government's action plan is the fight against racism as such.

Although we lack precise figures, Belgium is undeniably facing a certain resurgence of racist and anti-Semitic behaviour.

The Belgian Government has therefore decided to step up its efforts to combat this scourge. In July of last year, we approved to that end a plan of action against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

Allow me to outline the four principal objectives of that plan:

1. The improvement of our anti-racism legislation;
2. The prosecution of those guilty of inciting racial hatred on the Internet;
3. Better information and preventive measures, specifically by supporting actors in the field and by making available to them the kind of resources that will enable them to get to know, contact and enter into dialogue with the various cultures to which our fellow citizens belong;
4. A deeper understanding of the situation with regard to our inter-cultural relations thanks to a "tolerance barometer".

Clearly, these priorities must not overshadow the need to initiate voluntary policies against the numerous forms of discrimination — in employment, education, housing, etc. — which, under the surface, give rise to frustration and feelings of exclusion. It is a matter of guaranteeing a fundamental right. But it is also a matter of a democratic need, because discrimination undermines social cohesion and exacerbates tension between different groups and citizens.

Only the permanent mobilization of all the actors — governments, local authorities, associations and citizens — will make it possible to mount a genuine response to everyday racism, which, it must be said and said again, is intolerable since it is irreconcilable with the idea we hold of democracy, equality and the inalienable right of every individual to lead a dignified existence.

Thank you.