



## African Center

**U.S. Helsinki Commission Briefing  
"Europeans of African Descent "Black Europeans" - Race, Rights, & Politics  
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Remarks by  
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I thank the organisers of this briefing for their foresight, and for giving me the opportunity to speak about our activities and provide an overview of the situation of the African Diaspora in Eastern Europe.

African Center, based in Kiev, Ukraine, is the largest African institution in Eastern Europe. Among others, it defends the rights of Africans and promotes the positive side of Africa.

The Center is the platform for promoting diversity, respect, intercultural dialog and many other efforts. We do this through various actions and are pleased to have the cooperation of the U.S. Embassy in Kiev, the European Union, and the OSCE, just to mention a few partners. Our social and cultural actions in partnership with the Association FARE (UK), Never Again (Poland), United for Intercultural Action (Holland), The Edge) have also been very successful.

The Center monitors situations of Africans in Russia, Moldova and other Eastern European countries, and coordinates with other institutions in these areas. In essence, it is the library and source of information on Africans; and it is their voices that I carry with me here. Therefore, permit me to say precisely that I am speaking on behalf of the African diaspora in Eastern Europe. Though migrants generally face several problems, it is necessary to mention that people of African descent bear the blunt in most cases.

Issues of major concern include:

**Human rights:** Africans in Ukraine, Russia, Moldova and other countries of the former Soviet republics have asked several times that the law enforcement organs take necessary steps to



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address abuse of their rights. In fact, we are asking for the basic rights accorded to every person. This includes intervention and protection, in case of attack.

**Integration:** The world has become a global village as we all see. People travel to other countries for several reasons. But it becomes another issue if the 'system' is such that you are not integrated. For instance, even if an African has Ukrainian nationality it does not necessarily make him or her part of the society nor can he or she be accorded the basic equal rights. Africans who are married to Ukrainians have the same concern. African Ukrainian children also face the same problem, though one of their parents is Ukrainian.

**Employment:** Africans' rights are not protected at all in this area. The result is that employers hire them to work for months, at times up to a year then sack them without paying them.

**Racial abuse, xenophobia and other related hate crimes** are by far the major concern of the African diaspora in Eastern Europe, as are concerns of migrants everywhere. As you all know, issues of racism is very complex, and is not limited to one geographic region. In fact, they are global, though they differ from country to country. Sometimes one witnesses the 'natural' factors that characterize them. Disillusionment among people may contribute to creating hatred and disrespect for others. But it becomes an issue of grave concern when minorities, or migrants or specific group of people become inexplicable targets. It is important to take the necessary steps to adequately address this so as to not repeat the horrors of 2006 to 2011, when mainly African migrants were targeted, brutally attacked resulting in the loss of many lives.

I myself was a victim of such brutal attack where the perpetrators, 15 of them, armed with knives and various clubs, were bent on hacking me to death. **I am lucky to have survived such an attack. However, the timely intervention of Mr. Mark Wood, then Human Rights Officer of the U.S. Embassy in Kiev; when he visited me and saw my condition, he quickly arranged with Mr. Jeff Labovits, then Chief of Mission of the International Organization for Migration**



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**to quickly take me to another hospital for intensive care. That is why I am alive and talking today.**

I commend the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for their work in Eastern Europe, training law enforcement officers and civil society leaders to take up the challenge.

It is also necessary to mention the role of the U.S. government, the U.S. embassy. My colleagues and I have had the opportunity to attend various meetings, e.g. during the visits of Vice President Joe Biden, then Secretary of State Mrs Clinton, and, the U.S. Ambassador's Forum, where they also spoke on diversity.

**Conclusion:** Effective collaboration with the African Diaspora would help in better dealing with the situations cited above and similar ones. Our active participation in seeking solutions to issues that concern us is also crucial. We look forward to continuing working with the Ukrainian government, who also happens to be the current Chairperson of the OSCE. It is our hope, therefore, that the group of this study tour, which has so far been exposed to the working systems of various U.S. Departments and institutions with still more to visit, would be strengthened and that it would receive the needed support enabling us to effectively help in promoting progress of the African diaspora, and also contributing more meaningfully in our respective places of residence.

I thank you your time and your attention. We hope to meet with you again.