

Hearing
“Racism in the 21st Century:
Understanding Global Challenges and Implementing Solutions”
The Honorable Alcee Hastings
Chairman, U.S. Helsinki Commission
July 16, 2008

Good morning and welcome to today’s hearing entitled, “Racism in the 21st Century: Understanding Global Challenges and Implementing Solutions”. This hearing is one in a series we are holding on efforts to combat prejudice, discrimination, and inequality in the 56 North American and European countries, including the United States, that make up the OSCE region. In the OSCE, these efforts are often referred to as the ‘tolerance issues’ and began following efforts by myself and fellow Commissioners some years ago.

This past year, the Helsinki Commission has held briefings, hearings, and led a number of efforts focused on the experiences of and challenges faced by racial, ethnic, and religious minorities in the OSCE region. An issue near and dear to my own heart was a hearing we held on Black Europe.

For years I have traveled in the OSCE region and experienced racial profiling by law enforcement agents at borders and within countries, been treated differently at European establishments because of my skin color, and called derogatory terms. I was saddened to learn at our hearing that these were common experiences for many in Europe’s Black community. Racism is alive and well not only here in North America, but also in Europe.

However, there are numerous initiatives to combat the problem. Efforts to introduce and implement anti-discrimination and hate crimes laws are taking place across Europe. Equally important, non-legislative efforts, such as London’s African and Asian Heritage Commission dispel negative stereotypes and highlight the contributions of Blacks and other minorities. Whereas, the launch of the first Black European Women’s Congress promotes self-determination and equal opportunity. And I could go on.

However, I would be remiss if I did not note that amidst the work of this Commission and some positive initiatives, there are some worrying developments impacting Black and other minority communities here and abroad. Increasingly there are attempts to redefine racism, its consequences, who it effects, and whose responsibility it is to address it.

Currently, there is an attempt to shift the debate on racism and xenophobia to one on migration and integration. While migrants are often the targets of violent and non-violent forms of discrimination, a focus *solely* on migrants negates the reality that many European countries are also diverse, heterogeneous societies, with **citizens** that differ in race, ethnicity, language, and in other ways.

Citizens with darker skin color, non-European sounding names, accents, and so on are often the victims of indirect and direct discrimination in employment, education, and other sectors. Policies geared towards addressing racism and xenophobia must therefore have the ability to address the experiences of **both** citizens and non-citizens.

Second, as I recently noted at the OSCE’s May 29 Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, minority groups must be involved in the formulation and implementation of efforts

to combat racism and inequality. Increasingly we are receiving reports that minority communities are not being adequately consulted, which hurts both the credibility and effectiveness of any initiatives.

Third, we must be ever mindful that this is not a new issue. I and each of the witnesses on today's esteemed panel have been fighting to support civil rights on the domestic and international scene for decades and developed numerous solutions to fight racism in the process. I introduced legislation on the U.S. recent review before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to assist in highlighting to the American public that the U.S. has made both international and domestic commitments to combat racism.

But the problem of the U.S. and many other OSCE countries not implementing the solutions that have been put forth at domestic and international levels remains. A major reason I called this hearing was to discuss what role our Commission might play in the struggle.

Thank you for joining us today, Ms. Crickley, Ms. McDougall, and Mr. Payton. I am looking forward to your insightful testimonies and advice on this topic. I would also like to thank my fellow Commissioners for being here, and I will welcome your remarks at this time.

Thank you.