

**OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
The Role of National Institutions against Discrimination in Combating Racism
and Xenophobia with Special Focus on Persons belonging to National
Minorities and Migrants**

**Introductory Remarks
The Honorable Alcee L. Hastings
President Emeritus, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Chairman,
United States Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Opening Session
May 29, 2008**

Good afternoon, it is an honor to be here. As many of you know, I am the immediate past President of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. In that capacity and as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly, I have worked to ensure that the OSCE focuses on combating all forms of intolerance.

Recently, the Helsinki Commission held a series of hearings on issues related to migrant and other minority communities that included discussions of women's and African descendants' experiences with racism and discrimination in Europe. Given some of the alarming findings of those hearings and the worrying developments with the Roma population in Italy, this Meeting is certainly timely and well overdue.

At last years OSCE Bucharest High Level Conference on Combating Discrimination, I gave a speech detailing the United States Civil Rights struggle that gave birth to a number of the laws that ensure equal rights for all Americans regardless of race, origin, religion, or gender.

Two U.S. 'national institutions' that aided the struggle at that time were the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Civil Rights Division within the Department of Justice, both created in 1957. Public investigations by the Commission into racial discrimination in voting rights, education, and housing coupled with a dedicated group of civil rights attorneys working on behalf of the United States government helped set the stage for our historic Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementation.

The Civil Rights Act not only made racial discrimination and segregation illegal, but laws that followed governing voting, housing, and other rights, changed many U.S. government institutions and their roles in addressing the needs of all Americans.

Over the years these laws have been translated into action and, for lack of a better word, 'mainstreamed' throughout our system so that the U.S. now has a plethora of 'national institutions' to address the legacies of the virtual extermination of Native Americans, slavery, legal segregation, and other historic injustices. Most states now have state civil rights or human rights commissions or offices similar to the Civil Rights Commission.

The US Census Bureau and other US agencies also collect data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other factors allowing analyses of how groups are fairing in U.S. society.

Given the multiple effects of racism and discrimination, there is no single government office that can fully address the problem. Data often assists in directing where government initiatives should be targeted. Whether it is combating health disparities through our Health Department or assisting minorities with small business loans at our Small Business Administration, there are a network of offices and agencies specifically charged with reaching underserved communities.

I am pleased that the Chair of our Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, Ms. Naomi Churchill Earp is here to discuss the work at her agency and some of the challenges of combating employment discrimination in the 21st century.

Many government institutions also have internship and other professional mentorship programs to assist in the hiring of minorities and others with the goal of ensuring that US institutions reflect the diversity of American society. I personally have provided internship opportunities to African Americans and others in my Congressional offices and can proudly say that as a result of it and aggressive recruitment strategies, my offices are truly a microcosm of America's diversity.

This year the United States boasted an African-American, female, and Latino presidential candidate. For close to two decades, many others have graced leadership roles in various positions within our government.

Make no mistake. This was not an overnight process. The decades of U.S. government institutions fighting discrimination, recruiting from diverse communities, providing education and training opportunities for minorities coupled with efforts from the civil society and private sector were critical to these gains. Creating environments where the racist and prejudiced beliefs of some Americans were challenged and ultimately disproved through direct experiences with minorities working in these and other government institutions were also a vital component.

Any visit to a U.S. city will tell you that this is not the whole story. Despite African Americans and Latinos making up close to 30% of the United States population and over 12% of the U.S. population being foreign born, when you walk into government buildings, racial and ethnic minorities are often domestic workers or secretaries, not managers. This pattern is similarly reflected in the private sector.

Symptomatic of continuing problems in other areas, racial minorities, including Native Americans have higher unemployment rates, incarceration rates, perform more poorly in school, live in poorer areas, and have greater health problems and death rates than White Americans. Hate crimes are also rising.

And like in many European countries, anti-migrant sentiments in the US have trivialized the actual positive contributions both documented and undocumented migrants are making in the forms of bringing needed skills, revitalizing communities, and paying taxes. Though increased language courses, educational opportunities and ultimately a good plan for integration is needed in the US, we must at the same time address the very real problems of racism and discrimination affecting migrant communities. We must also note the very real problem of racial profiling that has increasingly become a problem for Muslim and recent migrant populations in the

wake of 9/11. The alarming treatment of the Roma in Italy attests to the urgency of facing the problem of racism in addition to integration in all of our countries.

One could surmise from the problems I detailed that the initiatives of US national institutions have been unsuccessful. That assessment would be wrong. In a clear case of politics usurping rights, these institutions have tragically been under attack for the last decade.

While symbolically supporting diversity with high level appointments of minorities, behind closed doors, our current administration has underfunded, downsized, and mismanaged these institutions to the point where a number of the historic gains of the US Civil Rights Movement are now unrecognizable. While many experts with years of expertise are still present in many of these institutions and elsewhere, their impact has been lessened.

I am working to ensure that this changes with our next President. But I also consider this a painful lesson. Efforts to support government initiatives to fight racism must constantly be sustained or the successes of the past can easily be erased by those who would prefer a return to the old status quo.

Other lessons that should be taken from our struggle to combat racism are:

1. data collection and research is critical to identifying a problem and targeting solutions;
2. no single institution can do the job. Data and research should assist in determining which institutions and whether new institutions should be involved and how;
3. minority input at all levels is critical to the development and implementation of any successful strategy to combat racism and discrimination and training opportunities and recruitment and retention strategies should be developed to sustain minority involvement.
4. cultural competency or training that includes an understanding of the effects of racism and discrimination are a must for all working at the institutions and especially those that will be working directly with the affected communities;
5. addressing other issues is no substitute for addressing the real problem. If the problem is racism and xenophobia, that should be the focus.

Lastly, learn from the experiences of others. The US government has partnered with a number of countries to provide technical assistance in data collection, affirmative action programs, community policing, and in many other areas to combat racism. One recent example is the joint action plan to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination and promote equality signed by the US and Brazil in March.

It is my hope that as the OSCE continues to work on these issues, the multitude of US experts trained to combat racism whether within or outside of our government institutions can be considered a resource for the OSCE region. I would be happy to facilitate such partnerships in our common struggles to combat racism and discrimination. Thank you.